



**Minutes of the Meeting of the  
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Board  
held at AFBI Newforge  
on Tuesday 15 May 2018 at 10.00am**

**Present – Board Members**

Mr Colm McKenna, Chair	Dr Michelle Costello-Smith	Ms Joan Houston
Mr Colin Coffey, Deputy Chair	Ms Theresa Cullen	Mrs Maureen McKeague
Mrs Roberta Brownlee	Mrs Fiona Hanna	Mrs Sharon Smyth
Mr Ian Buchanan	Dr Richard Horton	Mr Richard Solomon

**In Attendance - AFBI Executive**

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

Mr James Adams, AFBI Secretariat

**AFBI Board Apprentice**

Ms Jennifer Ritchie

**Visitor**

Ms Pauline Rooney, DAERA Review of AFBI Project Lead (Item 5)

**1. Welcome and Introduction**

**ACTION**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**2. Apologies**

An apology was received from AFBI Board Member, Ms Kate Burns.

**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 15 March 2018**

The draft minutes from the AFBI Board meeting held on 15 March 2018 were approved as an accurate reflection of the business conducted at the meeting.

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

4.1.1 Day One Planning following UK Exit from the EU

The Executive explained that the delay in providing a full return to DAERA on the 'Day one Planning for the UK exit of the EU' had been due to complex issues particularly around the marine sector. DAERA has been kept fully informed of the reasons for the delay and a return is expected shortly.

**5. DAERA Review of AFBI 2017/18 – Update**

The Project Head for the DAERA Review of AFBI, Ms Pauline Rooney gave a presentation entitled '*AFBI Review Findings and Proposed Recommendations*'.

Ms Rooney provided the Board with a background and an overview of the work undertaken by the review team on the three main areas, the headings of which are:-

1. Form and Function;
2. Effectiveness and Efficiency;
3. Governance.

Ms Rooney then outlined the detailed areas reviewed such as the Operating Model, Science and Service Quality, Sponsorship Management and Board Effectiveness including the findings and proposed recommendations.

In discussions that followed, the Board was pleased to note that the review had identified that the vast majority of functions undertaken by AFBI for DAERA are required and that a local Public Sector Research Establishment (PSRE), with some commercial focus, is valued to deliver main science services to DAERA. The Chair also welcomed the findings in the area of stakeholder engagement and the need to enhance these to ensure that the views of front-line services feed into the development of policy.

In response to a question on the timeline for completion, it was noted that a report will be issued to Trade Union Side before a final draft is presented to the Project Board in July 2018.

The Board thanked Ms Rooney for the very comprehensive presentation and looked forward to seeing the draft report. The Board and the Executive also thanked staff and particularly Mr Glenn Montgomery, Head of Governance and Performance Branch, for co-ordinating returns to the extensive information requests.

**6. Chair's Remarks**

Since the last AFBI Board Meeting in March 2018, the Chair commented on the following:-

- He had been pleased with the level of discussion and engagement at the AFBI Board Strategy Workshop in April;
  - Good discussions had been held with the DAERA Permanent Secretary who is heavily involved in national negotiations regarding the UK exit of the EU.
- ACTION**

The Chair also commented on the forthcoming Balmoral Show and the ongoing discussions regarding the auditing of the 2016/17 AFBI Annual Report and Accounts.

## **7. Executive Report**

The Board was content to note the CEO's Executive Report.

The CEO also highlighted that applications for the recruitment of the Head of Diagnostic Surveillance & Investigation Branch close on Friday 18 June 2018. He also commented on a number of forthcoming events and it was agreed that a Programme for the AFBI Dairy Open Day will be circulated to all Board members following the meeting.

**CEO**

The Board also took the opportunity to congratulate the CEO on being awarded the prestigious Belfast Telegraph Cup at the Ulster Farmers Union dinner earlier this year.

## **8. Hillsborough Feeding Information System (HFIS)**

Dr Magowan presented a paper on the review of the HFIS which included a detailed analysis of future options. Dr Magowan outlined the background and scope of the service and highlighted demands and trends in silage analysis. In recognising that the HFIS faces a number of challenges a number of key issues were highlighted such as cost, quality of service, systems and new technology.

Following an in-depth analysis eight potential options for the future of the service were identified with four being shortlisted for full analysis of monetary and non-monetary costs, benefits and risks.

In reviewing the paper, the Board thanked the Executive for such a comprehensive paper and having duly considered the analysis of options unanimously supported the Executive's proposal to adopt option eight - discontinuation of the service.

It was noted that discussions are ongoing with key stakeholders and the Board recognised the importance of keeping them fully informed of the process to ensure that any concerns raised are handled appropriately.

In response to a question on AFBI's position in relation to the development of new technologies in this area Dr Magowan advised the Board that AFBI is the master laboratory in this field and will retain the skills and expertise in relation to this area of work.

