



**Minutes of the Meeting of the  
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board  
held at  
AFBI Stormont (VSD)  
on Tuesday 28 February 2012 at 10.00am**

**Present – Board Members**

Mr Sean Hogan, Chair  
Prof David McDowell, D/Chair  
Mr Michael Walker  
Mr Seamus McCaffrey  
Mr Alan McKeown  
Mrs Hilda Stewart  
Mr John Rankin  
Mr Bob McCann  
Mrs Hilary McCartan  
Prof Stewart McNulty  
Prof Grace Mulcahy

**In Attendance - AFBI Executive**

Prof Seamus Kennedy, CEO  
Dr Michael Camlin, DCEO  
Dr David Bryson, DCEO (Acting)  
Dr Alistair Carson, DCEO (Acting)  
Mr Joel Ferguson, Head of Corporate Services Division (Acting)  
Mrs Venkat Deshpande, Head of AFBI Finance  
Mr Paul Brennan, Head of AFBI HR  
  
Mr Stephen Cousins, AFBI Secretariat

**1. Welcome and Introduction**

**Action**

The Chair issued a warm welcome to all those present and, in particular, Dr Alistair Carson who was attending his first AFBI Board meeting as Head of Agri-Food and Environmental Science Division (Acting).

The Chair also took the opportunity during his welcome and introduction to thank the staff at AFBI Stormont (Veterinary Sciences Division) for hosting the meeting and the Board's appreciation for the work that is carried out at VSD.

**2. Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of Mr Trevor Hinds and Mr James Noble, AFBI Board Members.

**3. Conflict of Interests Declaration**

The Board were made aware of a potential conflict of interest relating to the procurement of library services and it was agreed that any Board members with a potential conflict would absent themselves when the matter came up for discussion later in the meeting.

#### 4. **Draft Minutes of the Previous Board Meeting held on 24 January 2012**

On a proposal from Mr Bob McCann, seconded by Mr John Rankin, the Board approved the draft minutes from the previous Board meeting held on 24 January 2012 without amendment.

#### 5. **Matters Arising/Action Points from Previous AFBI Board Meeting held on 24 January 2012**

##### 5.1 Item 5.1 - Development of an AFBI Non-Solicitation and Protection of AFBI Intellectual Property Policy

The Executive are on schedule to present a draft AFBI Non-solicitation and Protection Policy at the Board meeting in March 2012.

**Exec**

##### 5.2 Item 5.2 - Minutes from the Joint DARD / AFBI Board meeting

The Executive agreed to circulate to the Board the minutes from the Joint DARD/AFBI Board meeting held on 7 November 2011.

**Exec**

##### 5.3 Item 5.3 - Business Development – AFBI Representation in the USA

A salary has been agreed and the recruitment process which is being taken forward by the British Embassy in Washington DC, will commence in April 2012.

##### 5.4 Item 5.4 - EU Audit of Brucellosis Testing

There have been no further developments since the date of the previous Board meeting. However, the Executive advised that a further EU inspection on the subject of Bovine TB is due to commence in March 2012.

##### 5.5 Item 5.6 - AFBI Overheads

The Executive confirmed that it was on track to present a paper on the issue of Overhead Rates at the next meeting of the AFBI Board (March 2012).

**Exec**

##### 5.6 Item 5.10 - Proposed Scheme of Delegation and Standing Orders for AFBI Board

The Executive advised the Board that the Scheme was still being developed and the matter currently resides with the AFBI Senior Management Team.

**Exec**

##### 5.7 Item 6 - New Appointments to the AFBI Board

The Chair informed the Board that he had received the names of the new Board appointees but he was not in a position to divulge these as he had not yet received Ministerial approval to do so. However, the Chair is

hopeful that approval will be given in time for him to invite the new members to the March Board meeting. **Action**

**5.8** Item 7.2.1 - Sharing of Financial Awards

The CEO informed the Board that since the date of the previous Board meeting he and a number of AFBI colleagues had met with the Chair of the Remuneration Committee, Prof McDowell.

During the meeting it had been agreed that the AFBI People Strategy group would take this matter forward and provide a report in due course. **Exec**

**5.9** Item 8.2 - Emerging Risk in AFBI Finance

A recruitment competition is now underway with the aim of appointing two Deputy Principal Accountants which will help reduce or hopefully eliminate this risk of insufficient accountancy resource.

The Executive also advised the Board that it was in the late stages of developing a job specification for a new Head of Corporate Services Division (Grade 5) and the CEO confirmed that he has enlisted the help of a number of Board members to assist with the recruitment process. The job specification would take account of the emerging findings from the KPMG review.

