

Minutes of the 209th Meeting of the Board of InterTradeIreland, the Trade and Business Development Body

Monday 30th November 2020 — via Zoom (09:30am – 10.40am)

Present via Zoom:

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

209.01 Apologies

There were no apologies for this meeting.

209.02 Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting. He advised that staff would join the Board via zoom at 11.00am following the Board meeting.

209.03 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 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.

209.04 27th October 2020 Board Minutes

The minutes of the 27th October 2020 Board meeting were agreed as a true record of the meeting and were unanimously approved by the Board, which would be signed and authorised by the Chairman at a later date.

209.05 Matters Arising

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

209.06 Chairman's Business

The Chairman reported that the Draft schedule of 2021 Board meeting had been included in the Board papers, however dates may be amended subject to availability of newly appointed Board members.

The Chairman gave an update on the recent NSMC Trade and Business Development Sectoral meeting at which the Irish Government's Board appointments had been ratified. As detailed in the Joint Communiqué sent to Board members, a newly appointed Vice Chair and two new Board members would be joining the Board. He reported that he had written to them to congratulate them on their appointments. He advised that it is anticipated that Northern appointments will be approved at a NSMC meeting in December. The Chairman informed the Board that at the NSMC meeting, there was a strong endorsement from the Ministers for the work of the Body and they recognised the valuable contribution that InterTradeIreland has made through its trade and development programmes for small and medium-sized companies trading across the border and in both jurisdictions. They also commended InterTradeIreland for its work in helping businesses to prepare for the UK withdrawal from the EU, and for its research on this issue. Mr Gough advised that although the new Corporate Plan has yet to be approved by the NSMC, it is evident that the plan is targeting both Government's priority areas. Ministers asked Sponsor Departments to consider InterTradeIreland's staffing complement, in consultation with the NSMC Secretariat and the Finance Departments, and to provide an update to the next Trade and Business Development Meeting.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Board, thanked Ms Rudden for her excellent service, commitment and support as a Board member and her work as Chair of the Communications Sub Committee. Ms Rudden expressed her pleasure as serving as a member of the Board, which she found to be a great experience. She passed on her best wishes to all in InterTradeIreland.

The Chairman congratulated Mr Briody, Ms Bayliss and Ms McGuinness on their re-appointments to the Board. He also reported that this may be the last Board meeting for Mr Spratt and Mr Greenfield and thanked them for their contributions and support to the Board and Sub Committees. Mr Spratt expressed his enjoyment as serving on the Board, thanked the Board and staff, and wished them every success for the future. Mr Greenfield thanked the Chairman for his leadership over the years and passed on his thanks to the Board and staff of InterTradeIreland.

The Chairman thanked Board members who had completed the Board Effectiveness Self-Assessment Questionnaire. He advised that a summary report and an outline of the suggested recommendations will be considered in early 2021.

The Chairman informed the Board that he had chaired the 2020 Seedcorn Competition final judging panel and highlighted the quality of the companies participating in the competition. A virtual awards ceremony will take place on Wednesday 2nd December at 12.00 noon and all Board members were invited to join the event. He asked that his thanks be passed on to the team involved. The Chairman advised that he had recently joined an Interreg monitoring committee meeting which included a detailed presentation and update on the Peace Plus programme. He also advised that he had been invited to a remote meeting with the UK Ambassador to Ireland, Mr Paul Johnston.

209.07 Designated Officer's Report

Interest in the proposed Cross Border Trade and Information Service has gathered positive interest in policy circles and additional funding may become available to assist in the delivery of this provision.

Mr Gough gave an update on the digitalisation project with the Strategic Investment Board (SIB). The Body's Corporate Plan 2020 – 2022 has still to be agreed by the Northern Sponsoring Department and it is anticipated that the Plan will be approved at an NSMC meeting in December.

The launch of our Brexit Webinar Series took place on 3rd November with over 500 registrations and almost 400 joining on the day. The keynote address was delivered by Minister Simon Coveney TD. The next event in series takes place on 3rd December and will focus on critical issues related to the movement of goods such as rules of origin, terms of sales and logistics. All Board members were invited to join the webinar.

