

**Minutes of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)
Board Meeting held in AFBI HQ (Newforge) and via WebEx
on Thursday 2 February 2023 at 10.00hrs**

Board Members

Mr Colin Coffey, Chair	Mr Bill Montgomery
Mrs Roberta Brownlee, Deputy Chair	Mr Ian Murphy
Ms Kate Burns	Mr Tim McClelland
Mr Martyn Blair	Ms Therese Rafferty
Mr David Campbell	Prof Sally Shortall
Mrs Daphne Johnston	Mr Tom Tynan
Mr Alan Moore	Mr Tom Wright

AFBI Executive:

Dr Stanley McDowell, Chief Executive Officer
Prof Elizabeth Magowan, Director of Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division
Mr Ivor Johnston, Interim Director of Finance & Corporate Affairs Division
Dr Alastair Douglas, Director of Veterinary Sciences Division

In Attendance

Mr Glenn Montgomery, Head of Governance and Performance
Mr James Adams, AFBI Secretariat

1. Welcome and Introduction

ACTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received on behalf of the Boardroom Apprentice, Mr Jonathan Craig and the Director of Environment and Marine Sciences Division, Mr Pieter-Jan Schön.

3. Conflicts of Interest Declaration

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

4. Draft Minutes of Board Meeting held on 12 January 2023

The draft minutes of the Board Meeting held on 12 January 2023 were accepted as an accurate and fair representation of the meeting.

4.1 Action Sheet from Board Meeting held on 12 January 2023

The Board noted that the actions as per the Action Sheet had been completed or formed part of the agenda.

5. Board Sub-Committees

5.1 Report of the Oversight and Governance Committee Meeting held on 30 November 2022

The Board noted the minutes of the Oversight & Governance Committee Meeting held on 30 November 2022.

5.2 Report on the Science Strategy Committee Meeting held on 9 December 2022

The Board noted the minutes of the Science Strategy Committee Meeting held on 9 December 2022.

Ms Burns also highlighted how impressed the Committee had been with the excellent presentations given by AFBI staff on the day. In terms of funding opportunities and horizon scanning, the Committee welcomed the report provided by the Research Support Office (RSO) and the Board agreed that it would be useful to invite the Head of the RSO to a future Board meeting.

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A wider discussion also took place in relation to AFBI scientific collaborations and the Chair requested that the Executive provide a document to the Board in the next few months which highlights these linkages and the associated benefits to AFBI and the wider NI economy.

Exec

5.3 Report on the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 31 January 2023

Mr Wright gave a summary report on the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 31 January 2023. A number of matters will be covered on today's agenda but he highlighted that the Committee had been assured that the Executive is fully sighted on any risks to achievement of organisational objectives and the implementation of audit recommendations.

6. Governance Issues

6.1 Risk Management

6.1.1 *Reports of New or Emerging Risks*

The Executive is considering the potential for industrial action as an emerging risk and any contingency measures which may be necessary.

6.1.2 Quarterly Risk Management Update

Mr Montgomery presented the Risk Management Update paper which provided the Board with a summary of the key changes to the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) following review by the Risk Review Group (RRG) at their meeting on 11 January 2023.

The Board welcomed a number of reductions to residual risk scores in light of the assessment of additional actions in place to manage risks and the management controls in place. The Chair commended the Executive for the work undertaken and reflected in the reduced risk scores.

The Board queried the omission of an entry in the CRR around delays in a major project that AFBI is involved in which had been highlighted in the farming media. The Executive advised that mitigating actions were being progressed to ensure delivery of the project in line with the first-year objectives but will consider the matter further going forward. The Board noted that related narrative on the project which is KPI for 2022-23 was included in another business paper. However, the Board were not content that this fully reflected their concerns and the potential reputational risk should AFBI fail to meet their targets

on this project. The Board stressed the importance of ensuring that all information presented is up to date and fully reflected the issues.

6.2 Fraud and Whistleblowing / Raising Concerns

6.2.1 *Reports of new or Ongoing Cases*

The Board noted the report and that there were no new cases of Whistleblowing / Raising Concerns since the last report to the Board. One case of potential fraud had been raised and it was taken forward in line with AFBI Policy and is now closed.

