



**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board
held at AFBI Hillsborough
on Thursday 4 September 2014 at 9.00am**

Present – Board Members

Mr Colm McKenna, Chair
Prof William McKelvey,
Deputy Chair
Prof Patrick Murphy
Dr Cecil McMurray
Mr Bob McCann
Mrs Hilary McCartan
Mr Ken Millar
Mrs Hilda Stewart
Mr David Lindsay
Mrs Sarah Havlin

In Attendance - AFBI Executive

Prof Seamus Kennedy, Chief Executive Officer
Mrs Lesley Hogg, Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs Division
Dr Sinclair Mayne, Director of Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division
Dr Stanley McDowell, Director of Veterinary Sciences Division
Mr James Adams, AFBI Secretariat

Visitors

Mr Graeme Wilkinson, DARD Finance Director
Mr Michael Donnelly, Strategic Investment Board
Mr Colin McCrossan, Strategic Investment Board

1. Welcome and Introduction ACTION

The Chair opened the meeting and took the opportunity to remind those present that due to the Open Meeting taking place immediately after the Board meeting, discussions would be focused on key strategic items.

2. Apologies

There were no apologies to record.

3. Conflict of Interests / Register of Interests Declaration

There were no conflicts of interest declared nor any changes to be made to Board members' Register of Interests.

4. Draft Minutes of the Previous AFBI Board Meeting held on 3 July 2014

The draft minutes from the previous AFBI Board meeting held on 3 July 2014 were approved without amendment.

5. Action Sheet from Previous AFBI Board Meeting held on 3 July 2014

Progress against actions was noted as per the Action Sheet.

6. Chairman's Remarks

ACTION

6.1 Report on Joint Meeting of DARD/AFBI Boards held on 20 August 2014

The Chair gave a report on the recent joint DARD / AFBI Board meeting held on 20 August 2014. The primary focus of the meeting was to consider AFBI's Strategic Vision to 2020 in the context of budgetary pressures. The Chair described the meeting as positive with open and honest communication and those who had been present concurred with the Chair's assessment.

The Chair also took the opportunity to inform the Board that as a result of a recent meeting between the DARD Minister, Permanent Secretary and Deputy Permanent Secretary, he will be meeting with the DARD Minister on Monday 8 September 2014.

During the discussions that followed a number of points were noted including:

- The agreement to move to a programme based approach in respect of commissioning of DARD R&D projects, with a minimum five year horizon for non-strategic projects, will strengthen AFBI's ability to attract and retain core scientific expertise which will in turn underpin AFBI's emergency response capabilities.
- Agreement for an AFBI Directed Research Programme (initially £3m of grant-in-aid) will assist AFBI in leveraging additional funding to complement core DARD R&D funding.
- It was also acknowledged that any opportunities to avail of additional funding through strategic partnerships must be fully explored and while AFBI must focus on existing areas of science that it can be active in, there must also be room for expansion into new and emerging areas of science such as Genomics.
- Concern was raised in respect of the timescales for delivery of the short term savings required. Going forward the Chair stated that, given the budgetary pressures being faced across the department, he felt that the Board and Executive must be proactive in its approach and offer alternative solutions if required.

In conclusion, the Board and Executive stated that they felt that the principles established and strategic direction described within the Strategic Vision to 2020 document is the correct strategy for AFBI to take, whilst also recognising that work on the finer detail is still to be agreed.

Mr Wilkinson, Mr Donnelly and Mr McCrossan entered the meeting

7. Newforge Estate Rationalisation - Update

The Chair welcomed Mr Wilkinson, Mr Donnelly and Mr McCrossan to the meeting. Mr Wilkinson thanked the Chair and stated that he was keen to progress the AFBI projects and the purpose of today's meeting was to update the Board on the progress to date and seek the Board's view on proceedings

and the direction being taken.