Mr Gough reported that he has been invited to participate in a panel discussion at the forthcoming Northern Ireland Economic Conference on 3rd December.

On behalf of the Senior Leadership team, Mr Gough thanks Ms Rudden, Mr Greenfield and Mr Spratt for their immense contribution to the Body over the past few years.

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

209.08 Board Sub Committee Reports

Innovation Sub Committee Report

Mr Morrow reported back from the Innovation Sub Committee meeting held via zoom on 27th October 2020. Apologies for the meeting had been received from Mr Spratt and Ms Hearty. He advised that ten new Fusion applications were considered. Eight projects were approved, one was deferred and one was not approved. The Managing Agent presented the bi-annual report demonstrating that delivery is on target as we approach the end of the final year of the recruitment of companies on to the Phase V of the Fusion programme. Mr Morrow reported that the Innovation Sub Committee Terms of Reference were updated to take into account the re-branding of the Impact (formerly known as Innova) and Innovation Boost (previously known as Fusion) programme. Mr Morrow expressed his thanks and appreciation to Mr Spratt, Chair of the Innovation Sub Committee for his contribution to the work of the Committee.

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

Trade Sub Committee Report

Mr Greenfield reported back from the Trade Sub Committee meeting held via Zoom on 27th October 2020. He advised that eleven new Acumen applications were assessed and eight were approved and three were deferred for additional information. A further thirteen applications would be considered by the Committee following the Board meeting today.

Mr Greenfield asked that his thanks be passed to Ms Currie and Ms McAteer for their support and assistance to the Trade Sub Committee.

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

209.09 For Consideration, Discussion and Noting.

Operations Directorate Progress and Activity Report

Ms Hearty presented the Operations Directorate progress report. She advised that both programme and event targets have been largely been achieved or exceeded to date. Programme budgets continue to be reviewed on a regular basis. Given the Covid 19 and Brexit situation, there was an expectation that demand would decline but the pipeline for programme supports remains strong, which is very encouraging. Ms Hearty reported that all programmes will continue to be actively promoted, including our Covid 19 emergency supports and Brexit initiatives.

Ms Hearty updated the Board on the Impact programme (formally known as the Innova programme) which is a collaborative R&D programme. Development grants have been awarded which will result in full projects proposals being submitted for consideration by the Innovation Sub Committee and approval by the full Board.

The Brexit Advisory Service continues to receive numerous queries, which the team address in a timely manner. Ms Hearty advised of the outreach work including participation in external meetings, partnering with and supporting third party events and continuing to engage with an increasing number of organisations and businesses across the island.

The Board were informed that following the approval of the Fusion VI Innovation Boost programme and completion of a tendering exercise with CPD, the Managing Agent contract for the next phase of the programme has been awarded.

Ms Hearty thanked Mr Spratt and Mr Greenfield for their contribution and support in their roles as Chair of the Innovation and Trade Sub Committees.

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

Co-Innovate Programme Update

Mr Neil Ryan joined the Board meeting for this agenda item.

Mr Ryan gave an update on the Co-Innovate Programme. He advised that the target for Strand 1 have been achieved with 1,412 attending workshops against the final target of 1,408. This Strand is now completed.

Strand 4 continues to be the most challenging aspect of the programme, complicated by the Covid 19 crisis impact. Significant progress has been made, particularly in Ireland. Mr Ryan reported that Strand 5 is also progressing well against its targets. As a result, we have closed acceptance of any new expressions of interest in Ireland (unless they have a Scottish partner). To date, 40 projects have been approved.

The Board noted the Co-Innovate Programme Report and the Chairman thanked Mr Ryan for his update.

InterTradeIreland All Island Business Monitor Results Q3 2020

Ms Kerry Curran, Strategy and Policy Research Manager joined the Board meeting for this agenda item.

Ms Curran reported that the latest Business Monitor results demonstrates the significant disruptive impact caused by Covid 19 across the island. The economy has shifted from a position in which less than 10% of businesses were in a negative state prior to the pandemic, to a position in which almost half of all businesses surveyed report they are in a decline. In addition, before Covid 19, 42% of companies reported that they were in growth mode; this has now dropped to 21%.