## 9. Progress on AFBI/QUB Discussions

**ACTION**

The CEO updated the Board of the establishment of the AFBI/QUB Strategic Alliance which, following discussions with key stakeholders, had been fully endorsed by all parties.

The CEO also advised that approval has been provided to allow for the procurement of external support to help assess and select the appropriate governance model for the alliance.

The official launch of the Alliance will take place at this year's Balmoral Show on Friday 18 May 2018.

## 10. Finance

### 10.1 AFBI Budget Monitor Report – Position at 31 March 2018

Mrs Kelly presented the “*AFBI Budget Monitor Report - Position as at 31 March 2018*” and advised that work is ongoing post year-end in order to prepare the Annual Report and Accounts 2017/18. It was also noted that AFBI is currently liaising directly with HM Revenue & Customs in relation to the VAT treatment for CIEL and the impact that this may have on the 2017/18 financial position.

In the discussions that followed the Board also noted the following points:-

- Income figures excluding royalty had decreased from the previous year and a paper on this is to be provided to the Finance & Business Strategy Committee for further analysis;
- Reduction in income from major projects was the key contributor to the drop in income figures. The Executive confirmed that costs associated with the projects had also reduced although not to the same degree;
- Fluctuations in overhead outturns for utilities was also discussed at the Finance & Business Strategy Committee and more detailed explanation for variances will be provided.

### 10.2 Update on 2018-19 Financial Settlement

Mrs Kelly presented a paper which showed the updated position regarding the 2018/19 financial settlement from DAERA. The Board concurred with the Executive that overall this was a very positive outcome.

In discussing the settlement, the Executive advised that it is robustly scrutinising figures internally and challenging original AFBI Bid & Income Systems (ABIS) bids in order to identify opportunities for spend. In terms of capital, the CEO highlighted that third-party approvals and processes could prove to be a risk to full utilisation of AFBI's allocation.

Given current in-year timelines the Board asked to be kept updated on the latest position.

**Exec**

## **11. Audit & Risk Assurance Committee** **ACTION**

### **11.1** Draft Minutes from Audit & Risk Assurance Committee Extraordinary Meeting held on 9 March 2018

The Board noted the draft minutes from Audit & Risk Assurance Committee Extraordinary Meeting held on 9 March 2018.

### **11.2** Report from Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Meeting held on 8 May 2018

In providing an update on the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee meeting held on the 8 May, 2018, Ms Houston highlighted that a number of questions from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) are being considered and responses are being compiled. Ms Houston also advised that she and the Deputy Chair have been working closely with Mrs Kelly in this regard.

## **12. Finance and Business Strategy Committee**

### **12.1** Minutes from Finance and Business Strategy Committee Meeting held on 8 March 2018

The Board noted the Minutes from Finance & Business Strategy Committee meeting held on 8 March 2018.

### **12.2** Report from Finance and Business Strategy Committee Meeting held on 4 May 2018

In reporting on the Finance & Business Strategy Committee meeting held on 4 May 2018 Mr Coffey informed the Board of the following points:-

- AFBI and DAERA are open to streamlining the number of lines in the Assigned Work Programme (AWP) as commented on by the DAERA Review Project Lead earlier in this meeting;
- Increased detail on the reporting of projects within the AFBI Directed Research Fund is required
- Additional information in relation to the relocation of AFBI HQ and the associated maintenance costs for remaining on the Newforge site in the medium term was discussed and further information around the value for money aspect has been requested by the Committee.

## **13. AFBI/CIEL Governance Committee**

### **13.1** AFBI CIEL Governance Committee Terms of Reference (Draft)

Mr Coffey outlined recent discussions around the establishment of an '*Oversight and Governance Committee*' in response to key lessons learned as a result of the Audit of the Annual Report and Accounts 2016/17. Consideration is also being given to extending the scope of the Committee to other high profile projects.

The Board noted the draft Terms of Reference which will be subject to further review.

## **14. Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee**

**ACTION**

### **14.1 Report from Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee Meeting held on 11 May 2018**

Ms Cullen reported on the Organisational Development & Human Resources Committee meeting held on 11 May 2018. Key topics discussed included the performance management cycle, absence management and health & safety (H&S).

In relation to the topic of H&S, the Board noted that the newly appointed H&S Manager and the Head of Emergency Planning, Safety and Estate Branch had attended the Committee to discuss this topic. Ms Cullen informed the Board that the discussions had been thorough and the Committee had been encouraged with the level of engagement and discussion from the H&S Manager given his short time in the post.

## **15. Governance Issues**

### **Risk Management**

### **15.1 Reports of New or Emerging Risks**

There were no new or emerging risks to report.

### **15.2 Draft AFBI Risk Management Strategy**

The Executive presented the revised '*AFBI Risk Management Strategy and Operational Procedures*' which had been considered by AFBI's Risk Review Group and the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee. The key changes refer to the establishment of AFBI's strategic outcomes and their alignment with the risk appetite categories.

The Board was content to approve the revised '*AFBI Risk Management Strategy and Operational Procedures*'.