ACTION

Mr Wilkinson advised that Hamilton Architects have completed their work on accommodation requirements and the proposals in respect of rationalisation of Newforge Lane and development of AFBI Loughgall are on track to meet the “*spend to save*” criteria. A business case is to be submitted to DFP by the December 2014 deadline. Business cases for replacement or refurbishment of farm accommodation at Hillsborough will also be targeted to be completed by the end of this year. In light of the tight timescales the Board was advised that Dr Eileen Stewart has been seconded to an AFBI estate strategy project management role to oversee the projects and that SIB has also been providing support.

Following Mr Wilkinson’s introduction, Mr McCrossan gave a presentation on the detailed progress to date, including the potential locations for AFBI Headquarters, the Plant Science Centre at AFBI Loughgall and the potential programme of works at AFBI Hillsborough. It was also noted that AFBI Crossnacreevy is not included in the rationalisation plans given that it is a fit for purpose site, has sizable land requirements and must retain an element of independence. In response to a query on the decision to locate a Plant Science Centre at AFBI Loughgall, Mr McCrossan advised the Board that guidance was provided through discussions with the AFBI Estate Programme Board, Project Team and User Groups.

Going forward the Chair stated that it is important that the footprint of the future AFBI Estate is aligned with AFBI’s strategic vision. SIB was asked to consider an additional option in respect of the location of the Plant Science Centre.

SIB

Mr Donnelly advised the Board that the next key step is to finalise the size requirements to enable options to be tested and final approval sought from the Board. Mrs Hogg reminded the meeting that consultation with staff on the proposals is still to be conducted and that it should take place before the finalisation of any space requirements. Mrs Hogg stated that DARD had previously agreed that Hamilton Architects would present its proposals to staff as part of the consultation process.

**LH/
SIB**

Mr Wilkinson, Mr Donnelly and Mr McCrossan left the meeting

8. Executive Report

The Executive Report containing a comprehensive overview of the work being carried out across the organisation was noted.

9. Finance

9.1 AFBI Budget Monitor Report – Position at 31 July 2014

The Board noted the financial position reflected in the July Budget Monitor, the fact that only part of the June Monitoring bid for pay progression had been successful and that the June Monitoring bid for depreciation had been unsuccessful.

AFBI's Business Plan had been predicated on its pay progression and depreciation bids being met in full and, while this had still been assumed in the July Budget Monitor, the Board requested that in light of current public sector funding pressures the Executive consider the implications of the shortfalls in these bids not being met.

9.2 June Monitoring Outcome/October Monitoring

The Board noted the June and October Monitoring Update paper subject to the aforementioned action.

10. **Draft Minutes from Finance Sub-Committee Meeting held on 23 June 2014**

The Board noted the draft minutes from the Finance Sub-Committee meeting held on 23 January 2014.

11. **Audit Committee**

11.1. Draft Minutes from Audit Committee Meeting held on 24 June 2014

The Board noted the draft minutes from the Audit Sub-Committee meeting held on 24 June 2014.

11.2. Draft Minutes from Audit Committee Self Assessment Review Meeting held on 2 July 2014

The Board noted the draft minutes from the Audit Committee Self Assessment Review meeting held on 2 July 2014.

12. **Science Strategy Sub-Committee**

12.1 Draft Minutes from Science Strategy Sub-Committee Meeting held on 10 June 2014

The Board noted the draft minutes from the Science Strategy Sub-Committee meeting held on 10 June 2014.

13. **Governance Issues**

13.1 Risk Management

The Executive confirmed that there were no new or emerging risks to the organisation, apart from the risk of AFBI's pay progression costs not being met, as discussed under item 9.1.

13.2 Whistleblowing and Fraud

The Whistleblowing and Fraud paper was noted along with the status of the ongoing investigation.

14. AFBI Open Meeting - Agenda

ACTION

A copy of the programme for AFBI's Open Meeting entitled "*A Showcase of AFBI's Science and Innovation*" was circulated for information.

15. Any Other Business

There were no additional items of business.

16. Review of Board Effectiveness

The Board was content that an effective meeting had been conducted.

17. Date of Next AFBI Board Meeting – 2 October 2014

The next AFBI Board meeting will be held in AFBI Headquarters, Newforge Lane on Thursday 2 October 2014.

Signed: _____
(Chairperson)

Date: _____