Ms Curran informed the Board that this quarter's survey again shows that businesses that trade cross border are performing better than those with no cross border sales. 31% of cross border traders are reporting growth, with over 50% saying that they are profitable and 29% reporting an increase in sales. This demonstrates the value of the work of Body in promoting cross border trade.

Companies are predicting that Brexit will have a negative impact on their business over the next year. The survey indicates that only two in ten firms have made preparations for the impact of Brexit. Challenges reported by firms this quarter were reduction in demand (60%), business and consumer confidence (60%) and cash flow (52%).

Ms Curran advised that this quarter's survey reveal that Covid 19 has hit some sectors harder than others, with those in leisure and tourism impacted particularly seriously, reporting a 70% decrease in sales. Micro enterprises continue to be most severely effected.

The Board noted the results of Q3 2020 Business Monitor results and the Chairman thanked Ms Curran for her update.

Ms McGuinness joined the Board meeting at 10.00am.

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 the 2019 external audit has completed and will be certified by the offices of the Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) in the coming weeks. The accounts/annual report will then be laid before the Assembly and the Dáil.

The draft report to those Charged with Governance has been issued and was considered by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at its meeting on 24th November. No recommendations have made in report and no adjustments were required to be made to the financial statements presented for audit.

The Committee also approved the draft internal audit at the meeting. Fieldwork on the first audit will commence in Spring 2021.

Further to Board approval of the Body's Risk Management Policy at the October Board meeting, the high level Corporate Risk Register was approved by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and is included in the Board papers. The Register is reviewed on an on-going basis by the Executive and by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at its quarterly meetings. The Board discussed and approved the high level Corporate Risk Register.

Mr Agnew provided an overview of the Body's financial out-turn to 31st October 2020 and funding arrangements. He advised that expenditure commitments for all programmes continue to be closely monitored by Programme Managers and the Executive to ensure that any required re-profiling of budgets can be promptly actioned. Mr Agnew reported that all drawdowns requested from the Sponsoring Departments have been paid to date.

Mr Agnew informed the Board that the 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 Business Plans have been approved by the NSMC at its meeting on 25th November. The 2020 – 2022 Corporate Plan is expected to be approved by NSMC in December.

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 vary the Letter of Offer and extend the timescale for the All Island Innovation Programme until 31st December 2021 at no additional costs.

The Board also approved an extension to the All Island Innovation Programme – Digital Content Provider to deliver an additional 9 on-line events and post event content.

Communications Update

Mr Agnew gave an overview of the delivery by the Communications team during October 2020. He drew attention to some detail including increase in session duration to the corporate website and the growth in new visitors to the website. Mr Agnew highlighted the significant media coverage particularly in relation to the Seedcorn Awards, the quarterly All Island Business Monitor results and the Brexit campaign. The main message of the campaign is to ‘Make Brexit More Manageable – Forward Together’. The next Brexit seminar will be held on 3rd December with Minister Dodds as keynote speaker.

Mr Agnew extended his thanks to Ms Rudden for her participation as Chair of the Communications Sub Committee. Ms Rudden gave a brief synopsis of the work of the Sub Committee in the past four years reflecting on the significant changes with highlights including the increase in brand awareness and the prominent media campaigns. The Chairman thanked Ms Rudden for her contribution to the Committee.

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

Business Plan Budget Variance and Milestone Exception Report

The Chairman wished Ms Kinver every success in her new role and thanked her for her significant contribution to the Body over the past nine years. She thanked the Board and Executive for all their support over the years.

Ms Kinver presented the Business Plan Budget Variance and Milestone Exception Report and highlighted variances, which are mainly attributable to the impact of Covid 19

Mr Briody suggested that it would be timely to review the budget variance limits/tolerance levels and it was agreed that the Executive would review this matter and bring a paper to the Board for consideration.

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

209.10 AOB

Mr Briody also thanked Ms Rudden, Mr Spratt and Mr Greenfield for their significant contributions to the work of the Body. The Board commended the work of staff given the significant challenges as a result of Brexit and Covid 19 in 2020.

Authorised by
Mr Ken Nelson
Chairman, InterTradeIreland