

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board
held at VSD Library
on Thursday 27 June 2019 at 9.30am**

Present – Board Members

Mr Colin Coffey, Chair	Dr Michelle Costello-Smith	Ms Joan Houston
Mrs Roberta Brownlee	Ms Theresa Cullen	Mrs Maureen McKeague
Mr Ian Buchanan	Mrs Fiona Hanna	Mr Richard Solomon
Ms Kate Burns	Dr Richard Horton	

In Attendance - AFBI Executive

Dr Stanley McDowell, Chief Executive Officer
Mrs Josephine Kelly, Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs Division
Dr Elizabeth Magowan, Director of Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division (Items 7 & 9 – 16)
Dr Alastair Douglas, Acting Director of Veterinary Sciences Division
Dr D McCleery, Head of Bacteriology Branch (Item 8)
Dr B McNerney Head of Disease Surveillance and Investigation Branch (Item 8)
Prof L Cooke Head of Virology Branch (Item 8)

Mr James Adams, AFBI Secretariat

Visitors

Ms P Rooney, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) (Item 9)

1. Welcome and Introduction ACTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and discussed the informal sessions that will be held prior to the commencement of Board meetings. The key objective of this revised format is to enable the Board to discuss the key outcomes that it wishes to achieve from the forthcoming meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from AFBI Board Member Mrs Sharon Smyth and the AFBI Boardroom Apprentice Ms Nuala Kilmartin.

3. Conflict of Interests/Register of Interests Declaration

ACTION

There were no conflicts of interest to be recorded.

4. Draft Minutes of the AFBI Board Meeting held on 30 May 2019

The draft minutes from the AFBI Board meeting held on 30 May 2019 were approved as an accurate reflection of the business conducted at the meeting.

4.1 Action Sheet from AFBI Board Meeting held on 30 May 2019

The Board noted the progress against actions as per the action sheet.

5. Chair's Remarks

In providing his remarks the Chair highlighted a number of recent engagements with senior representatives from DAERA including the following:-

- The Chair met with the DAERA Director Mr Brian Doherty who is very supportive of the DAERA Permanent Secretary's ethos of working in partnership with Arm's Length Bodies. The Chair has agreed quarterly informal meetings with Mr Doherty;
- The Chair met with AFBI Sponsor Branch staff at AFBI Hillsborough where Dr Magowan showcased the scope and depth of the work undertaken at the site. An AFBI presentation on precision farming was also given by Dr Debbie McConnell;
- The DAERA Permanent Secretary visited AFBI Stormont on 20 June 2019 and afterwards posted some positive comments on social media. It is hoped that he will return to the site in the near future and it was evident that he is keen to meet and engage with frontline staff.

The Chair highlighted the importance of maintaining frequent communications with DAERA stakeholders. The CEO also commented on the support AFBI has received from DAERA in terms of capital investment and informed the Board that the Executive will be attending a DAERA/AFBI Estate Transformation Workshop on Wednesday 3 July 2019. The workshop is being facilitated by the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) and will discuss the long term estate plans and commitments.

The Chair concluded his internal site visits with trips to AFBI Hillsborough and AFBI Bushmills in June 2019. The Chair felt that a key outcome of the visits was a need to improve internal communications across divisions and branches.

The Chair also gave a short synopsis on a recent meeting with senior representatives from Queen's University Belfast and will provide a full brief to the Executive in due course. The Chair also touched on some external engagement with Agrisearch and the NI Food and Drink Association.

ACTION

In concluding his remarks, the Chair informed the Board that a new Board Apprentice will commence with AFBI on 1 September 2019. This year it has been agreed that Mrs Kelly will provide some Executive support to the apprentice and as per normal protocols, the Chair will be seeking a non-executive 'Board Buddy' to support the apprentice.

Chair

5.1 AFBI Board Sub-Committee Membership

The Board approved the revised membership of the AFBI Board Sub-Committees.

6. Executive Report

The Board noted the Executive Report and welcomed the additional revisions to the format in particular the inclusion of an excellent executive summary.

