

Minutes of the 202nd Meeting of the Board of InterTradeIreland, the Trade and Business Development Body

Tuesday 31st March 2020 — via Teleconference Call (09:30am – 10.20am)

Present via Teleconference Call:

Board Members:

Mr Ken Nelson MBE	Chairman
Ms Florence Bayliss	
Mr Micheál Briody	
Mr Timothy Cairns	
Mr Paul Greenfield	
Ms Adrienne McGuinness	
Ms Ann Rudden	
Mr James Spratt	

Executive:

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

202.01 Apologies

No apologies were received.

202.02 Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting in these extraordinary circumstances via teleconference call.

Due to the nature of teleconferencing, for all key matters and decisions, the Chairman advised that he would invite each member individually in alphabetical order to comment/ raise questions and indicate approval where required.

202.03 Conflict of Interest

The Chairman asked members to declare any conflicts of interest relating to today's agenda. Mr Nelson 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 Greenfield declared a potential conflict of interest arising from his position as a member of the Peace IV Working Group. Mr Briody also declared a potential conflict of interest arising from his position as CEO of Silver Hill Foods, which is involved with the Co-Innovate programme. Ms Ann Rudden declared a potential conflict of interest arising from her position as founder and MD of Áine Hand Made Chocolates which is a participant on the Co-Innovate programme.

No other conflicts were declared.

202.04 26th November 2019, 28th January 2020 and 25th February 2020 Board Minutes

The minutes of the 26th November 2019, 28th January 2020 and 25th February 2020 Board meetings were agreed as a true record of the meetings and were unanimously approved by the Board and would be signed and authorised by the Chairman at a later date.

202.05 Matters Arising

Mr Gough advised that there were no matters arising from the last Board meeting.

202.06 Chairman's Business

The Chairman welcomed Ms Bayliss and Ms McGuinness to the Board following the recent ratification of their Board appointments by the NSMC. The Board noted the revised quorum of five Board members.

Board members unanimously confirmed their approval of continuing to conduct Board meetings via Teleconference/online calls for the foreseeable future and unanimously approved the option of considering decisions by written procedure going forward.

The Chairman reported that he, Aidan and Margaret had met with DfE Minister, Diane Dodds and he had recently attended the Ulster Society, Chartered Accountants Ireland Dinner.

202.07 Designated Officer Report

Mr Gough gave an update on the Body's quick response to the Covid-19 pandemic including staff safety, contingency planning and supporting businesses who are currently on our programmes. He advised that although the switch board continues to be manned, all staff are working remotely. Contingency plans are now in place to enable us to function appropriately and ensure that we continue

to deliver our supports to businesses. Mr Gough reported that new procedures have been introduced to ease the burden on the companies we support, including more regular payments of claims and the option to extend projects. He advised that the Executive were proposing new pilot initiatives to assist our businesses respond to the current situation which would be outlined by Ms Hearty. Mr Gough advised that the TechIreland database could be used to identify, collect and respond to current business needs and report our findings to both Governments. The Executive will continue to signpost companies to other relevant Government supports on the island. The Board noted the suspension of the next quarterly Business Monitor Survey and the Board encouraged the Executive to find new ways of mining vital information from businesses across the island so that the Body is best placed to provide support for the recovery from this shock. Mr Gough commended the efforts of staff and the Senior Leadership team in adjusting to this new environment.

The Board discussed the current situation and agreed that the real concern for most businesses is cash flow and highlighted the need for the Body to signpost companies to other relevant agency supports including the UK Government's Furlough Scheme. Board members thanked the Executive for their prompt response in a rapidly changing situation.

Ms Hearty reported that Covid 19 is particularly impacting on current Acumen and Fusion projects. Ms Hearty advised that the team has contacted companies supported on our main Trade and Innovation programmes, many of which are experiencing extremely challenging conditions. Our approach is to be flexible and supportive to live companies and directing and signposting them to new emergency Government supports and measures.

Ms Hearty reported that initially the Executive had considered providing 100% salary support to companies for a three-month period, however given the Government intervention to support employees, it was felt that it would be inappropriate for the Body to proceed with this measure at this time. Ms Hearty outlined the various adaptations to existing supports to assist businesses in this evolving crisis, including flexibility in processing payments, facilitating the suspension and extensions to projects.

Ms Hearty presented two pilot proposals for participants on InterTradeIreland programmes:

- Pilot Initiative to support cross border traders to develop an on-line sales platform/presence.
 - This pilot initiative will support businesses to organise an on-line sales platform. This will be modelled on our Elevate programme where a business will receive up to £2,500 (or euro equivalent) worth of support from an expert to evaluate, advise and help implement an on-line sales platform and process. This pilot will support approximately 140 companies.
- Pilot Initiative – Covid 19 Crisis/Risk Management support for cross border traders.
 - This pilot will assist companies with cash flow forecasting, supplier management, signposting to relevant Government supports and dealing with staffing crisis. This will involve providing support of £2,000/€2,250 using our existing service providers to deal with crisis/risk management issues and be administered similar to the Elevate and Brexit Voucher Schemes. This pilot will support approximately 140 companies.

