

**Minutes of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)
Board Meeting held in AFBI HQ (Newforge)
on Thursday 20 April 2023 at 9.30hrs**

Board Members

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

Boardroom Apprentice

Mr Jonathan Craig

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
Mr Pieter-Jan Schön, Director of Environment and Marine 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

An apology was received on behalf of the Board Member, Mr Bill Montgomery.

3. Conflicts of Interest Declaration

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

4. Draft Minutes of Board Meeting held on 2 March 2023

The draft minutes of the Board Meeting held on 2 March 2023 were accepted as an accurate and fair representation of the meeting.

4.1 Action Sheet from Board Meeting held on 2 March 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 Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee held on 8 February 2023

The Board noted the minutes of the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee held on 8 February 2023.

5.2 Report of the Finance & Business Strategy Committee held on 15 February 2023

The Board noted the minutes of the Finance & Business Strategy Committee held on 15 February 2023.

5.3 Report of the Science Strategy Committee held on 20 February 2023

The Board noted the minutes of the Science Strategy Committee held on 20 February 2023.

5.4 Report of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee held on 2 March 2023

The Board noted the minutes of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee held on 2 March 2023.

5.5 Report of the Oversight & Governance Committee held on 15 March 2023

Mr Moore reported that a very effective meeting had been held and at his request, the Executive provided some updates to the Board on key matters discussed at the meeting.

The Board noted the updates and the minutes of the Oversight & Governance Committee held on 15 March 2023.

6. Governance Issues

6.1 Risk Management

6.1.1 *Reports of New or Emerging Risks*

There were no new or emerging risks to report.

Mr Montgomery advised that AFBI's Risk Management Strategy and supporting guidance had been reviewed and will be presented to the Board in due course.

6.2 Fraud and Whistleblowing / Raising Concerns

6.2.1 *Reports of new or Ongoing Cases*

The Board noted that there were no new cases of Fraud or Whistleblowing / Raising Concerns since the last report to the Board.

6.2.2 Annual Fraud and Whistleblowing / Raising Concerns Report 2022-23

The Board noted that the Annual Fraud and Whistleblowing / Raising Concerns Report 2022-23.

In relation to an external review into handling complaints undertaken within the NICS, the Executive will meet to ensure that AFBI's processes are aligned with any recommendations and if there are any lessons learned which are pertinent to AFBI. Findings from the review will be reported to the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee.

Exec

6.3 AFBI Corporate Plan 2023-2027 and AFBI Business Plan 2023-24

The CEO presented the draft AFBI Corporate Plan 2023-2027 which is in the final stages of the design phase. The Board commended the Executive on the progress made and the overall content of the Plan. A small number of amendments were suggested including the insertion of a strapline and updating of a number of photographs. Ms Burns also suggested that she will provide the CEO with some opening narrative for his consideration.

**Exec/
KB**

The CEO presented the draft AFBI Business Plan 2023-2024. The Board felt that the narrative read well and that there was a focus on strategic priorities. The Executive noted that while the Corporate Plan 2023-27 set the overall strategic direction and objectives, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) within the Business Plan had to be in a form which could be audited and that a number were cross-cutting. The Chair also noted that feedback from DAERA on the AFBI Business Plan 2022-2023 had been incorporated into this year's document.

The Board asked that further work be undertaken in relation to the section on KPIs to ensure that they align with the aspirations of the plan. The Executive took onboard a number of suggestions and will look to further develop the KPIs to encompass scientific impacts and outcomes.

Exec

6.4 Standing Orders, Schedule of Matters Reserved to the Board

The Board approved the Standing Orders, Schedule of Matters Reserved to the Board which had been subject to periodic review.

7. **Health & Safety**

The Board noted that there were no reports of any new or emerging issues in terms of Health and Safety.

Dr Douglas updated the Board on recruitment competitions in relation to the Biosafety post and Prof Magowan made the Board aware of a potential compliance matter that is being investigated.

8. Finance & Business

8.1 Finance Update Report

Mr Johnston presented the Finance paper and updated the Board on the following:

2022-23 Budget Update

Mr Johnston informed the Board that since the report was produced the budget position had changed and the latest provisional outturn position reported to DAERA reflects an underspend of £4k for 2022-23.

The Board was pleased to note the positive provisional outturn position.

2023-24 Budget Update

Indications remain that AFBI's 2021-22 Opening Resource Budget will be used as its 2023-24 Resource Baseline. AFBI had also met with DAERA representatives on 18 April 2023 and were updated on the potential level of reductions to expect in its 2022-23 baseline.

The Board noted the current position and commended the Executive for the clear plan and approach that it is undertaking in order to address the potential funding gap.

2021-22 Annual Report and Accounts

The Northern Ireland Audit Office's draft Report to Those Charged with Governance (RTTCWG) in relation to the audit of the 2021-22 Annual Report and Accounts is expected to be presented to the AFBI Audit & Risk Assurance Committee on 25 April 2023. It was noted that the Executive had been recently informed that C&AG had decided to include a Report to the Accounts, which had not been indicated in the previous draft RTTCWG.

Review of Financial Processes (ROFP)

AFBI Finance continue to engage with DAERA Finance and expects to produce the required 2022-23 consolidation pack by the 24 April deadline.

While a pre-summer audit of the AFBI Accounts will not be undertaken, following discussion and agreement with DAERA AFBI continues to work towards producing a 2022-23 Annual Report and Accounts and associated working papers by mid-May. This is to demonstrate AFBI's capability and capacity to meet these deadlines. As a material component of DAERA's consolidated accounts, AFBI have been advised by the NIAO that they will be audited in parallel with the DAERA timetable which is currently due to commence in July 2023.

9. Executive Report

The CEO presented the Executive Report for April 2023 and highlighted a number of points including the following:

- The provisional staff turnover rate for 2022/23 was 16.9% which was higher than previously expected but reflective of the current labour market. It was noted that a significant contributory factor was the loss of a number of staff to NICS posts. The CEO noted the additional pressure which this had placed across the organisation and commended the work of Executive colleagues to maintain work delivery. Further detail would be presented to the forthcoming Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee.
- AFBI had met with senior DAERA staff to discuss the Evidence & Innovation (E&I) programme. The Chair was pleased to note the discussions, key actions agreed and the direction of travel.
- AFBI has been awarded three prestigious UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) grants. AFBI will lead in one project and collaborate on the other two with work to commence later this year.
- A draft report in relation to the Strategic Review of the AFBI Estate has been produced and is being considered by the Project Board.
- In discussing events and stakeholder engagements at school level, it was noted that AFBI is regularly involved in the annual NI

Science Festival. The Executive noted a suggestion by Mr Tynan and Prof Magowan agreed to consider re-establishing educational visits to AFBI Hillsborough.

- Following working group discussions and consideration of options, it is planned to have a series of site events rather than a single staff conference given the diversity of work and grades of staff across the organisation.

10. Chair's Remarks

The Chair informed the Board of a number of recent engagements and correspondence with DAERA.

He also advised that he had met with the Director of College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE). After a brief discussion, the Board agreed to invite the CAFRE Director to the May meeting of the Board. Given the CAFRE involvement in the SNHS it was agreed that a key member of AFBI staff working on the SNHS will also be invited to give a presentation.

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11. Any Other Business

Prof Shortall informed the Board that she had recent engagements with the recently appointed DAERA Head of Rural Development and that they would be keen to engage with AFBI at a committee level.

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 Monday 22 May 2023.