

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board
held at AFBI Newforge
on 16 April 2019**

Present – Board Members

Mr Colin Coffey, Chair
Mr Ian Buchanan
Ms Kate Burns
Dr Michelle Costello-Smith

Ms Theresa Cullen
Mrs Fiona Hanna
Dr Richard Horton
Ms Joan Houston

Mrs Maureen McKeague
Mrs Sharon Smyth
Mr Richard Solomon

In Attendance - AFBI Executive

Dr Stanley McDowell, Chief Executive Officer
Dr Elizabeth Magowan, Director of Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division
Dr Alastair Douglas, Acting Director of Veterinary Sciences Division
Mrs Josephine Kelly, Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs Division

Mr James Adams, AFBI Secretariat

1. Welcome and Introduction

ACTION

Mr Coffey welcomed everyone to his first meeting as AFBI Chair.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from AFBI Board Member, Mrs Roberta Brownlee and the AFBI Board Apprentice Ms Nuala Kilmartin.

3. Conflict of Interests/Register of Interests Declaration

There were no conflicts of interest to be recorded.

4. Draft Minutes of the AFBI Board Workshop held on 7 February 2019

The draft minutes from the AFBI Board workshop held on 7 February 2019 were approved as an accurate reflection of the business conducted at the meeting.

4.1 Action Sheet from AFBI Board Meeting held on 7 February 2019

The Board noted the progress against actions as per the action sheet, subject to the following:-

4.1.1 *AFBI/CAFRE Collaboration (Item 6.2)*

ACTION

The paper on future collaboration between AFBI and CAFRE is in progress and is likely to be discussed by the Executive at its May meeting. Therefore a paper may be brought to the Board in June 2019.

Exec

5. Draft Minutes of AFBI Board Meeting held on 14 March 2019

The draft minutes from the AFBI Board meeting held on 14 March 2019 were approved as an accurate reflection of the business conducted at the meeting.

5.1 Action Sheet from AFBI Board Meeting held on 14 March 2019

In noting the progress against actions as per the action sheet, the Board sought an update in relation to a specific Evidence and Innovation (E&I) request from DAERA which was highlighted at the DAERA/AFBI Joint Board meeting. In response, the Executive advised that the area in question, as with all E&I work requests, will need to be considered in terms of both capacity and budget provision from DAERA.

The Board requested that an update on the situation be provided in the Executive report for June 2019.

Exec

6. Chair's Remarks

In providing his first Chair's remarks, Mr Coffey highlighted a number of points including the following:

- A recent meeting with the DAERA Permanent Secretary (PS) had been very positive and it is felt that AFBI can play a crucial role in supporting the Department's Vision through the delivery of science and innovation. The Chair will meet with the DAERA PS on a quarterly basis.
- The Chair is scheduling meetings with a number of internal stakeholders. As part of a focus on strategic alignment with DAERA he plans to meet with the DAERA Deputy Secretary to discuss estate matters;
- Meetings with a number of external stakeholders will take place in the coming months with the Chair having already attended the Ulster Farmer's Union annual dinner with the CEO earlier this month;
- The Deputy Chair position for the AFBI Board will be completed via external recruitment which is expected to take 4-6 months to complete and all non-executives were encouraged to apply;
- IT equipment to facilitate paperless Board meetings have been received. Some IT issues are currently being resolved and devices are expected to be issued out shortly;
- A closed session will be held at the end of the meeting to discuss the methodology of reporting to the Board and maximising Board understanding of significant issues and topics.

It was noted that at its meeting on the 14 March 2019, the AFBI Board approved the draft AFBI Annual Report & Accounts for year ended 31 March 2018, subject

to finalisation of the Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) Report. The Board held a teleconference on 23 March 2019 where the AFBI Chair, Mr McKenna confirmed that all parties had agreed that there would be no further response in relation to the content of the draft C&AG's Report presented to the Board on 14 March 2019. The Board subsequently agreed that the Annual Report and Accounts could be signed by the Chair and CEO. A draft minute of the teleconference proceedings was tabled at the meeting and this will be finalised and circulated to the Board for approval.

