

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board
held at AFBI Newforge
on Thursday 2 April 2015 at 10.00am**

Present – Board Members

Mr Colm McKenna, Chair
Dr Cecil McMurray
Prof Patrick Murphy
Mr Bob McCann
Mr Ken Millar
Mrs Sarah Havlin
Mr Colin Coffey
Mrs Maureen McKeague
Mr Ian Buchanan

In Attendance - AFBI Executive

Prof Seamus Kennedy, Chief Executive Officer
Mrs Lesley Hogg, Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs Division
Dr Stanley McDowell, Director of Veterinary Sciences Division

Mr James Adams, AFBI Secretariat

1. Welcome and Introduction

ACTION

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all in attendance, in particular the three new members of the AFBI Board, Mrs McKeague, Mr Buchannan and Mr Coffey.

2. Apologies

An apology was received on behalf of the Deputy Chair, Prof McKelvey and AFBI Board members Mr David Lindsay and Mrs Hilary McCartan. The Executive also tabled an apology on behalf of Dr Mayne, Director of Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division.

3. Conflict of Interests/Register of Interests Declaration

There were no changes to Board members' register of interests. However, Mr Coffey informed the Board of a potential conflict of interest given his Non-Executive Director position in relation to the Northern Ireland Science Park. The Board noted the potential conflict and signified that it was content to proceed.

4. Draft Minutes of the AFBI Board Meeting held on 5 March 2015

The draft minutes from the previous AFBI Board meeting held on 5 March 2015 were approved without amendment.

Progress against actions was noted as per the Action Sheet.

5. **Chairman's Remarks**

The Chair acknowledged that the new financial year will bring with it a number of difficulties and uncertainties for AFBI as well as the entire Northern Ireland Public Sector. However, he also stated that this is an exciting time to be involved in agri-food and that AFBI was in the fortunate position of being able to seek external funding and commercial income. AFBI must look to "*shrink to grow*" in line with agri-food sector requirements.

The Chair informed the Board that he is scheduled to meet with the DARD Permanent Secretary on Thursday 16 April 2015 and that discussion is likely to centre on AFBI's Vision to 2020 and its Corporate and Business Plan 2015/16. The Chair also stated that he will take the opportunity to express the Board's concern at the level of cuts being imposed and the impact on AFBI, DARD and the agri-food industry.

The three newly appointed Board members, Mrs McKeague, Mr Buchanan and Mr Coffey, were then invited to introduce themselves and provide a brief summary of their background. Following their introduction, the Chair stated that he was delighted at the strength and value the new members would bring to the Board and that he was very much looking forward to working with them.

6. **AFBI Vision to 2020**

The CEO presented the revised AFBI 2020 Strategy/Vision which incorporated the Board comments received and informed the Board that, as previously agreed, this had been submitted to the Department on 31 March 2015. Dr McMurray noted that during the redrafting process one of the key scientific areas had been omitted from the list and the Executive agreed to rectify the matter and inform DARD as soon as possible.

Exec

In response to a query on potential competition between AFBI and other Centres of Excellence (CoE) in neighbouring regions, the Executive stated that other CoEs are seen very much as opportunities for collaboration and strategic alliance rather than direct competition, citing the Farming Futures initiative as an example.

In discussing current commercialisation work within AFBI, the Executive assured the Board that business development work is continuing across the Institute, that the new Northern Ireland Contact Point for Agri-Food has taken up post and while

Mr Ray Atkinson, Business Development Executive for Northern Ireland, is now based in London, he is maintaining contact with representatives in the North American market, while rapidly developing links with several research institutions in Great Britain.

