

Minutes of the 210th Meeting of the Board of InterTradeIreland, the Trade and Business Development Body

Tuesday 26th January 2021 — via Zoom (09:30am – 10.45am)

Present via Zoom:

Board Members:

Mr Ken Nelson MBE	Chairman
Mr Martin McVicar	Vice Chair
Ms Kim Ashton	
Ms Florence Bayliss	
Mr Micheál Briody	
Mr Pete Byrne	
Mr Richard Kennedy	
Ms Adrienne McGuinness	
Dr Conor Patterson	
Mr David Simpson	

Executive:

Mr Aidan Gough	Designated Officer
Ms Margaret Hearty	Assistant Designated Officer
Mr Martin Agnew	Corporate Services Director
Ms Kerry Curran	Assistant Director of Strategy and Policy
Mr Alan Morrow	Assistant Director of Operations
Ms Orla McGlennon	Board Secretary

210.01 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Timothy Cairns and Mr Michael Hanley.

210.02 Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed all to the first meeting of 2021 and in particular, all new recently appointed Board members. He advised that following the Board meeting, there would be a zoom meeting with staff to say farewell to Mr Aidan Gough, Designated Officer on his retirement. On Board Training for Board members would also take place via zoom this afternoon.

210.03 Conflict of Interest

The Chairman declared a potential conflict of interest arising from his position as CEO of LEDCOM, which is a member organisation of Enterprise Northern Ireland and is involved in the delivery of the Co-Innovate programme. Mr Briody declared a potential conflict of interest arising from his position as CEO of Silver Hill Foods, which is involved with the Co-Innovate programme. Mr Patterson also declared a

potential conflict of interest arising from his position as CEO of Newry & Mourne Co-operative & Enterprise Agency which is involved in the delivery of the Co-Innovate programme.

No other conflicts were declared.

210.04 30th November 2020 Board Minutes

The minutes of the 30th November 2020 Board meeting were agreed as a true record of the meeting and were approved by the Board, which would be signed and authorised by the Chairman at a later date.

210.05 Matters Arising

Mr Gough advised that the Executive had reviewed the budget variance limits/tolerance levels, which would be presented as a separate agenda item during the meeting.

210.06 Chairman's Business

Introductions by Board members and the Executive were made. The Chairman reported that he had briefing meetings with all new Board members, at which he explained the Board roles and had provided other relevant information. He advised that he would formally write to out-going Board members, on behalf of the Board, to thank them for their support and acknowledge the significant contributions made during their terms of office.

The Board discussed the Board Sub Committee membership and it was agreed that Mr Briody would continue to Chair the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and Mr Byrne would join this committee. Ms Bayliss would Chair the Trade Sub Committee, Ms McGuinness would Chair the Innovation Sub Committee, Mr Patterson would Chair the Communications Sub Committee, Mr McVicar would Chair the Funding for Growth Committee and Mr Nelson would Chair the Management Development Sub Committee. Additional membership to the various Sub Committees would be confirmed in the coming weeks.

The Chairman reported on the very successful Seedcorn Awards Ceremony, which was an on-line event at which he had chaired the final judging panel. He asked that his thanks be passed to all staff involved in the event.

He also advised that he had been invited to speak at a Joint IBEC/CBI event on 23rd February 2021.

The Chairman advised that he had a positive meeting with the new UK Ambassador to Ireland and hoped to have the opportunity to invite him to meet with Board in 2021.

210.07 Designated Officer's Report

Mr Gough reported that the NSMC had ratified appointments of new Northern Board members and we now have a full complement of Board members. The NSMC also approved the Body's 2021 Business Plan and 2020-2022 Corporate Plan. He advised that in terms of funding, we now have the resources to meet our planned expenditure in 2021. Mr Gough informed the Board that Sponsoring Departments and

Ministers have agreed that the headcount cap will be reviewed at the next NSMC meeting, as it could be a constraint on our capacity to develop our supports and spend as planned.

He cited the immediate challenges for the Body are responding to the challenges of Covid 19 and Brexit. Demand for our supports including the EBS and E-merge programmes along with the Brexit Advisory Service continue to grow and feedback to date has been very positive.

The Chairman recognised the key roles and range of work undertaken by the Body. He highlighted the importance of InterTradeIreland's role as facilitators and brokers on all aspects of cross border trade. The need for enabling companies to sell on-line was stressed. Ms Hearty advised of the potential to develop the very successful E-merge covid support as a mainstream support in the near future.

Mr Gough informed the Board that Co-Innovate programme Director, Mr Ryan will be leaving to take up a new job.

The Board discussed the merits of a Dublin presence to increase outreach and profile in the South.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Board expressed his appreciation for Mr Gough's services to the Body for the past 20 years and wished him well in his retirement. Mr Gough thanked the Board and staff for all their support over the years.

The Board noted the Designated Officer's report and the Chairman thanked Mr Gough for his update.

210.08 Board Sub Committee Reports

Innovation Sub Committee Report

Ms McGuinness reported back from the Innovation Sub Committee meeting held via zoom on 30th November 2020. An apology for the meeting had been received from Ms Hearty but her comments were provided. Ms McGuinness advised that three new Fusion applications and one deferred application were considered. All four projects were approved. Three approvals were from ROI companies and one from N.I. She advised that the Sub Committee would review seven applications today.

