

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board
held at AFBI Newforge
on Thursday 30 May 2019 at 10.00am**

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	Mrs Sharon Smyth
Ms Kate Burns	Dr Richard Horton	Mr Richard Solomon

In Attendance - AFBI Executive

Mrs Josephine Kelly, Director of Finance and Corporate Affairs Division
Dr Elizabeth Magowan, Director of Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division
Dr Alastair Douglas, Acting Director of Veterinary Sciences Division
Mr Glenn Montgomery, Head of Governance and Performance Branch

Mr James Adams, AFBI Secretariat

AFBI Board Apprentice

Ms Nuala Kilmartin

- 1. Welcome and Introduction** **ACTION**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 2. Apologies**

An apology was received on behalf of the AFBI CEO, Dr Stanley McDowell.
- 3. Conflict of Interests/Register of Interests Declaration**

There were no conflicts of interest to be recorded.
- 4. Draft Minutes of the AFBI Board Meeting held on 16 April 2019**

The draft minutes from the AFBI Board meeting held on 16 April 2019 were approved as an accurate reflection of the business conducted at the meeting.

4.1 Action Sheet from AFBI Board Meeting held on 16 April 2019

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

4.1.1 *AFBI/CAFRE – Future Collaboration*

Whilst this item had originally been scheduled for the June Board Meeting, it was noted that the item will form part of today's agenda.

5. **Chair's Remarks**

The Chair referred to his and senior AFBI staff attendance at the recent DAERA & Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) Engagement Workshop on '*Working Together in Partnership*'. He described the event as very positive and commented on the DAERA Permanent Secretary's update on Departmental priorities which had a focus on the value of ALBs, delivery of efficient services and the utilisation of ALB skills to assist DAERA. The focus on environmental impact was also noted and it is important that AFBI align with the DAERA direction of travel in this and other areas. Given the focus on outcomes, the Chair also emphasised the critical importance that, once deadlines have been agreed with DAERA, AFBI must deliver within the timeframe specified.

The Chair informed the Board of his ongoing outreach activities since the last Board meeting. He met with the Fiona McCandless Deputy Secretary Food and Farming Group, DAERA and discussed a number of estate related matters. The Chair has invited the Deputy Permanent Secretary to attend a future Board meeting. The Chair has also invited AFBI Sponsor Branch to AFBI Hillsborough and sees this as an opportunity to demonstrate the breadth of work undertaken at the site.

The Chair is also continuing his outreach activities around the AFBI sites. Having already visited AFBI Loughgall and AFBI Crossnacreevy, he has visited AFBI Newforge, AFBI Stormont, AFBI Omagh and the Research Vessel Corystes since the last Board meeting with visits to AFBI Hillsborough and AFBI Bushmills taking place in June 2019. The Chair has thoroughly enjoyed meeting AFBI staff and described them as talented, committed and a credit to AFBI.

The Chair attended the Balmoral Show 2019 over two days and felt that it had been a very positive event with an excellent AFBI stand. He attended the AFBI QUB event on the Friday and has plans to meet with the Director of the Institute of Global Food Security in June 2019.

6. Executive Report

Mrs Kelly presented the Executive Report on behalf of the CEO and highlighted the following:-

- Additional short-term resources to provide specialist IT / Business Analyst skills relating to the business case for the Finance and Business System are progressing well. The business case is on track for submission by the end of June 2019.
- DAERA and AFBI representatives met to discuss the DAERA-AFBI Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS). Follow-up meetings will take place to discuss the progress, scope and governance of LIMS. Mrs Kelly has joined the LIMS Project Board and will represent AFBI alongside Dr Douglas;
- Competitions for the posts of the Head of Financial Costing, DP and SO Accountants are progressing rapidly and will significantly increase the number of permanent staff within the revised Finance Branch structure;
- The Executive received an update on the Health & Safety Action Plan arising from the 2017/18 AFBI Corporate Health and Safety Review. The Executive report contained information on progress being made and a detailed update will be presented to the Board later this year;
- A soft launch of the new AFBI Logo took place at this year's Balmoral Show;

Mrs Kelly also informed the Board of the following matters:-

- A pre-audit version of the Annual Report and Accounts 2018/19 is on schedule to be provided to the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee in June 2019. Whilst there is some delay in the completion of the Internal Audit Plan 2018/19, the plan will be completed before the end of the audit of the Annual Report and Accounts;
- The completion of 2018/19 timesheets on the AFBI Time Task Recording System (TTRS) shortly after year-end was completed. This helped to ensure that more robust costing information was at hand which increased accuracy in DAERA Evidence and Innovation Reports.

