

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee

Monday, 2nd August, 2021

MEETING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BELFAST WATERFRONT
AND ULSTER HALL LTD. SHAREHOLDERS' COMMITTEE
HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor McCabe (Chairperson);
Alderman Haire;
Councillors Bradley, Flynn, M. Kelly,
Magee, Mulholland, and Newton.

In attendance: Ms. J. Corkey, Chief Executive, ICC Belfast
(Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd.);
Mr. I. Bell, Director of Finance and Systems, ICC Belfast
(Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd.);
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Ms. P. Morrow, Tourism Culture Heritage & Arts
Development Officer;
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer; and
Ms. K. McCrum, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Alderman Copeland and Councillor McAteer.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 17th May were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st June.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following 6 items is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Annual Report and Financial Statements
for the year ended 31st March 2021

The Chief Executive of ICC Belfast/BWUH Ltd. reminded the Members that, at its meeting on 17th May 2021, they had been presented with the Quarter 4 Year to Date performance overview. The Members had since been provided with the full audited accounts.

She advised the Members that the Annual Report and Financial Statements had been presented to the BWUH Ltd Board at its meeting on 30th June 2021 and that both the Annual Report and Financial Statements were agreed as final by the Board and were electronically signed following that meeting.

The Members of the Committee recommended that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive would exercise her delegated authority to note the BWUH Ltd Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st March 2021.

Final Draft Business Plan 2021/2022

The Director of Finance and Systems and the Chief Executive of ICC Belfast/BWUH Ltd. presented the Members with the draft BWUH Ltd. Business Plan and the direction of travel for the financial year 2021/2022. The Members noted that the draft Business Plan had been approved by the BWUH Ltd. Board in April 2021, subject to approval by the Shareholders' Committee.

The Members were advised that, due to the ongoing global pandemic, the plan served as a direction of travel due to the venues having been instructed to remain closed. As a reopening date had not been received by the NI Executive, assumptions had been made that the full opening date, in line with the end of furlough and current booked business, would be 1st October 2021.

The Members of the Committee recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive would exercise her delegated authority to approve the draft BWUH Ltd. Business Plan 2021/22.

Casual Workers - Verbal update

The Director of Finance and Systems provided the Committee Members with an update on the outcome of the consultation which had taken place with casual staff Members of the ICC Belfast/BWUH Ltd.

He outlined that a number of staff members had accepted permanent contracts, with the others having chosen to remain as casual employees.

A number of Members welcomed the outcome.

The Members noted the update.

Extension of Board Directors' Contracts

The Director of Economic Development advised the Members that an extension was sought for three existing ICC BWUH Directors' contracts, to 31st August, 2022, in order to accommodate the acceleration and growth of the business when emerging from COVID19.

He explained that, given the ongoing impact of COVID-19, a recruitment exercise for Directors was still not possible.

The Board Directors concerned were Mr. A. Dixon, Mr. R. Holt and Mr. P. McClughan.

The Members of the Committee recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive would exercise her delegated authority to approve the extension of the three existing ICC BWUH Directors' contracts to 31st August, 2022.

Capital and Maintenance Update

The Director of Economic Development reminded the Members that a number of major capital projects had been identified at the Waterfront, including escalator replacement, replacement of the chiller units and works to the roof.

He explained that work was ongoing by Council officers to look at all of those works but that, currently, only the escalator replacement had agreed capital financing in place.

The Members noted that the replacement of the escalators had previously been agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, where a budget of £900,000 had been allocated in principle for the replacement of two sets of escalators (ground to first floor and first floor to second floor). In April the Committee was advised that tenders had been returned and that contract negotiations were on-going with the contractor nominated for appointment. In addition, the Committee was also advised that the scope of the project had been increased to incorporate the replacement of all six escalators. Following successful negotiations, the contract had now been awarded.

In relation to the replacement of the chiller units, the Council's and Waterfront's Facilities Teams were working closely with structural engineers to produce a practically deliverable solution. He reminded the Members that there was currently no capital financing associated with the project and that it would therefore be subject to the Council's capital governance processes, including the Oversight Group and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

An options report was being prepared in relation to the roof works which were required and the Committee would be updated in due course. As with the replacement of the chiller units, there was currently no capital financing associated with the project and that it would therefore be subject to the Council's capital governance processes.

A number of Members asked questions in relation to the works. A Member stated that they would like to receive a further update from the Director of Physical Programmes on the works required to the Waterfront at its next meeting.

In relation to ongoing maintenance, the Members were advised that monies had been agreed under non-recurrent capital funding for works at the Waterfront. This comprised £450,000 towards a toilet upgrade programme in the original Waterfront Hall and £45,000 for a proof of concept project to improve the efficiency and optimise the heating and cooling systems at the Waterfront Hall.

The Members noted the update and the monies which had been agreed under non-recurrent capital funding.

Changes to BWUH Box Office

The Chief Executive of ICC Belfast/BWUH Ltd. reminded the Committee Members that a review of the Entertainments business had been carried out in 2018, which had highlighted the growth in e-commerce buying behaviour and had identified an opportunity for growth in online sales.

She outlined the growth in online sales across all demographics and audiences.

The Members were advised that, in February 2020, the BWUH Board had reviewed the need to restructure the box office in line with business needs and the industry trend for online ticket sales. She outlined that it had been put on hold due to COVID-19 but that it was proposed that the business would review it in light of potential reopening and returning to business as usual.

She outlined a number of updates which had taken place in respect of the BWUH ticketing system. As restrictions lifted, she explained that the demand for tickets and level of customer enquiries had increased and with the upcoming return of live events, staff needed to be trained.

The Members were advised that an evaluation of the responsibilities of box office roles had been carried out, including gathering feedback from team members. She outlined that a benchmarking exercise against wider industry practices had identified that other entertainment venues, given the impact of COVID-19 and the significant increase in online purchasing, had closed their box office counters and, in some cases, their phone lines.

The Chief Executive of BWUH Ltd. outlined the proposed changes to the business. She also outlined the importance of a strong Customer Service team.

She outlined that there would be a formal process of meaningful consultation when proposals were still at a formative stage and that BWUH Ltd. would talk with Trade Union representatives and impacted individuals formally about any changes and would be seeking feedback on the proposals over the coming weeks.

In response to a request from a Member, the Chief Executive of BWUH Ltd agreed to provide the Members of the Committee with updates in relation to the consultation process.

The Members noted the update which had been provided.

Chairperson