

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee

Thursday, 12th January, 2017

MEETING OF BELFAST WATERFRONT AND ULSTER HALL LTD. SHAREHOLDERS' COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Walsh (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Campbell;
Alderman Haire; and
Councillors Copeland, Dorrian, Graham,
Johnston, McDonough-Brown, Mullan and O'Donnell.

In attendance: Mr. D. Durkan, Director of Development;
Ms. C. Toolan, Managing Director of Belfast Waterfront
and Ulster Hall Ltd;
Mr. I. Bell, Business Support Director, Belfast Waterfront
and Ulster Hall Ltd; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor O'Neill.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 21st November 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

No declarations of interest were recorded.

RESTRICTED ITEM

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

Business Plan 2017/2018

The Managing Director of Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. (BWUH Ltd.) provided the Members with an overview of the key contents of the 2017/2018 Business Plan.

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In conjunction with the Business Support Director, they provided the Committee with an overview of the company's Year to Date performance and of the Strategic Goals which BWUH Ltd. had agreed upon, which included:

- delivering 50,000 annual conference delegate days, 35,000 of which would be out-of-state visitors, by 2020;
- delivering six National Large Association conferences each year from 2020;
- delivering six International/ European Association conferences each year from 2020;
- reducing the subsidy by £1.6million by 2020;
- creating employment development programmes;
- developing partnerships with other city businesses; and
- supporting local sourcing/procurement strategies where appropriate.

The Managing Director advised the Committee that the company would face some challenges over the next 12 months. She highlighted that the level of competition was growing, with Cardiff and Aberdeen opening new conference centres in 2018, and added that the uncertainty around the impact that Brexit would have was widely thought to be felt over the next two years.

In relation to the to the challenges which BWUH Ltd. would face, the Managing Director explained to the Members that they were working to ensure that the culture in the Sales team was proactive and customer-focused from the outset, rather than reactive and operationally driven.

The Managing Director confirmed that BWUH Ltd. would work closely with the Ulster University and Belfast Metropolitan College in order to develop student placements, apprenticeships and work experience opportunities for local schools. The Committee was also advised that a Management Leadership Programme had been arranged for 18 middle level managers in BWUH Ltd.

In response to a Member's question regarding staffing and recruitment, the Managing Director advised that she had had discussions with the Trade Unions and had outlined to them that there would be some changes in the recruitment of new staff. She explained to the Members that, in line with the entertainment and conference industry, more flexibility was required in relation to working hours and that this would be included in the contracts for new positions. She advised the Members that they would also be looking at annual leave, sick pay and pension requirements for any future employees, but confirmed that the terms and conditions for existing staff would remain unchanged at this time.

The Managing Director outlined to the Committee that one of the commitments which the company had made was to hold a Community Service Day each year, where the entire team, including partners, would spend one day volunteering to deliver a community project, such as refurbishing a classroom or creating a community garden. She advised the Members that they would work with the local representatives to select the project.

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In response to a further Member's question regarding the low occupancy rate for the Ulster Hall, the Managing Director advised the Committee that a new Programme Manager had been appointed for BWUH Ltd. and that he would be working to ensure maximum yield for both venues. She reminded the Members that the Grand Opera House would be closing in January 2018 for almost a year for major refurbishment, and that that would create some opportunities for the Ulster Hall, at least in the short term.

After discussion, the Committee noted the contents of the report and agreed the Business Plan for the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. for 2017/2018.

Audit, Governance and Risk

Corporate Risk Management Update

The Director of Development reminded the Committee that the corporate risk register and related processes were subject to a fundamental review in 2015/2016. He advised the Members that this included a review and re-score of all the corporate risks, including target risk scores. It was agreed that management would begin to report to the relevant Committees on the progress being made to manage the key risks.

The Committee was reminded that the risk for the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee was an "inability to effectively manage business performance as set out in the contract in order to meet the terms and conditions of the Letter of Offer." The Director outlined the current measures which were in place to manage the risk to an acceptable level, including legal agreements, amendment to Standing Orders, project governance and a number of Service Level Agreements.

The Director of Development also reminded the Members that, in addition to those controls, a fourth Gateway Review of the Belfast Waterfront Conference and Exhibition Centre Project had been completed over a three day period in August, 2016. The Director advised the Committee that this gateway Review had been completed by an independent review team which had determined the 'Delivery confidence assessment' as 'Amber', where they had made a number of recommendations which had either been implemented already or were underway. The Committee was advised that the fifth Gate Review was likely to take place in August, 2017.

The Committee noted the arrangements which were in place to manage the risk, the progress which was being made to implement controls and measures to reduce the level of risk further, and the proposed six monthly process for reporting.

Chairperson