The Board reiterated the need to improve engagement with stakeholders, including the use of social media, to ensure that AFBI plays a bigger role in assisting the agri-food industry. In response to a query from the Board on AFBI's involvement in the Department of Enterprise Trade & Investment's "*MATRIX - Northern Ireland Science Industry Panel*", the CEO indicated that he

felt the initiative had been very worthwhile and AFBI had been engaged in this process. **ACTION**

In concluding the discussions, the Chair emphasised how important it is that AFBI receives a rapid response from DARD on the AFBI 2020 Strategy/Vision and he will emphasise this with the DARD Permanent Secretary at the aforementioned meeting.

7. Executive Report

In presenting the Executive report for March 2015 the CEO highlighted that the Outline Business Case (OBC) for the VSD-Stormont Main Building is still with DARD Financial Policy Branch for review and the OBC for the AFBI HQ/Plant Science Centre remained on track.

Dr McMurray welcomed the inclusion of the funding opportunities in the Executive Report. Dr McMurray requested that a quarterly report be provided outlining, by Division, how many funding opportunities had been applied for and the likelihood of success and how many were successful.

Exec

The Executive advised the Board that it will ensure that targets to seek additional funding will be included in the Personal Performance Agreements of relevant staff this year and beyond and that as part of AFBI's Leadership Development Programme there has been a focus on performance management and culture change. The Chair stated that as the culture of an organisation is set from the Board it may be timely to hold a Board workshop around organisational culture and he will give this further consideration.

In discussing the potential for increasing links between AFBI and CAFRE, the Chair reiterated that he will discuss the matter with the DARD Permanent Secretary. The CEO also agreed to circulate the Terms of Reference for the Working Group established to look at the potential for increasing links between AFBI and CAFRE to the AFBI Board. In response to a query on AFBI's links with the Northern Ireland Science Park (NISP), the CEO stated that AFBI had good links with the NISP, that the Executive had met with senior NISP staff on several occasions and is also sponsoring the Annual Invent Awards 2015.

CEO

8. Finance

8.1 AFBI Budget Monitor Report – Position at 28 February 2015

Mrs Hogg presented the Budget Monitor for the month ended 28 February 2015 which projects a balanced budget within agreed limits. Mrs Hogg also highlighted that although some work on final costings for capital expenditure is to be completed, the Executive expects to spend its total capital resource for 2014/15. The Board recognised the huge amount of work involved in getting AFBI to its year-end position and congratulated everyone involved in making this happen under very difficult circumstances.

The Chair added that he would like to see profit & loss accounts at Branch level within AFBI and in response, the Executive advised that detailed reports on actual spend against budget for individual activities had been provided to Branches for the 8 months to November 2014 and that a yearly report will also be produced.

9. Minutes from Organisational Development & Human Resources Sub-Committee Meeting held on 23 February 2015 **ACTION**

Given competing priorities Mrs Hogg apologised that the Executive had been unable to present draft minutes of the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee meeting held on the 23 February 2015. The Board was content to note that the paper will be provided at the May meeting of the AFBI Board.

LH

10. Minutes from Science Strategy Committee Meeting held on 23 February 2015

In presenting the minutes of the Science Strategy Committee Meeting held on 23 February 2015, Dr McMurray highlighted the following points:

- The Committee expressed deep concern regarding the potential impact of the Voluntary Exit Scheme on AFBI's ability to deliver future science programmes.
- Encouraging staff to continue to seek additional funding collaborations will be vital to AFBI's future success.
- The Committee was pleased to see that the Executive was continuing to develop in the area of genomics.
- The Committee awaits the peer review report with interest.

In commenting on the Peer Review of Sustainable Livestock Systems Programme, the CEO informed the Board that the final report had been received and that he will be forwarding a copy to the Committee and the AFBI Chair in due course.

CEO

The Chair also asked the Executive to ensure that AFBI is represented on the Agri-Food Strategy Board's Sub Committee that had been established to look at innovation in the agri-food sector.