The majority of the Board welcomed the revised format of the report although there were some suggested alterations. It was agreed that any comments on the report are to be submitted to Mrs Kelly.

Board

7. Finance

ACTION

7.1 Finance Update

Mrs Kelly presented the finance update which shows the AFBI Budget position following the outcome of the June Monitoring round. AFBI Finance have since been working through the AFBI Bidding and Income System (ABIS) bids in order to establish an agreed opening position at Branch level.

It was noted that Divisions had been asked to review and prioritise their initial capital bids for 2019/20 and once forwarded to Finance they will be collated and presented to EMT for official approval. In response to a query on the timeline for completion of business cases for capital items, the Executive anticipates that these will be completed by the end of June 2019.

In terms of the position in relation to royalty payments, Mrs Kelly advised that she and the Head of Finance had attended meetings with relevant parties but there is no resolution at this stage and an update is not expected until sometime in the Autumn. The Executive informed the Board that letters have been drafted for issuing to inventors and advised that DAERA have been kept fully aware of the situation. A detailed disclosure note will be included in the latest draft of the Annual Report and Accounts 2018/19.

8. AFBI Board Sub-Committees

8.1 Membership of AFBI Board Sub-Committees

The Chair informed the Board that he was in the process of concluding the revised membership of the Board Sub-Committees. Once complete, the Board will be informed and a paper will be brought to the June meeting for approval.

Chair

8.2 Audit & Risk Assurance Committee

8.2.1 Draft Minutes from Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 30 April 2019

The Board noted the draft minutes from Audit & Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 30 April 2019

8.3 Finance and Business Strategy Committee

ACTION

8.3.1 Report from Finance and Business Strategy Committee Meeting held on 10 May 2019

The Board was content that the key matters discussed at the Finance & Business Strategy Committee meeting on 10 May 2019 had been covered in earlier discussions.

8.3.2 Finance & Business Strategy Committee – Terms of Reference

The Committee was content to approve the revised Terms of Reference subject to confirmation of the membership of the Board Sub-Committees.

8.4 Oversight & Governance Committee

8.4.1 Report from Oversight & Governance Committee held on 14 May 2019

The Board was content that the key items discussed at the Oversight & Governance Committee meeting on 10 May 2019 had been covered through earlier discussions.

8.4.2 AFBI Oversight & Governance Committee Meeting – Terms of Reference

The Board was content to approve the revised Terms of Reference subject to confirmation of the membership of the Board Sub-Committees.

The Board also commented that the Terms of Reference should be further revised to reflect the widened scope of the Committee to review other large and complex projects. It was noted that the Terms of Reference would be further considered by the Committee in due course.

**O&Gov
Cmt**

9. **Health & Safety**

9.1 Reports of New or Emerging Issues

The Board was made aware of steps taken in relation to an incident that occurred on a public road near the AFBI Hillsborough site. No people were injured as a result of the incident and proactive measures are being carried out to ensure that a similar incident does not occur. Mrs Kelly agreed to provide a further update on the matter at the June Board Meeting.

JK

10. Governance

ACTION

10.1 Risk Management

10.1.1 Reports of New or Emerging Risks

There were no new or emerging risks to report.

10.1.2 Draft AFBI Corporate Risk Register (April 2018)

In considering the AFBI Corporate Risk Register – April 2019, it was noted that the score of CR10 – *'The impact of the UK leaving the EU negatively affects AFBI's financial position, supply chain, access to and retention of staff, data and key consumables and the ability to deliver on commitments to customers'* had been reduced given the delay in the UK Exit of the EU which has afforded additional time to further investigate contingency planning.

Implementation of a finance and business information system is a key priority for AFBI and is very much a focus of DAERA. The Board suggested that the Executive be mindful of this in future risk discussions.

The Board approved the AFBI Corporate Risk Register – April 2019.

10.2 Whistleblowing

10.2.1 Reports of New or Ongoing Cases

There were no cases of whistleblowing to report.

10.3 Fraud

10.3.1 Reports of New or Ongoing Cases

There were no cases of fraud to report.

10.4 AFBI Policies

10.4.1 Encryption of External Communications Policy

The Board approved the Encryption of External Communications Policy.

The policy will be launched on the AFBI Intranet along with the new 'AFBI Encrypted Web Mailer' tool and will form part of AFBI's induction package. Mr Montgomery also informed the Board that he had attended Heads of Branch meetings to discuss the impact of the policy on their business areas.

10.4.2 Records Management Policy

The Board approved the Records Management Policy.