ACTION

Sec

Mrs Kelly informed the Board that the Accounts had been laid at the NI Assembly on Friday 12 April 2019. A word version of the Annual Report and Accounts had been uploaded to the AFBI website on 15 April 2019 with finalisation of the published version due to be completed shortly. The published version will then be forwarded to the Northern Ireland Audit Office, as per normal protocols, to ensure that they are content.

7. Executive Report

The CEO presented his Executive Report for March 2019 and highlighted the following points:

- The first in a series of Executive Roadshows was held at AFBI Loughgall on 20 March 2019. The roadshow outlined the vision and direction of AFBI and provided staff with the opportunity to highlight positive aspects as well as areas for improvement. Feedback from the event was positive and key messages from all roadshows will be collated and communicated to staff in due course;
- The provisional financial outturn position for 2018/19 shows a small surplus and the vast majority of capital expenditure was also realised during March 2019.
- A number of candidate information booklets relating to the restructuring of AFBI Finance are being finalised and will be issued shortly. Initial scoping of staff requirements for the Research Support Office is also under development;
- The strategic alliance with QUB is progressing with the CEO and Dr Magowan recently holding a positive meeting with Prof Nigel Scollan, QUB. The appointment of a project lead is also progressing with interviews scheduled for 17 April 2019;
- The AFBI Brand refresh will be officially launched at the Balmoral Show in May 2019;
- Dates for the postponed Outlook Conference are still under consideration and there is potential that the event could move to Spring 2020.

The Board welcomed the revised format of the report which clearly laid out the key areas of reporting.

In response to a query on the renewal of the AFBI-DAERA Lease, the Executive confirmed that there were no major issues and it is hoped that the draft documentation will be signed off in the near future. An update will be provided to the Finance & Business Strategy Committee in May 2019.

In terms of the business case for the new Finance & Business System it was noted that temporary additional resource to provide specialist IT / business analyst skills will be in place by 29 April 2019. Mrs Kelly will lead on the project and it is hoped that the Outline Business Case will be completed by 30 June 2019 but this will be dependent on the resolution of some technical issues and resource availability.

ACTION

The Board noted that AFBI has adopted a three pronged approach in relation to solutions to address AFBI's need for Ammonia Emissions Monitoring Facilities and that a further update will be provided to the Science Strategy Committee in June 2019.

A wider discussion then ensued on science strategy, horizon scanning and alignment with DAERA. The CEO referred to a Department of Finance (DoF) framework document which will be discussed at a DAERA/Arm's Length Body meeting on 17 April 2019 and the need to develop a two way strategic vision in which science informs policy and policy aids the direction of science.

The Board asked that they were kept informed of any areas of science which the Executive see as short, medium and long term priorities. The CEO agreed to reflect on the discussion and stated that capacity to deliver on all scientific matters is an issue on the radar of both AFBI and DAERA and is reflected in some of the recommendations of the recent DAERA Review of AFBI.

Mr Solomon entered the meeting

8. Finance

8.1 Finance Update – Year-end provisional outturn 2018/19

The Executive presented a paper entitled 'Update 2018/19 Provisional Outturn' which shows an underspend of £441k in comparison with the January Monitoring Budget. The Board noted that as income and costs were heavily weighted to March 2019, figures will be subject to confirmation as per the year end accounting process.

Mrs Kelly also highlighted the key risks to the forecasted outturn, in particular that royalty income remains subject to sales volumes which will not be known until invoices are received. Should clarification be forthcoming prior to the final outturn, the income figure may be subject to change.

The Board congratulated the Executive on an excellent set of provisional figures and recognised the efforts of all involved in achieving the provisional outturn. In response to a request for comparison figures and reasons for variations against the opening budget, it was noted that such information will be provided to the Finance and Business Strategy Committee in due course.