**5.10** Item 10.2 - AFBI Invoicing Processes

The Chair of the Finance Committee agreed that she would discuss ways of improving AFBI's invoicing processes with the Head of AFBI Finance prior to and during the next meeting of the AFBI Board Finance Sub-Committee. **HMcC**

**6. Chair's Business**

**6.1** Result of DARD Investigation into Allegations made under the Research Misconduct Policy

The Chair informed the Board that DARD Central Investigation Service had completed its investigation into recent allegations made under AFBI's Research Misconduct Policy.

As a result of this latest investigation DARD have concluded that a previous investigation was thorough, upheld its findings and the matter can now be regarded as closed.

The Chair confirmed that he had written to the whistle-blower.

**6.2** Freedom of Information Request

The Chair reported that AFBI had received a Freedom of Information request seeking information on the appraisal of AFBI Board members. Having discussed the matter with the CEO, the Chair advised that AFBI had released the performance appraisal templates but was not in a

position to release the actual appraisals of individual Board members which was deemed to be personal information. **Action**

In the discussion that followed the Board were made aware of concerns expressed by industry representatives that the composition of the AFBI Board was not sufficiently representative of the industry. While the Board expressed its sympathy for this position, it agreed that this is essentially a matter for the Committee for Public Appointments.

The Board accepted the Chair's decision not to release personal performance appraisal information.

### **6.3** Dates for the Diary

The Chair highlighted a number of forthcoming events that may be of interest to Board members and asked the Secretary to compile a list that could be circulated to Board members. **Sec**

## **7. CEO's Report**

The CEO presented his report to the Board and the Board were content to note.

## **8. Governance Issues**

### **8.1** AFBI Risk Management

There were no reports of any new or emerging risks to the organisation.

### **8.2** Whistle blowing and Fraud

There were no reports of any new cases of whistleblowing or fraud.

### **8.3** Health and Safety

There were no reports of any health and safety issues.

## **9. AFBI Personnel**

### **9.1** Starters and Leavers Report

The Board were content to note the details in the latest *Starters and Leavers Report* particularly the presentational changes that have been made since the previous Board meeting.

The Board were also made aware of a number of additional reports that are currently in the process of being developed and the Executive gave an indication that it was hopeful that these would be ready in time for the April Board meeting.

## 9.2 Agency Workers

The Executive provided a paper detailing AFBI's use of agency workers since 2009/10. Following discussion the Board signified that it was satisfied with the proactive manner in which the Executive manage agency workers and were content to note the paper.

## 10. **Draft AFBI Internal Communications Strategy**

Following circulation of the draft AFBI Internal Communications Strategy the focus of discussion centred on the appointment of a *Communications Champion*. The Board agreed that this appointment would be crucial to ensuring the successful implementation of the Internal Communications Strategy and as such were fully supportive of this appointment.

On a proposal by Mrs Hilda Stewart, seconded by Mr Seamus McCaffrey the Board approved the AFBI Internal Communications Strategy.

## 11. **Appointment of Non-DARD Business Manager**

Following discussion the Board agreed that the appointment of a Non-DARD Business Manager is business-critical and was one of the key recommendations contained in the AFBI Business Development and Marketing Strategy (BDMS).

The Executive indicated that it had delayed this appointment to allow time for the DARD Business Manager post, which had also been one of the BDMS recommendations to bed in and also because of budget constraints but agreed that now would be an appropriate time to take this matter forward.

Exec

## 12. **Finance**

### 12.1 Monthly Budget Monitoring Report

The Monthly Budget Monitoring Report for the period ending 31 January 2012 was presented to the Board and duly noted.

The Executive assured the Board that it was content that capital expenditure was on track.

### 12.2 Cash Flow Report

The Cash Flow Report detailing the position as at 31 January 2012 was presented to the Board and duly noted.

## 13. **Draft Minutes from the Finance Sub-Committee Meeting held on 17 January 2012**

The draft minutes from the Finance Sub-Committee meeting held on 17 January 2012 were circulated to the Board and the Board was content to note.

**14. DAO (DFP) 03/12 – Introduction of the Governance Statement 2012/13 Accounting Period and Annex 3.1 The Governance Statement**

The Chair of the Finance Sub-Committee made reference to Dear Accounting Officer Letter (DAO (DFP) 03/12) dated 7 February 2012 that introduces a significant change in AFBI's governance arrangements. From the financial year 2012-13 onward the requirement to complete a Statement of Internal Control (SiC) will be replaced by the need to complete a Governance Statement.

The Board were made aware that the completion of this Governance Statement will necessitate information and input from the Board and this will require further thought as to what information and reports are to be included.

As part of the process the Board are also expected to undertake a Self Effectiveness Review and it was suggested that this be undertaken in 2013.

Following discussion the Executive agreed that it would provide a draft Governance Statement for the Board's consideration at a suitable point in the future.

