

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee

Thursday, 4th March, 2021

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

Members present: Alderman Haire (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland;
Councillors Canavan,
Matt Collins, Flynn, M. Kelly,
Kyle, Magee, McAteer and McCabe.

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. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Cobain, Mulholland and Newton.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 18th January 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 February.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Restricted Items

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

Performance Report - Quarter 3, 2020/21

The Chief Executive of ICC Belfast/ BWUH Ltd provided the Committee with an overview of the company's performance during Quarter 3 and of the year to date.

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As the venues had been mandated to close from 16th March, 2020, the Members were advised that there had been a major impact on sales revenue results and the majority of Key Performance Indicators.

She explained that the projected reopening date for both venues was 1st September 2021, but that it was liable to change based on lockdown restrictions.

The Committee was advised that the company had developed a Training and Development Plan with Belfast Met and SERC, offering a range of courses commencing February 2021 and which would operate throughout the next 3-6 months. As part of the programme, fourteen members of the permanent team would receive comprehensive training to ensure that the level of Health and Safety knowledge within the company was enhanced.

The Chief Executive outlined that internal communications was a priority for the company during such a difficult time and that they had ensured all staff were receiving regular, clear and transparent messaging relating to business updates.

The Director of Finance and Systems provided the Committee with an update on the economic impact and the financial data.

The Chief Executive outlined the challenges and the opportunities which faced the business. She advised the Committee that the pandemic had placed a focus on virtual and hybrid events, such as the successful “Live from the Ulster Hall” digital event experience.

In response to a Member’s question regarding the recent announcement of additional resources for apprenticeships, the Director of Economic Development advised the Committee that his Department was working with the Department for the Economy to try and remove the age and finance barriers which prevented more people from undertaking an apprenticeship.

The Committee noted the update which had been provided.

Update on Capital Projects

The Director of Physical Programmes provided the Committee with an update on the ongoing capital and maintenance works at the ICC Waterfront and Ulster Hall.

She outlined that, since 2016, a number of major capital projects had been undertaken at both the Waterfront and Ulster Halls, including:

- repairs to replace the glazing support system at the Waterfront Hall;
- upgrade of the PA system at the Waterfront Hall;
- upgrade of the emergency lighting system at the Ulster Hall;
- stabilisation and sealing of external brick walls at the Ulster Hall; and
- roof repairs at the Ulster Hall.

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She provided the Committee with an update in terms of the impact that Covid-19 had had on both the ICC and the Council from a financial and people resourcing perspective.

The Committee was advised that three major capital projects had been identified at the Waterfront Hall, namely, the replacement of the escalators and of the chiller units, as well as works to the roof.

In respect of the escalator replacement, she explained that the process had a lead in time of one year and the Members were asked to note that Council officers had investigated whether it was possible to bring the timelines forward due to the building being closed during the pandemic but that due to the tender timeline and the specialist nature of the project it had not been possible to do so.

The Committee noted the update and:

- agreed to receive regular update reports in respect of the ongoing capital and maintenance works at the ICC Waterfront and Ulster Hall; and
- noted that regular meetings had now been established between the ICC Management Team and BCC Physical Programmes Department to agree a forward work programme in terms of maintenance, subject to budget sign off.

Update on Casual Workers

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 18th January, it had received an update on the company's progress with the proposal around offering a number of casual workers permanent contracts. At that meeting, the Committee had agreed to invite a Union representative to the next meeting in order to discuss the issue with them.

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. D. Noble, Production Manager at BWUH and Unite the Union representative, to the meeting.

In light of the UK Government announcement on 31st October 2020, extending the financial support offered by the Corona Virus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), the Chief Executive of ICC Belfast provided the Committee with an update on the the progress which had been made regarding casual workers' employment status within the company so far.

The Director of Finance and Systems provided a timeline of the process, including the consultation period with staff and the staff categories which it affected.

Ms. Noble advised the Committee that the Union had been kept well informed throughout the process and that it had a good relationship with the company's management.

She outlined that the Union was content that a number of casual staff were proposed to be taken on as permanent staff members. She added that some members of casual staff did not want to become permanent, due to other commitments or jobs, but

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that it was important that all staff were consulted on the issue as it could impact on the requirement for casual staff in the future.

In response to a Member's question regarding those employees who would not be offered a permanent contract with the company, the Chief Executive advised that a number of staff wanted only to take on work when it suited them and that they did not want a permanent contract.

In response to a further question regarding the recent announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in relation to the extension of the furlough scheme until September 2021, whereby employers would be required to pay 10% towards the hours that their staff did not work in July, and increasing to 20% in August and September, the Director of Economic Development confirmed that any decision relating to those employers contributions would be subject to a financial analysis and would have to be considered by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

A further Member raised concerns that it might be difficult to bring apprentices into the business while the company was conducting a staff review. The Chief Executive pointed out that there was a demand and significant activity in future years, which would create opportunities for both current employees and those outside it.

In a discussion on the proportion of casual employees which would be offered permanent contracts, Ms. Noble confirmed to the Committee that the Union was content that the number corresponded with the discussions they had had with employees.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Ms. Noble for her attendance at the meeting.

The Committee noted the update which had been provided.

Proposed use of BWUH by Belfast Multi-Cultural Association

The Chief Executive of ICC Belfast (BWUH Ltd) advised the Committee that representatives from the Belfast Multi-Cultural Association (BMCA) had been given a tour of the facilities of the Waterfront Hall and had been expressed their gratitude both to BWUH and to the Council in terms of their offers to use their premises. The Director of Physical Programmes added that her Department, along with the Good Relations Unit, had also been liaising closely with the BMCA and that they were extremely grateful to the Members and the officers for their engagement.

However, the Committee noted that the BMCA had advised that, while they were very grateful for all the support and the offers received in respect of premises owned by both the Council and BWUH/ICC, they required a lockable, shop-front type building in a certain location, which was not within the portfolio of the Council or BWUH/ICC.

Noted.

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Draft Business Plan 2021/22

The Chief Executive of ICC Belfast (BWUH Ltd) advised the Committee that, in what was a challenging time for the business, given the ongoing uncertainty with the timelines in terms of the various COVID-19 restrictions being lifted, she hoped to provide the Members with an interim Business Plan at the next meeting.

Extension of Directors' Contracts

The Director of Economic Development advised the Committee that an extension to a number of Directors' contracts was required in order to accommodate the pause in the recruitment process caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and to provide continuity, expertise and support to the business.

He outlined that the Terms of Reference for the Shareholders' Committee included the recommending of the appointment of the Chairperson and non-executive Directors to the Board of the BWUH Ltd and to agree remuneration.

The Committee approved the extension of the ICC BWUH Directors' contracts for:

- Mr. A. Dixon, Mr. R. Holt and Mr. P. McClughan to 31st August, 2021; and
- Mr. S. Daniels and Ms. L. Jackson to 19th February, 2024.

During discussion a Member referenced a recent Workshop which had taken place in relation to the governance structure of BWUH Ltd.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor Collins,

That a report be circulated to the Committee Members, covering the issues which had been discussed at the BWUH Governance Workshop in December 2020; and

That a legal opinion be sought as to whether the governance operating model for BWUH Ltd. could be changed; specifically how a mutual agreement would work and if Elected Members of the Council could be appointed directly to the Board of Directors.

On a vote, six Members voted for the proposal, none against and three no votes and it was declared carried.

Chairperson