A number of points were discussed including progression of alliances, recruitment, funding opportunities and events. Mrs Hanna also took the opportunity to highlight that she had attended a joint event between an industry partner and AFBI at the AFBI Crossnacreevy site. The event had been well attended by industry and she congratulated AFBI staff involved in staging the event.

6.1 CEO Update on Structure – Presentation

The CEO provided the Board with a presentation regarding the ongoing work on the organisational design which best supports the strategic direction of AFBI.

The CEO outlined AFBI's internal change process and the progress made in the areas of Finance, Research Support, Health & Safety, Quality Management Systems and Document Management. The CEO then set out his vision at the senior level to meet the strategic objectives of AFBI based on key drivers and challenges over the medium term.

The CEO has met with Heads of Branch to discuss the proposals and no major issues have been raised to date. Following a discussion, the Board approved the CEO's proposals in principle and it was noted that a number of options will be explored going forward. Further consultation will also take place with

a range of stakeholders including DAERA, senior AFBI staff and Trade Union Representatives. **ACTION**

7. Finance

7.1 Finance Update

Mrs Kelly presented the finance update which reported a £766k underspend in AFBI's projected outturn for 2019/20 following the result of the June 2019 monitoring round. AFBI anticipates, based on previous years, that income trends may reduce during the year and given the movements in expenditure, additional funding from the Department has not been requested at this time.

It was noted that the drawdown of cash is agreed annually with DAERA and the process is reviewed on a monthly basis in-year. The Executive confirmed that it is managing the cash drawdown process given the current royalty income position. In discussing the current situation in terms of royalties, it was agreed that the Board will be kept updated on any developments in relation to the royalty position. **Exec**

The Board also discussed the ratio of AFBI's Capital and Resource budget allocation. This issue is expected to become more prominent in future years and the Executive informed the Board that an exercise will be carried out in this area in due course.

The Board was given a brief update on the recent recruitment competitions relating to AFBI Finance. Mrs Kelly will provide a further update at the September 2019 meeting of the AFBI Board. **JK**

8. Veterinary Sciences Division (VSD) Head of Branch Presentations

Dr Douglas presented an overview of the work within VSD including key impacts in terms of disease eradication, emergency response, food safety and commercial services.

The Board was then given succinct presentations in respect of the four branches within VSD. The Board thanked everyone for their informative presentations which had given them a good overview of the work undertaken within the Division and key impacts on the wider agri-food sector.

8.1 Tour of AFBI Stormont Buildings

Prior to lunch, Board members were given a brief tour of some of the facilities of the AFBI Stormont site.

9. DAERA Science Strategy Presentation

Ms Rooney presented the ongoing work around the development of the DAERA Science Strategy. After setting the background, she outlined the draft vision for the Strategy, what the Strategy will, and will not, entail and DAERA's science principles, in particular '*How DAERA will seek to use science*'.

Feedback from stakeholders on the draft strategy will be reviewed to facilitate issuing a draft for public consultation. Once the public consultation is complete comments will be considered before a final version is submitted for appropriate approval.

The Board thanked Ms Rooney for the presentation and welcomed the work being undertaken to develop the DAERA Science Strategy and the importance of it linking with other work streams such as the recommendations from the DAERA Review of AFBI and the DAERA Estate Strategy.

During a short Q&A session Ms Rooney highlighted that the strategy is anticipated to provide a high level framework and the impact of DAERA's science investment will be measured once a baseline is established. Details of the programme based approach will also be further developed once the DAERA Science Strategy is finalised. The Executive also suggested that, in terms of foresight, DAERA should be looking at a 10 to 15 year horizon.

10. Governance

10.1 Risk Management

10.1.1 *Reports of New or Emerging Risks*

There were no reports of any new or emerging risks.

10.1.2 AFBI Corporate Risk Register (draft) – June 2019

Mrs Kelly presented the draft AFBI Corporate Risk Register dated June 2019 which now included a 'heat map' in relation to the overall position of the corporate risks. The Board approved the Corporate Risk Register.