10.5 Annual Report on Corporate Complaints 2018/19

The Board noted the Annual Report on Corporate Complaints 2018/19.

10.6 Annual Report on Information Governance and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Compliance

Mr Montgomery, as part of his role as AFBI Data Protection Officer, presented a paper which summarises the progress of key projects undertaken to ensure compliance with the GDPR and to improve information governance and records management within AFBI.

A number of points were summarised including the following:-

- Implementation of an Electronic Document and Records Management System (EDRMS) will bring AFBI in line with NICS departments and other ALBs. The business case for the EDRMS will be provided to EMT for approval in early June 2019 prior to onward submission to DAERA;
- A significant increase in reported potential data breach incidents was observed in 2018/19 compared to the two previous years and this has been attributed to AFBI's comprehensive GDPR training and awareness campaign carried out during 2018/19;
- In relation to AFBI's responses to information requests made under relevant legislation, the Board was pleased to note that the 2018/19 AFBI FOI response rate within deadline was 100%.

11. **Partnerships between Departments and Arm's Length Bodies – A Good Practice Guide**

The Board noted the document entitled '*Partnerships between Departments and Arm's Length Bodies – A Good Practice Guide*'.

Mr Montgomery highlighted that, as part of DAERA's Tailored Review of AFBI in 2018, a recommendation was made for DAERA and AFBI to implement the Cabinet Office - good practice on relationships with arm's length bodies. As the NI version was based upon the cabinet office guide, implementation of the recommendation will now be based on the NI good practice guide.

12. AFBI Business Plan 2018/19**12.1** AFBI Corporate Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) 2018/19 – Year End Outturns

The Board noted the outturns against the AFBI Corporate KPIs 2018/19 – Year End Outturns.

KPI 2 – *'Establish operational model and launch AFBI science programmes to include Industry Advisory Group by March 2019'* had not been achieved in 2018/19. In providing an update in relation to the KPI it is expected that this will not be in place by the end of June 2019. It was noted that the matter will be further discussed by the Science Strategy Committee.

In relation to KPI 16 *'Achieve combined industrial and non-industrial absenteeism of 7.5 working days or less per Whole Time Equivalent (WTE)'*, the Board was pleased to note that this had been achieved.

13. AFBI Business Plan 2019/20**13.1** DAERA Feedback on AFBI Business Plan

The Executive informed the Board that the feedback from DAERA on the AFBI Business Plan 2019/20 had been very positive. Amendments based on DAERA comments are in the process of being completed and a revised version will be provided to DAERA shortly.

14. AFBI Board Governance**14.1** AFBI Standing Orders and Schedule of Matters Reserved to the Board and Scheme of Delegation

It was noted that a paper will be presented at the June Board Meeting.

Exec**14.2** AFBI Board Self-Assessment Report 2018/19

Mr Montgomery presented a paper and gave a brief presentation on the analysis of the Board Self-Assessment Exercise 2018/19 which is undertaken as part of the Board Operating Framework. In outlining the results it was noted that all of the six key principles had an average score which met or exceeded expectations and there was also a general consensus on areas of strength and weakness.

A discussion ensued in relation to areas for improvement and how these may be addressed. Under Question P) '*Board is provided with information that is fit for purpose*' the Board recognised the demands it has placed on the Executive for detail and the need to be precise with questioning and information requests. It was suggested that, where appropriate, papers should have a more strategic context in the Executive Summary identifying how the subject links with AFBI's key corporate messages and relevant KPIs.

ACTION

15. Any Other Business

15.1 AFBI/CAFRE – Future Strategic Working Proposal

Dr Magowan presented a high level paper on the AFBI/CAFRE – Future Strategic Working Proposal which aims to maximise the impact which AFBI and CAFRE have for DAERA and the wider agri-food industry. The paper also outlines the key aims of the CAFRE/AFBI Steering Group.

While the Board welcomed the initiative, they are keen to see early progress on delivery of identifiable projects. Oversight of the development of the relationship with CAFRE will form part of the remit of the Science Strategy Committee.

**SSC
Com**

15.2 DAERA Knowledge Framework

The Board noted the DAERA Knowledge Framework Document.

16. Review of Board Meeting Effectiveness

The Board felt that the meeting had been effective with open and honest communication.

17. Date of Next meeting

The next meeting of the AFBI Board will take place on the Thursday 27 June 2019.

18. Closed Session – Board Schedule and reporting

The Board held a short closed session to discuss Board reporting and items for in-depth discussion.

Signed: _____
(Chairperson)

Date: _____