CEO

11. Draft AFBI Corporate and Business Plan 2015/16

Mrs Hogg presented the revised AFBI Corporate and Business Plan 2015/16 which incorporated recent Board comments. In commenting on the paper Mrs Hogg highlighted the following points:

- The combination of a corporate and business plan for one-year is to align with the one-year Northern Ireland Executive's Comprehensive Spending Review for 2015/16.
- The plan includes clear alignment between AFBI and DARD Goals.
- Although a balanced budget has been presented, the Board was asked to note the assumptions and risks associated with achieving the full anticipated savings requirements and in particular the assumed savings from the voluntary exit scheme.

The Board noted the points raised and was content that the plan be submitted to DARD.

12. Mid-Year Review of AFBI's Delivery of the Assigned Work Programme (AWP) ACTION

Mrs Hogg presented the Mid-Year Review of AFBI's Delivery of the DARD AWP 2014/15. While responses were largely positive, DARD and AFBI Branches had highlighted concerns around the impact on several work areas of future savings proposals and financial constraints. Some issues were also raised regarding communication and these will be followed up by the relevant AFBI branches.

Following discussion, the Board was content to note AFBI Sponsor Branch's positive Mid-Year Review of AFBI's delivery of the DARD AWP, the issues highlighted within and that the Board anticipates the production of an action plan between AFBI and DARD.

13. AFBI Collaborations & Partnerships

Given the changing priorities in the last month, Dr McDowell apologised that an updated paper on AFBI's Collaborations & Partnerships was not available for today's meeting. The Board was content to defer the item until its May meeting.

**SMcD/
SM**

14. Governance Issues

14.1 Risk Management

14.1.1 *Reports of New or Emerging Risks*

Mrs Hogg advised that the Executive was not aware of any new or emerging risks to the organisation.

14.2 Whistleblowing and Fraud

The Board was content to note that there were no new or emerging cases of Whistleblowing or Fraud.

15. AFBI Board Governance Documents

The Chair presented the AFBI Board Operating Framework, Induction Process, Board Members Appraisal System and Board Members Assessment of the Chairman which he had agreed with AFBI Sponsor Branch and had now been cleared by the DARD Minister.

The Board was content to note the documents and agreed that the AFBI Board Operating Framework was concise and well formatted. The Chair also indicated to the Board that he will review the timescales for the appraisal of Board members and that he will initiate the process.

16. Any Other Business

16.1 Voluntary Exit Scheme

Mrs Hogg presented an update on AFBI's Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) and highlighted the following points:

- The AFBI VES will be launched on 13 April 2015 and close on 1 May 2015 and is subject to approval of the business case by DARD and the

receipt of funding from Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP).

- A business case, approved by DARD, must be submitted to DFP by 31 May 2015.
- Any funding for the VES will be allocated via the June Monitoring Round.
- Staff will leave through the scheme in two tranches on 30 September 2015 and 30 November 2015.
- 200 leavers are required in order to address the deficit in the AFBI budget for 2015/16.
- Actual numbers of staff leaving the organisation will be dependent on the following factors:
 1. Number of applications received;
 2. Approval of the business case;
 3. The level of funding allocated to AFBI; and
 4. Business continuity arrangements.

The Board thanked the Executive for production of the paper and was content to approve the launch of AFBI's VES on 13 April 2015. However, in the discussions that followed the Board recognised that a major reduction in staff numbers in AFBI will have a substantial impact on the scientific capability of the Institute including its capability for emergency response and its ability to grow Non-Grant-in-Aid income.

16.2 Pre-Election Guidance for Civil Servants

The CEO made the Board aware of guidance on the role and conduct of civil servants, including staff in publicly funded bodies, in the period between now and the General Election which will take place on 7 May 2015. The Board was content to note.

17. Review of Board Effectiveness

The Board was satisfied that it had held a very productive and effective meeting.

18. Date of Next AFBI Board Meeting – 12 May 2015

The next AFBI Board meeting will be held on Tuesday 12 May 2015 at AFBI Loughgall.

Signed: _____
(Chairperson)

Date: _____