The Board was also advised of AFBI engagement with DAERA in relation to the impact of the UK Exit from the EU including a review of risks and the contingency measures in place.

10.2 Whistleblowing

ACTION

10.2.1 Reports of New or Ongoing Cases

There were no new cases of whistleblowing to report.

10.3 Fraud

10.3.1 Reports of New or Ongoing Cases

The Board noted that one case of fraud had been reported to the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee. The incident was reported in line with normal protocols and resulted in no loss to AFBI.

10.4 AFBI Standing Orders and Schedule of Matters Reserved to the Board and Scheme of Delegation

In approving the AFBI Standing Orders and Schedule of Matters Reserved to the Board and Scheme of Delegation, the requirement for business papers to be provided at least five working days prior to board meetings was highlighted.

11. Equality Scheme

11.1 5 Year Review of AFBI's Equality Scheme 2013-18

The 5 year review of the AFBI Equality Scheme 2013-18 was presented to the Board. The Chair proposed a slight change of wording in relation to a specific point and it was agreed that the scheme would be brought back to the September meeting for approval.

Exec

11.2 Revised AFBI Equality Scheme 2019-2023

The Revised 5 Year Equality Scheme 2019-2023 was approved for submission to the Equality Commission.

12. Health & Safety

12.1 Reports of New or Ongoing Cases

There were no new cases in relation to Health and Safety. The Board noted that an update on one ongoing case had been included within the Executive Report presented under item 6.

13.	Minutes of Board Sub-Committees	ACTION
13.1	<u>Draft Minutes from the Finance and Business Strategy Committee Meeting held on 10 May 2019</u>	
	The Board noted the draft minutes from Finance & Business Strategy Committee Meeting held on 10 May 2019.	
13.2	<u>Draft Minutes from Oversight & Governance Committee Meeting held on 10 May 2019</u>	
	In noting the draft minutes of the Oversight & Governance Committee meeting held on the 14 May 2019, clarification was provided regarding one figure. The minutes will be updated to reflect the change.	Sec
13.3	<u>Draft Minutes from the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee held on 31 May 2019</u>	
	The Board noted the draft minutes of the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee meeting held on 31 May 2019.	
13.4	<u>Draft Minutes from the Science Strategy Committee Meeting held 5 June 2019</u>	
	The Board noted the draft minutes from the Science Strategy Committee meeting held on 5 June 2019.	
13.5	<u>Report from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 25 June 2019</u>	
	In reporting on the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting on 25 June 2019, Ms Houston highlighted the following points:-	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A detailed review of the Annual Report and Accounts 2018/19 was undertaken; • The Northern Ireland Audit Office timetable within their Audit Strategy reflects a current completion date of 1 November 2019; • The progress of the AFBI Internal Audit Plan 2018/19 was discussed and AFBI have been assured that Internal Audit have undertaken enough work to enable an Annual Assurance to be provided for 2018/19. 	
14.	Any Other Business	
14.1	<u>Duty of Care / Work Life Balance</u>	

During discussions at Board and Committee meetings the level of evening and weekend working by the Executive had been noted. Ms Cullen stated that it is important that while this is a requirement of the job from time to time, it should not be seen as a constant working pattern. It was noted that wider discussion on work/life balance will be taken forward by the Organisational Development and Human Resources Committee.

ACTION

ODHR

15. Review of Board Meeting Effectiveness

The Board was content that the meeting had been effective and that the following key outcomes, discussed at the informal session prior to the commencement of the meeting, had been achieved:-

- Approval of CEO's proposals for organisational structure
- Better understanding of the progression of the DAERA Science Strategy
- Increased knowledge of the work of Veterinary Sciences Division and the facilities at the AFBI Stormont site.

16. Date of next meeting – 12 September 2019

The next AFBI Board meeting will take place on Thursday 12 September 2019

Signed: _____
(Chairperson)

Date: _____