6.3 AFBI Business Plan 2022-23 – KPI Outturns at 31 December 2023

Mr Montgomery presented the paper on the provisional outturn of the 17 Corporate KPIs 2022-23 as at the end of Quarter 3, 31 December 2022.

The Board was pleased to note that 2 KPIs are now achieved with a further 8 KPIs on target to be achieved and acknowledged that the overall picture reflected the exceptional pressures which have existed during 2022-23. In terms of the one KPI that has been deemed not achieved, the Board sought an assurance that this will be progressed in 2023-24. The Executive advised that the Outline Business Case is now progressing through the review and approvals process and DAERA is fully informed on this matter.

6.4 CEO Assurance Statement

The Board noted the CEO Assurance Statement 2022-23 – Quarter 3 and that it aligned with their understanding of the key issues within AFBI.

In response to a question on IT matters, the CEO advised that processes and training are in place and a partial assurance reflects the ongoing transfer to a new accreditation requirement.

6.5 Dates of Board and Committee Meetings 2023-24

Mr Montgomery presented the Board and Committee proposed dates for 2023-24 which had been developed following benchmarking and in consultation with the Chair.

After discussion, it was agreed that the Chair would consult with the Committees and any proposals will be discussed with Mr Montgomery in order to finalise the programme for the incoming year.

7. Health & Safety

7.1 Health & Safety Update

The Board noted the '*Health and Safety Update Report*' dated February 2022. Mr Johnston also provided a further update on the recruitment for the Health & Safety and Compliance Branch.

The Board was also made aware of discussions at the recent Audit & Risk Assurance Committee meeting on estate matters being taken forward by DAERA and had been assured that, while awaiting completion, AFBI has in place robust procedures and plans relating to these areas.

8. Finance & Business

8.1 Finance Update Report

Mr Johnston presented the Finance paper and updated the Board on a number of matters including the following:

2022-23 Budget Update

Taking account of the Third Monitoring Round Outcome AFBI is projecting an underspend within budget tolerance. While fluctuations are expected in both income and expenditure, Finance and the scientific staff will be working very closely on achieving a positive year-end outturn. The Board welcomed the current position.

2021-22 Annual Report and Accounts

The audit of the 2021-22 Annual Report and Accounts is progressing with no significant issues raised to date. Following the AFBI Audit & Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) meeting on 31 January 2023, Finance have met again with the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) representatives to solidify a proposed timeline for completion. It was

agreed that a further ARAC meeting would be scheduled to facilitate potential certification, with a meeting immediately preceding the 2 March Board Meeting being the preferred option.

Review of Financial Processes (ROFP)

AFBI has met the commitments to complete dry-run consolidation packs in preparation for faster closing. AFBI continues to engage with DAERA Finance to enable AFBI to provide a completed 2022-23 Consolidation pack by the 24 April 2023 deadline. Discussions are also ongoing with the NIAO and DAERA Finance in relation to auditing of the AFBI Accounts prior to the summer recess.

9. Executive Report

The CEO presented the Executive Report for January 2023 and highlighted a number of points including progress on recruitment competitions, the excellent outcomes of the recent ISO9001 audit and the Strategic Review of AFBI occupied land and property which has commenced jointly between DAERA and AFBI, in conjunction with the Strategic Investment Board (SIB).

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

- The Executive updated the Board on a number of consortia and funding opportunity streams including bids to a recently established Co-Centre Programme.
- The indicative timeline for progressing the Green Growth Business Case was outlined and the Executive were asked to ensure that AFBI meets all its commitments in relation to this.
- The Board was impressed with the breadth of Communications and Stakeholder Engagement detailed within the Executive Report.
- The Board also noted the accompanying copy of the '*AFBI Science Impact Booklet 2022*' and was impressed with the spectrum of activities that had been undertaken. Communicating such achievements beyond the immediate stakeholders was also briefly discussed.

10. Chair's Remarks

The Chair informed the Board that he had held a positive meeting with the DAERA Permanent Secretary.

The Chair noted that the next Quinquennial Review of AFBI, which will be commissioned by DAERA, is likely to take place this autumn. He said this would be an opportunity to demonstrate the value of AFBI.

11. Any Other Business

There were no additional items of business.

12. Review of Board Meeting Effectiveness

The Board was content the meeting had been effective.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next AFBI Board Meeting will be held on Thursday 2 March 2023.