Ms Hearty advised that the aim of these initiatives is to help secure the survival of businesses live on our programmes and ultimately secure our investment to date. The impact and effectiveness of both pilot supports will be evaluated on an on-going basis.

The Board discussed the proposals and highlighted the importance of reacting quickly to this evolving crisis and of protecting our investments to date. Due to the nature of teleconferencing the Chairman invited each member individually in alphabetical order to comment/ raise questions and indicate approval where required. The Board unanimously approved funding for the pilot initiative to support cross border traders to develop an on-line sales platform/presence. The Board also unanimously approved funding for the pilot initiative – Covid 19 Crisis/Risk Management support for cross border traders.

The Chairman thanked Mr Gough for his update and the Board noted the Designated Officer's report. The Chairman also thanked Ms Hearty and her team for the work carried out to date on the pilot programmes.

202.08 Board Sub Committee Reports

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Report

Mr Briody reported back from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting held on 25th February 2020. He advised that the draft 2019 Audit was presented by the NIAO representative.

The RSM representative presented the reports from the recent internal audit of payroll. A 'satisfactory' assurance rating had been awarded, which is the highest level of assurance.

Mr Briody advised that the Committee had reviewed the Risk Register with Brexit risk the highest rank at that time. The Register would be revised to include Covid 19 as the highest risk now.

The Board noted the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Report and the Annual Report to the Board.

The Chairman thanked Mr Briody for his report.

Innovation Sub Committee Report

Mr Spratt reported back from the Innovation Sub Committee meeting held on 25th February and 27th February 2020. Six new Fusion applications and one Fusion B2B were considered. Four applications and the B2B project were approved, one was deferred and one was not approved. Mr Spratt advised that the deferred project has since been approved. With regard to the project that was not approved, the Sub Committee was not convinced that the proposed products were sufficiently researched.

The Board noted the Innovation Sub Committee report and the Chairman thanked Mr Spratt for his report.

Trade Sub Committee Report

Mr Greenfield reported back from the Trade Sub Committee meeting held on 25th February 2020. He advised that eleven new Acumen applications were assessed, seven were approved, two deferred and two not approved due to concerns regarding the likelihood of displacement.

The Board noted the Trade Sub Committee report and the Chairman thanked Mr Greenfield for his update.

202.09 For Consideration, Discussion and Noting.

Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report

Ms Hearty presented the Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report. She reported on the successful Venture Capital Conference which took place on 5th March in Belfast. Feedback from those in attendance was extremely positive. The Chairman advised that he had attended the Conference and he had also received excellent feedback from delegates. The Chairman asked that the Board's thanks be passed on to all staff involved in the event.

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

Co-Innovate Programme Update

The Board noted the Co-Innovate Programme Update as presented in the Board papers.

Governance and Financial Matters

Mr Agnew presented the Governance and Financial Matters report. He advised that the Risk Register had been updated to include the Covid 19 crisis. Mr Agnew updated the Board on the main elements of the Body's business continuity planning and Covid 19 response reflecting the importance of staff safety and welfare. He reported that the Body's IT systems are operating well with all staff working remotely and regularly receiving ongoing HR support and guidance. Payments to suppliers and businesses supported by InterTradeIreland are being processed on a flexible and frequent basis. The monthly payroll will be processed and paid as normal. The 2019 external audit fieldwork and next internal audit are being carried out remotely, with documentation being exchanged and queries resolved via email.

Mr Agnew gave an overview of the Body's financial out-turn and advised that the ongoing Covid 19 situation will have an impact on expenditure this year and will likely impact spend in 2021. He highlighted the importance of ongoing monitoring of expenditure.

The Board noted the Governance and Financial Matters report. The Chairman thanked Mr Agnew for his report and the actions taken to date in respect of Covid 19.

Tenders and Variations to Letters of Offer/Appointment

Mr Agnew advised that there were no requests to go to tender or variations to letters of appointment.

Communications Update

Mr Agnew provided an update on recent Communications activity including media relations, social media and website metrics, Co-Innovate campaigns and the successful Venture Capital Conference. He advised that the Board had approved a procurement exercise for the appointment of a Web Development and Maintenance supplier in March 2019. Due to unforeseen delays, the CPD exercise was postponed and a supplier was appointed after a fixed hours competition to deliver some web projects. The Body has now reassessed its web requirements including digital delivery platforms which will be included in the new tender competition. Mr Agnew reported that due to the current Covid 19 situation, a significant delay to the next competition is expected and the Body has engaged the current supplier to complete a number of web projects. The Audit & Risk Assurance Committee will be advised of this direct award contract at its meeting in May.

The Board noted the Communications Report and the Chairman thanked Mr Agnew for his update.

Business Plan Budget Variance and Milestone Exception Report

The Board noted the Business Plan Budget Variance and Milestone Exception Report.

202.10 AOB

The Chairman thanked Board members and the Executive for their input to the meeting in highly unusual circumstances. The potential of using skype or Zoom for the next Board meeting was suggested.

.....Authorised by
Mr Ken Nelson
Chairman, InterTradeIreland

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