The Board noted the Innovation Sub Committee report and the Chairman thanked Ms McGuinness for her update.

Trade Sub Committee Report

Ms Bayliss reported back from the Trade Sub Committee meeting held via zoom on 30th November 2020. She advised that thirteen new Acumen applications were assessed and twelve were approved and one deferred for additional information. In addition, two previous deferrals were re-assessed and both were rejected. Seven projects were from ROI companies and five from N.I. Ms Bayliss reported that twelve new Acumen applications would be reviewed at the Sub Committee meeting today.

The Board noted the Trade Sub Committee report and the Chairman thanked Ms Bayliss for her update.

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Report

Mr Briody reported back from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting held via Zoom on 24th November 2020. He advised that the Committee meet four times per annum. Mr Briody reported that the 2019 external audit is completed and has been certified by the offices of the Comptroller & Auditor General. The accounts/annual report will be laid before the Assembly and the Dáil at the earliest opportunity. Mr Briody advised that the Committee approved the draft internal audit charter and internal audit plan presented at the meeting. Fieldwork on the first audit will commence in February 2021.

Mr Briody informed the Board that the Committee had reviewed and approved the Corporate Risk Register, with the Covid-19 risk continuing to be ranked first on the register followed by the Brexit risk.

The Board noted the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee report and the Chairman thanked Mr Briody for his report.

210.09 For Consideration, Discussion and Noting.

Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report

The Chairman advised the Board that Ms Hearty would take up the position of Delegated Officer, effective immediately. He thanked her for all her support and work to date.

Reflecting on 2020 year end results, Ms Hearty highlighted key points from the Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report. She reported that all programme targets have been achieved and in many cases exceeded despite the disruption from the Covid-19 crisis. Budget underspend is largely related to the pandemic and associated savings mainly attributed to planned events being delivered on line and some projects stalling. She further advised that the uplift in 2021 targets will be challenging with the current unstable economic environment and resource pressures.

Ms Hearty advised that the key priorities include assisting businesses navigate the impact of Brexit. The team are working to keep updated on relevant information and the wider implications of the protocol and the Trade and Co-operation Agreement. Demand for Brexit vouchers remains high with over 500 applications in the past two months.

It is anticipated that the further digitalisation of our programmes and services will increase our reach to companies on the island. Ms Hearty informed the Board that outreach activities continues and we are currently engaging with increasing numbers of organisations and businesses.

Staff continue to work remotely in line with public health guidance and we continue to maintain strong levels of communication with all staff.

The Board noted the Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report and the Chairman thanked Ms Hearty for her report.

Co-Innovate Programme Update

Mr Ryan joined the Board meeting for this agenda item. He presented the Co-Innovate Programme Update. He advised of the positive independent review of the programme. Strand 4 continues to be the most challenging aspect of the programme. Strand 5 is progressing well against its targets.

The Board noted the Co-Innovate Programme Report and the Chairman, on behalf of the Board, wished Mr Ryan all the best in his new post.

Business Plan Budget Variance Report

Mr Gough advised that the Executive had reviewed the budget variance thresholds. The Board discussed and approved the changes to the threshold limits as outlined in the Board paper.

Governance and Financial Matters

Mr Agnew presented the Governance and Financial Matters report. He advised that as reported previously, the Body is continuing to follow government, public health and N.I Executive advice, with staff continuing to work remotely. Work has been carried out to reconfigure the office infrastructure and desk screens have been installed to ensure that staff can work safely when the appropriate time arises.

Mr Agnew advised that as reported earlier, the 2019 accounts were certified by the C&G office in Belfast and Dublin in December and will be laid before the Assembly and Dáil at the earliest opportunity.

The Board noted the Report to Those Charged with Governance. Mr Agnew advised that the report was positive, with no recommendations made and no adjustments required to the financial statements presented for audit.

Board members were reminded of the requirement to complete a Statement of Interest form on an annual basis.

Mr Agnew reported that the draft year end accounts for 31 December 2020 were attached and additional adjustments may be identified during the audit.

Mr Agnew also reported that the 2021 Business Plan and 2020-22 Corporate Plan were approved by NSMC on 16 December 2020. The 2021 Business Plan requires funding of £16.7m, excluding pension payments, with approved funding from DETE in place. The Body is awaiting confirmation of the DFE share.

The Board noted the Governance and Financial Matters report. The Chairman thanked Mr Agnew for his report.

Tenders and Variations to Letters of Offer/Appointment

The Board approved Mr Agnew's request to go to competitive tender for a Training Provider to deliver a Post Graduate Diploma and On-line Learning Service for the Innovation Boost Programme, for 5 years.

The Board also approved the request to go to competitive tender for a Service Provider to carry out Financial/Commercial Assessments for the Impact programme for 3 years.

Communications Update

Mr Agnew highlighted the range of activity including the Seedcorn finals and the Brexit campaign during November and December, and the levels of digital engagement which generated significant coverage for the Body during November and December.

The Board noted the Communications Report.

Business Plan Budget Variance and Milestone Exception Report

Ms Curran presented the Business Plan Budget Variance and Milestone Exception Report and highlighted variances, which are attributable to the impact of Covid 19. She highlighted the underspends on programmes due to the cancellation of events as a result of Covid-19.

The Chairman thanked Ms Curran for her update and the Board noted the report.

Authorised by
Mr Ken Nelson
Chairman, InterTradeIreland