### **15.3 Draft AFBI Corporate Risk Register (April 2018)**

The Executive presented the Draft AFBI Corporate Risk Register (CRR) April 2018 and highlighted the key changes which included the amalgamation of some previous risks, a change to one risk definition and the reduction of one residual score as follows:-

*'CR7 If we fail to prepare sufficiently to ensure compliance with new Data Protection Regulation, it could expose AFBI to enforcement action and/or monetary penalties from the UK's regulatory body and reputational damage'* – the residual risk score has decreased from 15 (impact 5 x Likelihood 3) to 10 (Impact 5 x Likelihood 2)

Following a general discussion the Board approved the revised CRR.

<b>15.4</b>	<u>Whistleblowing and Fraud - Reports of New or Ongoing Cases</u>	<b>ACTION</b>
	<p>There were no reports of any new or ongoing cases of whistleblowing or fraud.</p> <p>In response to a suggestion from the Board, it was agreed that whistleblowing and fraud will appear as two separate items on future agendas.</p>	<b>Sec</b>
<b>15.5</b>	<u>Revised AFBI Data Protection Policy (DRAFT)</u>	
	<p>The Executive presented the revised '<i>AFBI Data Protection Policy</i>' which had been updated to include evidence of compliance with GDPR, the eighth Data Protection Act 1998 principles and the roles and responsibilities in relation to the information governance structure within AFBI.</p> <p>The Board approved the revised '<i>AFBI Data Protection Policy</i>'.</p>	
	<u>Presentation of Certificate to Long Service Staff – Dr Ethel White</u>	
	<p>Prior to a break for lunch, the Board presented Dr Ethel White with a long service certificate in recognition of her years of service to AFBI.</p> <p>The Chair provided a synopsis of her career and the Board congratulated Dr White on her achievements and wished her well in her retirement.</p>	
<b>16.</b>	<b>Health &amp; Safety</b>	
<b>16.1</b>	<u>Reports of New or Emerging Issues</u>	
	<p>There were no reports of any new or emerging issues in relation to Health &amp; Safety.</p> <p>The Board noted that a presentation on the area of Health &amp; Safety will be given at the AFBI Board Strategy Workshop in June 2018. A revised AFBI Health &amp; Safety Policy will also be presented at the Workshop.</p>	<b>Exec</b>
<b>17.</b>	<b>AFBI Business Plan 2017-18</b>	
<b>17.1</b>	<u>Update on Progress Against KPIs 2017/18 Year End Outturns</u>	
	<p>The Executive presented the report on the year-end position in respect of the AFBI Corporate KPIs 2017/18.</p> <p>While lessons have been learned and a number of processes have been put in place for the 2018/19 year such as increased reporting on sub-objectives and additional milestones, the Executive was disappointed to report that only six of fifteen recommendations had been achieved for the year.</p> <p>The Board was very disappointed to note the year-end position which the Chair described as not reflective of the excellent work of the Institute. In the discussion which ensued around setting of Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound (SMART) objectives and KPIs, the Board urged the Executive to further review the performance targets and ensure that they are SMART and that</p>	

ownership of organisational performance is effectively cascaded down through the Institute. **ACTION**

**18. Draft AFBI Corporate Plan 2018-2021 and Draft AFBI Business Plan 2018/19**

**18.1 Draft AFBI Corporate Plan 2018-2021**

Mrs Kelly presented the Draft AFBI Corporate Plan 2018-2021 which had been revised following comments from the Department and updated to include budget information and the preface.

The Board approved the Draft AFBI Corporate Plan 2018-2021.

**18.2 Draft AFBI Business Plan 2018/19**

Mrs Kelly presented the Draft AFBI Business Plan 2018/19 which had also been further revised following comments from the Department.

In light of the earlier discussions on SMART objectives and KPIs, the Board approved the Draft AFBI Business Plan 2018/19 subject to some minor changes.

**19. AFBI Board Annual Governance**

**19.1 AFBI Board Self-Assessment Report 2017-18**

The Chair presented the AFBI Board Self-Assessment Report 2017-18. Overall the results of the exercise were positive with improvements made in areas such as '*Board relationship with Stakeholders*' and '*Board Capacity*'.

In discussing the areas for improvement, the Chair agreed to further review comments provided and asked that a paper be provided for the next meeting.

**Exec**

**20. Any Other Business**

**20.1 Stakeholder Open Day – Thursday 7 June 2018 at AFBI Hillsborough**

The CEO outlined the programme for the Stakeholder Open Day to be held on Thursday 7 June at AFBI Hillsborough.

**21. Review of Board Meeting Effectiveness**

The Board was content that it had held an effective meeting.



**22. Date of Next meeting**

AFBI Board Workshop – 18 June 2018 – Venue TBC

AFBI Board Meeting – 13 September 2018, Boardroom, Newforge Lane

*Following the conclusion of the meeting the AFBI Board met in closed session.*

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chairperson)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_