Exec

**15. Business Plan Outturn Targets for Quarter Ending 31 December 2012**

In presenting the report on the Business Plan Outturn Targets for the quarter ending 31 December 2012, the Executive acknowledged that there has been some slippage in a number of areas which was due mainly to a lack of staffing resource.

Following discussion the Board were content to note the report.

**16. AFBI Annual Report and Statement of Accounts 2010/11**

The Chair was informed that each member of the AFBI Board had received a hard copy of the AFBI Annual Report and Statement of Accounts 2010/11 and a copy had been forwarded to AFBI Sponsor Branch to lay before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Further copies of the report will be issued to AFBI's major stakeholders and it will also be made available to the general public via the AFBI website.

Exec

**17. Report and draft Minutes from AFBI Board Strategy Sub-Committee Meeting held on 24 January 2012**

The Chair of the Strategy Sub-Committee reported that work on an AFBI Science Strategy document was well on track and substantial work has been completed but major decisions will rest with the incoming Board.

A copy of the draft minutes from the Strategy Sub-Committee meeting held on 24 January 2012 were circulated to the Board and noted accordingly.

**Action**

**18. Report from Audit Committee meeting held on 31 January 2012**

The Chair of the Audit Committee informed the Board that there had been no major issues arising during the meeting held on 31 January 2012 and a draft minute will be presented to the Board during the Board meeting in March 2012.

**Chair  
AC/  
Sec**

**19. Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) – Value for Money Review**

The Executive informed the Board that the NIAO had presented its findings to both AFBI and DARD and the Executive advised the Board that this review will be very significant for AFBI.

The Executive acknowledged that there are some areas where disagreement currently exists and advised the Board that AFBI and DARD will be holding a number of meetings aimed at agreeing an action plan that will challenge some of the initial findings of the review.

In response the Board accepted the Executive's plan to challenge some of the findings but advised the Executive there was also a need to accept valid criticism in which case the Executive should focus its attention on the need to demonstrate how these issues are now being addressed or will be in the future.

The Executive accepted the Board's advice and confirmed that it had agreed a timescale with the NIAO for responding to the NIAO's initial comments.

*(Mrs Stewart, Mr McCaffrey and Mrs McCartan left the meeting)*

**20. Update on Organisational Review**

The latest meeting of the Steering Group was held on Friday 24 February 2012 when comments were made on the latest draft report presented by KPMG. KPMG are now addressing these issues with the view to bridging a number of gaps that currently exist.

A further draft report is expected by Friday 2 March 2012 and when received it will be circulated to the Board in advance of the Extraordinary Board Meeting scheduled for Friday 9 March 2012.

**Exec**

**21. Reports from Divisions**

The Heads of Division presented their reports to the Board and following discussion on a number of points the Board were content to note.

## 22. Any Other Business

### 22.1 Rolling Database of Issues Raised at AFBI Board Meetings

The Board were content to note the updates made to the Rolling Database of Issues Raised at AFBI Board Meetings.

### 22.2 Speaking Engagement

The Board were informed that the CEO would be speaking at an event being held in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings, Stormont on Thursday 15 March 2012 and Board members were issued with an invitation to attend.

It was agreed that the Secretary should add this to the list of events being compiled for circulation to the AFBI Board.

Sec

*(Prof McDowell and Prof Mulcahy absented themselves from the meeting.)*

### 22.4 Renewal of Library Contract

The Board were content to note that the process for renewing the contract for the provision of an AFBI Library Service was underway with a specification currently being developed. When complete the specification and tender documents will be issued via the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD).

*(Prof McDowell and Prof Mulcahy returned to the meeting.)*

## 23. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the AFBI Board will be held on Tuesday 27 March 2012 in the AFBI Boardroom, AFBI HQ, Newforge Lane at 10.00am.

### PRESENTATION

*A presentation on Quality Assurance was given by Mrs C McVeigh, Acting Quality Manager at AFBI Stormont.*

*During the presentation the Board were informed that Quality Assurance has always been part of the ethos of the organisation but what has changed in recent years has been the adoption of international standards as management tools.*

*The presentation focused on two of the main standards attained by AFBI in recent years, ISO9001 Certification and ISO17025 Accreditation. The presentation also provided the Board with an overview of the work required to attain these standards and the benefits to the organisation that have been derived from having achieved the standards.*



*The Board congratulated Dr Bryson and the entire Quality Assurance team of Mrs Cynthia McVeigh, Dr John Cooper and Mrs Helen Shields for the significant work and the advances that they have made in this area.*

**Action**

*In light of the successes the Executive also accepted a suggestion from the Board that the work on accreditation should be reflected in the AFBI Annual Report 2011/12 and the article should highlight the achievements made and the importance of these standards to AFBI.*

**Exec**

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Chairperson)

Date: