

# **Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee**

Monday, 13th March, 2023

## **MEETING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BELFAST WATERFRONT AND ULSTER HALL LTD. SHAREHOLDERS' COMMITTEE HELD IN HYBRID FORMAT**

Members present: Councillor Maghie (Chairperson);  
Alderman Haire; and  
Councillors Bradley, Flynn, Howard, Magee,  
McAteer, McCann, Nelson, Newton and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. J. Corkey, Chief Executive, ICC Belfast  
(Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd.);  
Mr. I. Bell, Director of Finance, Risk and Corporate  
Services, ICC Belfast (Belfast Waterfront and Ulster  
Hall Ltd.);  
Mr. F. Grant, Operations Development Manager; and  
Ms. V. Smyth, Democratic Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Cobain.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 16th January 2023 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 December.

### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **Restricted Item**

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

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the Press and public from the meeting during discussion of the item as, due to the nature of the item, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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**Quarter 3 Performance Report**

The Chief Executive, ICC Belfast, Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd (BWUH Ltd.) provided the Committee with an update on performance for Quarter 3 Year-To-Date 2022 covering the period 1st April 2022 to 31st December 2022.

She highlighted that this was the seventh year of operation for the new company, with ICC Belfast operational from April 2016 and reported that the third quarter of 2022/23 contained a good mix of events but with a higher proportion of entertainment events, including the Snooker and Panto which was very well attended. This followed on from the high-profile events previously mentioned in the Quarter 2 Year-To-Date review, including International Society for Influenza and other Respiratory Diseases, Vascular Anaesthesia Society GBI, Association of Anaesthetists GBI, British Transplantation Society, and European Society Clinical Cell Analysis which had fed through into the financial results.

She provided the Committee with an overview of the BWUH Ltd.'s financial performance for Quarter 3 Year-To-Date 2022/23 and provided context around the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

**Corporate and Social Responsibility**

The Chief Executive, ICC Belfast (BWUH Ltd.) advised that BWUH Ltd. had been awarded the Autism NI Impact Award and would continue to support the charity until 31st March 2023. She informed the Members that work was ongoing for a call for new charity partners for Financial Year 2023/24. Sensory space was introduced for the Panto and feedback from patrons had been positive on venue adjustments for accessibility.

She advised the Members that BWUH Ltd. continued to support the 'Changing the Menu for Good' initiative and surplus food from conferences had been donated to the People's Kitchen, and it had also hosted drop off points for dry and canned goods, clothing, and much needed toiletries for the team to support internally. BWUH Ltd.'s catering partners and team members had attended volunteer days with the People's Kitchen, serving food to those most in need in the community.

BWUH Ltd. were continuing with apprenticeships/placements, offering suitable employment opportunities to various universities, colleges, schools, and schemes like Work+. There had been a focus on underrepresented departments and BWUH Ltd. had taken on female team members in these areas with further work to be completed with education bodies to encourage women in these areas.

Senior leaders continued educational outreach in the form of guest lectures and site visits for University of Ulster and the South Eastern Regional College.

The Chief Executive, ICC Belfast (BWUH Ltd.) reported that the Green Team was meeting regularly and had developed an action register to ensure initiatives continued through the organisation. Progress had been made with exploring the tracking of the

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carbon emissions from events and BWUH Ltd. hoped to activate this in Quarter 1 of Financial Year 2023/24. Ongoing education for the team was in place with regular segments in the internal newsletter and training and development was underway for the team.

She reported that the Ulster Orchestra continued to utilise the Ulster Hall for rehearsal space and had offered performances throughout Quarter 3 for patrons, subscribers, and the general public. BWUH Ltd. had further supported the ongoing marketing and communication with the Ulster Orchestra through a collaborative approach which had been well received by the senior leaders in the organisation.

### Governance

The Chief Executive, ICC Belfast (BWUH Ltd.), advised the Members that Board meetings had been held throughout the year as scheduled. The Audit and Risk Sub-Committee meetings were also held on the same days as the main Board meetings.

Board meetings had been held in April, May, September, November, and December 2022 (Business Plan Review) with further Board meetings scheduled on a quarterly basis. In addition to these Committee and Board meetings, regular monthly meetings had been held with the Senior Reporting Officer to review progress.

The Director of Finance, Risk and Corporate Services provided a high-level financial performance summary upon what he described as a backdrop of inflation and rising costs. He reported positive trends had been seen in relation to ticket and catering sales and measures had been taken to offset costs and grow revenue. He referred to the risks and opportunities which were detailed in the report. He highlighted cybersecurity and advised that issues which had been identified were being closed out.

A Member commended BWUH Ltd's upturn in business performances post Covid.

The Members noted the contents of the report and information provided.

### **Capital and Maintenance Report**

The Operations Development Manager provided the Committee with an update on capital and maintenance works at the ICC Waterfront and Ulster Hall.

The Members were reminded of major capital projects which had been identified at the Waterfront and were provided with a progress update.

- Escalator Replacement

Following the installation of the 6 new escalators, the performance of the units had been monitored. Initially, performance of the units was satisfactory, however, several outages had recently been experienced, particularly with the ground to first floor units, in excess of what would be considered to be normal levels of faults. These issues were escalated to the Director of TKE European Operations, and he had committed to providing engineers from the main factory to resolve the issues. Consequently, engineers

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from Germany had attended the site week commencing 30th January and, following a series of tests, they had replaced a range of contactor units and carried out sensor adjustments and software upgrades. It had been impressed upon TKE the disappointment with the performance of the units and the recent outages effectively resets the monitoring period. TKE had been informed that only after a successful period of operation and subsequent recommissioning of the units would consideration be given to release of the outstanding account balance.

- Replacement of the Chiller Units

The Members recalled that a report was commissioned to examine technical solutions for the replacement of the chiller units serving the Waterfront Hall. The report made a series of recommendations with one considered the most viable. The report was based on the replacement of the chiller units with a similar capacity. However, to inform the final option and ensure it was the optimum option, it was agreed that further work was required and therefore as previously reported financing had been secured to install additional metering required to monitor the performance of the chilled water system. The meters had now been installed with some final connections to take place with the building energy management system to allow monitoring. This information would be fed into the dynamic model already available to assist in more accurate sizing of the replacement chiller units.

In addition, further financing had been secured to install solar film to the glazing in the bar areas. The design had been completed and the work was currently out to tender with contractor appointment expected by the end of March and works to commence at the start of April (subject to tender costs being within budget). This would help alleviate the problem of heat build-up within these areas and reduce the cooling requirement placed on the existing chiller units as well as contributing to a more sustainable operation of the facility.

- Works to the Roof

There had been some leaks at the Riverside Foyer Hall 1 A - 1 B and it had been identified that the Ballast Roof on the original building may be the issue. A temporary solution was now in place that had resulted in no further leaks. A more permeant solution was required in this area. Further capital funding with regard design and works would be required.

- Refurbishment of Toilet Facilities

The Members were reminded of the allocated budget for the refurbishment of 11 toilets within the Waterfront Hall, and that, subsequently, a changing places facility was added.

The design had been completed and signed off Consultation with Building Control had taken place and a Building Control Application had been submitted. Preparation of tender documents was now underway. The Members were reminded of the significant increase in the cost of materials and labour across all elements of construction as part of

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the general cost of living increases currently being experienced. The Members were advised that this may impact on the total number of toilet refurbishments that could be completed within the available budget. This would be assessed following tender returns once the actual costs had been identified.

- Fire integrity arrangements to the Waterfront Hall main auditorium

In November 2022, the Waterfront Hall Facilities team engaged the services of a specialist engineer to review the fire strategy for the Waterfront Hall main auditorium. In the course of this survey the engineer identified a lack of containment between the underside of the auditorium roof and the top of the deployable fire curtains. Subsequent investigations identified that a concrete soffit had been replaced with an open slotted grid feature, the effect of which potentially allowed smoke to access the void space above the existing fire curtains. The circumstances that brought about this change were unknown but it is apparent the original Fire Strategy was not updated to reflect the omission of the concrete soffit.

The Operations Development Manager reported that there was no obvious or straightforward solution to this issue. Physical Programmes had examined the options and were going to engage an architect and specialist engineers to review the current construction and suggest potential solutions. Further updates would be brought back to Committee. He advised that, in the interim, the Waterfront Hall had amended its Fire Strategy with the inclusion of additional staff in the affected areas during performances to ensure safe evacuation if required.

The Members reviewed and noted the update presented in relation to ongoing capital and maintenance works at the ICC Waterfront and Ulster Hall.

**Draft Business Plan 2023-2034**

The Chief Executive, ICC Belfast (BWUH Ltd.), presented the Business Plan for the financial year 2023/24. The Business Plan had been presented to and approved by the BWUH Ltd. Board in December 2022, subject to approval by the Shareholders.

She provided more detail around the Vision, Mission and Values which would guide the Business Plan, and highlighted that ICC Belfast was competing with other venues nationally and internationally.

The Chief Executive, ICC Belfast (BWUH Ltd.), provided details of BWUH Ltd.'s areas of focus which included the strategic pillars in the Business Plan which included digital transformation, organisational development, maximising revenue and cost management, and sustainability which would drive the business forward in the year ahead. She gave special mention to the strong stakeholder relationships with Belfast City Council, Tourism NI and Visit Belfast, and highlighted a principal focus on the Republic of Ireland market.

A Member questioned the new markets she had been referred to and asked if remote meetings were still a challenge to the business. The Chief Executive, ICC Belfast (BWUH Ltd.) explained that a new market was developing and she referred to research

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that had been undertaken in this regard which showed that, due to the nature of conferences in a world of hybrid working, there was an appetite to meet and it was for this reason that BWUH Ltd. were targeting the corporate market. She informed the Members that the business was targeting 120 national associations as part of the business' growth plan which would result in 30 conferences per year and provided a sales context in relation to the data used to drive the business.

The Chief Executive, ICC Belfast (BWUH Ltd.), referred to Belfast's new link to Frankfurt which would provide opportunities. She advised that the business was building a pipeline of conferences from Northern Ireland FDI companies and the team were working with Tourism NI in relation to new market development.

The Members reviewed the report and approved the draft BWUH Ltd. Business Plan.

**Ratification of Non-Executive Directors**

The Chief Executive, ICC Belfast (BWUH Ltd.), requested that the Committee ratify the appointment of 5 new Non-Executive Directors for the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Board of Directors and approve the transfer of Company Secretary duties to the Head of Governance and Stakeholder Engagement.

The Members noted that there were 3 outgoing Board members, who were extended to 31st March 2023 due to the original pause in recruitment caused by Covid-19 and the subsequent appointment of the new BWUH Ltd. Chairperson in November 2022. At the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Board meeting on 16th February 2023, John Walsh, Belfast City Council Chief Executive, placed on record his thanks on behalf of the Council to the outgoing Non-Executive Directors.

Moved by Councillor McAteer,  
Seconded by Alderman Haire; and

Resolved - that the Committee:

1. Ratify the appointment of 5 new Non-Executive Directors for BWUH Ltd.
2. Note the outgoing 3 Non-Executive Directors for Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Board.
3. Approve the transfer of Company Secretary duties to the Head of Governance and Stakeholder Engagement.

Chairperson