

**CONFIRMED MINUTES
MEETING OF BOARD**

**Friday 15 December 2023
Cultra Manor, Ulster Folk Museum**

Members Present:

Gordon Milligan OBE – Chair
Keith Charlton
Ryan Cornett
William Duddy
Charlotte Jess
William McMullan
Sally Montgomery OBE
Peter Osborne
Therese Rafferty
Fiona Ryan
Mark Walker
Robert Whan

In Attendance

Kathryn Thomson, Chief Executive (CEO)
William Blair, Director of Collections (DC)
Colin Catney, Chief Operating Officer (COO)
Aaron Ward, Director of Public Engagement (DPE)
James Lewsley, Head of Finance & Governance (HFG)
Michelle Ashmore, Secretariat

1. Induction

1.1 Apologies

The Chair formally welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted no apologies were received.

1.2 Conflicts of Interest

The Chair ascertained there were no conflicts of interest in relation to the business as set out on the agenda.

1.3 Approval of Minutes from Last Meeting

Members approved the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 22 September 2023.

1.4 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

The Chair advised there were no actions from the previous meeting held on 22 September 2023.

2. Chair & Chief Executive Business

2.1 Chair & Trustee Business

The Chair advised that Board meetings would take place every 6 weeks and the agenda had been restructured to cover key areas of Performance, Strategy and Governance. He welcomed feedback on the proposed structure of the agenda which will be reviewed and refined over time.

The Chair advised Board members regarding a letter which is due to be received from the Permanent Secretary in relation to the 2024-25 budget and ongoing financial challenges.

2.2 Chief Executive Report

The Chief Executive (CEO) advised that the current Chief Executive Report is being reviewed to reduce repetition of the other papers in the Board pack and a new format for a written report will be included in future.

The CEO then provided a verbal update with the below highlights:

- **Ulster Folk Museum** – Ards & North Down Borough Council Planning Committee has given full approval to the planning application for the redevelopment of the museum. This represents a major milestone and all focus will now be on the funding strategy;
- **Ulster American Folk Park** – the SOC for the redevelopment of the museum as a key project in the Mid Southwest Region Development Deal SOC is in the final stages of approval;
- **Sale of Landseer Street** – previously the Board agreed that this piece of land behind the Ulster Museum was surplus to requirements. The CEO confirmed that an offer has been accepted for the sale of the land;
- **Up and coming Exhibitions at the Ulster Museum** –
 - Lavery on Location is opening on 23 February 2024. The exhibition, which is a partnership between the National Gallery of Ireland, National Museums NI and National Galleries Scotland, focusses on the artist's impressions of the people and locations that he encountered during a life filled with travel. There will be an entry charge to this exhibition in line with the other venues;
 - Exhibition in partnership with National Gallery for their 200 year anniversary sees the loan of a Carravagio for an exhibition opening in May 2024;
- **Education** – the Education team at the Ulster Folk Museum has been recognised with a prestigious Sandford Award, the only nationally recognised quality mark for heritage learning that provides independent assurance for heritage sites and services. The Board passed on their congratulations to the team;
- **Collections Development** – we have recently received a generous donation of the stunning Lanto Synge collection through the Cultural Gifts Scheme;

- **Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR)** – At National Museums NI we have CEDaR partnership with DAERA since 1995 and we have now formally launched, and are proceeding to publicise, a new 10-year Business Plan;
- **Decolonisation** - With the *Global Voices, Local Choices* decolonisation project now entering its final stages, the achievements of all participants were celebrated at an event at Stormont on 28th October which was supported by Kate Nicholl MLA.

Members noted the report.

3. Performance Review

3.1 Q2 Business Plan Performance Report

The CEO advised that KPIs were developed for the current corporate strategy and provided an update of the Q2 performance.

Members noted the report.

3.2 Q2 Finance Report

The Head of Finance & Governance (HFG) welcomed the new Members and provided the meeting with an update on the Q2 Financial position and forecast to year end.

The HFG highlighted the current funding challenges which were being faced across the public sector, and that National Museums NI's sponsor Department (DfC) were themselves in an over-committed position, thereby restricting the capacity to allocate any additional funding in year. The Head of Finance & Governance assured members that conversations were being held regularly with the Department at all levels and urgent solutions are being sought in order to move forward with confidence into the final quarter of the year and deliver a balanced budget.

The HFG also discussed ongoing capital projects highlighting that the lack of capacity within CPD was continuing to be a critical dependency for delivery. Despite that the capital programme was largely on track to be delivered by year end, with the exception of the Ulster Museum kitchen works which might tail into 2024/25.

Members noted the report.

3.3 Q2 HR&OD Report

The Chief Operating Officer (COO) highlighted the following from the tabled report:

- OD Programme;
- Absence levels this year have started to reduce following a rise last year attributable to Covid-19;
- We are currently experiencing a higher level of turnover within our front of house teams. It is a competitive job market and people can demand higher salaries than our junior grades offer;

- Volunteering is very successful and has grown really well. There are volunteering opportunities on offer right across the organisation.

Members noted the report.

4. Strategy

4.1 Draft Business Plan 2024-25

The CEO advised that the draft Business Plan for 2024/25 is based on the final year of our Corporate Strategy 2021-25. KPIs to be set once we know where we will finish this year. The budget will be developed in Q4 when funding position is clearer. The CEO advised that the final Business Plan will be presented at the Board meeting in March for approval.

Members approved the draft Business Plan 2024-25.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

5. Governance

5.1 Board Reserve Fund Bid – UFM

The CEO advised this paper seeks the approval of £100K from the Board Reserves to undertake an independent design assurance review of the Ulster Folk Museum's major capital project RIBA Stage 3 designs, to mitigate the risk of unforeseen change costs at a later stage of the project and ultimately provide assurance for the Project Board moving forward.

Members approved the Board Reserve Fund Bid as presented.

5.2 Loans, Acquisitions, Disposals

The Director of Collections (DC) advised that the loans primarily relate to the Lavery Exhibition and include private lenders.

The Board approved the Loans for Approval as presented.

The Chair also confirmed approval had been secured from members via written procedure in relation to the loan of Jack Butler Yeats painting to Ulster University for our annual Christmas partnership, Art Unwrapped.

5.3 Update from ARAC

The Chair of ARAC passed on his thanks to new Board members for joining the ARAC Committee along with Mr Duddy who will continue as a member. The Chair of ARAC also advised that the transition from RSM to EY as our new Internal Auditors had been completed.

Members noted the update.

5.4 FOIs

The Board noted the FOI report.


6. Any Other Business

None noted.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The Chair thanked Members and attendees, drew their attention to the date of the next meeting – 30 January 2024 – and closed the meeting at 12.16pm.

Signed:

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Date:

..... 30/1/24