Exec

Mrs Kelly also took the opportunity to inform the Board that the Northern Ireland Audit Office had appointed Mr Declan Cooper as the Audit Manager for AFBI. The draft accounts will be prepared for the Audit & risk Assurance Committee meeting in June 2019 and are expected to be provided to the NIAO in July 2019.

8.2 AFBI Budget 2019/20 Update

ACTION

The Executive presented a paper entitled 'Update 2019/20 Financial Settlement' which detailed the budget allocation from DAERA.

Mrs Kelly outlined the actions taken by AFBI in relation to the first monitoring round of the financial year and it was noted that the outcome may not be known until late May 2019. The Executive is continuing to engage with key staff in order to progress the internal budgeting position but it was recognised that, depending on the outcome of the June monitoring, some additional recruitment requests may need to be postponed.

9. Governance Issues

9.1 Risk Management

9.1.1 Reports of New or Emerging Risks

There were no new or emerging risks to report.

9.1.2 Brexit Planning

The Board noted that Brexit planning is ongoing.

9.2 Whistleblowing

9.2.1 Reports of New or Emerging Risks

There were no new or emerging cases of whistleblowing to report.

9.3 Fraud

9.3.1 Reports of New or Ongoing Cases

There were no new or emerging cases of fraud to report.

10. Health & Safety

10.1 Reports of New or Ongoing Cases

The Board was made aware of a Health and Safety incident which occurred on the AFBI Newforge site. The AFBI Estate Unit has led co-ordination of the response to the incident which includes technical input from the DoF's Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) via DAERA Accommodation and Estate Branch. The Board was assured that all relevant parties had been made aware of the occurrence and that all protocols had been followed.

11. Minutes of Board Sub-Committees

11.1 Draft Minutes from the Science Strategy Committee Meeting held on 26 February 2019

The Board noted the draft Minutes from the Science Strategy Committee Meeting held on 26 February 2019.

11.2 Draft Minutes from the Finance and Business Strategy Committee Meeting held on 1 March 2019

The Board noted the draft Minutes from the Finance and Business Strategy Committee Meeting held on 1 March 2019.

11.3 Draft Minutes from the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee Meeting held on 6 March 2019

The Board noted the draft Minutes from the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee Meeting held on 6 March 2019.

The subject of succession planning was raised and a discussion ensued and it was noted that the matter will be a key area of focus for the Organisational Development and Human Resources Committee. Any Board members who had a view on the matter were encouraged to share these with the Chair of the Committee. It was noted that a review of critical posts is being conducted by AFBI HR and this will also form part of Committee discussions.

11.4 Draft Minutes from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Extraordinary Meeting held on 11 March 2019

The Board noted the draft Minutes from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Extraordinary Meeting held on 11 March 2019.

12. Any Other Business

There were no additional items of business.

13. Review of Board Effectiveness

The Board was content that the meeting had been effective.

14. Date of Next Meeting – 30 May 2019

The next meeting of the AFBI Board will be held on Thursday 30 May 2019.

15. Closed Session – New Chair/Board Reporting

The Board met in closed session to discuss Board reporting.

16.

Presentation for Former AFBI Chair, Mr. Colm McKenna

ACTION

Prior to lunch, the Board and a number of invited guests presented Former AFBI Chair, Mr Colm McKenna with a certificate to mark the completion of his term of office on 31 March 2019.

The Chair, on behalf of the Board and Executive, thanked Mr McKenna for his contribution to AFBI during a significant period of change. Colm's efforts to raise AFBI's profile with key stakeholders and his development of the AFBI Board were highlighted and the Chair noted that AFBI was in a stronger position as a result of Mr McKenna's tenure.

Reflecting on his term in office as AFBI Chair, Mr McKenna stated that it had been a privilege for him to be the Chair of the AFBI Board. He felt that a good foundation had been established during his term of office and he encouraged the AFBI Board and Executive to build on their achievements and the excellent work undertaken to date.

Attendees wished Mr McKenna every success for the future.

Signed: _____
(Chairperson)

Date: _____