

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee

Tuesday, 1st August, 2017

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

Members present: Councillor Walsh (Chairperson);
The High Sheriff (Alderman Haire); and
Councillors Campbell, Dorrian,
Hargey, Johnston and O'Donnell.

In attendance: Mr. D. Durkan, Director of Development;
Ms. C. Toolan, Managing Director, Belfast Waterfront
and Ulster Hall Ltd;
Ms. N. Murray, Finance Manager, Belfast Waterfront
and Ulster Hall Ltd; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Copeland, Councillor Mullan and Mr. I. Bell.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 19th June were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3rd July.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

RESTRICTED ITEM

The information contained in the following 2 reports is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Shareholders' Performance Report – Quarter 1

The Managing Director of Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. (BWUH Ltd.) provided the Committee with an overview of the Company's performance during April, May and June, 2017.

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The Members were advised that the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall had hosted some very high profile events during the first quarter, including the Routes Europe conference and the Congress of Irish Dance Teachers. The Members noted that this had followed on from a busy and successful first year of operation. The Managing Director reported that the total sales income had been 7.5% ahead of budget with room hire, additional charges and box office commission being the main contributors.

The Committee was advised that BWUH Ltd. had generated 19,965 delegate days by the end of Quarter 1, which had resulted in an economic impact of £17.2million for Belfast. The Members noted that feedback from both organisers and attendees of events had been largely positive and, in response to customer feedback, improvements had been made by Amadeus Catering in relation to the queuing process in the Belfast Waterfront. She also explained that similar improvements would be made within the Ulster Hall but that it would be more challenging due to its layout.

The Managing Director informed the Members that the final audited accounts had been agreed at the July meeting of the BWUH Board and that an internal audit had taken place in February and March, which had resulted in a yellow rating. She confirmed that a list of follow-up actions had been agreed upon and were currently being worked through.

The Finance Manager reported that BWUH Ltd. would be on budget to meet its year-end forecast.

It was reported that the heating and cooling system within the Belfast Waterfront had been identified as a defect and had been raised with both the Council's Project Management and the contractor.

In relation to the previously highlighted risk of Northern Ireland's Liquor Licensing legislation having a financial impact on Client Event Earnings, the Managing Director reported that BWUH Ltd. was in the process of applying for an Off-Sales Liquor Licence, which, if successful, she advised would be an asset to the company.

She informed the Committee that BWUH Ltd. was the first convention centre in Europe to have an interactive 3D model for room set-ups on its website and that feedback from users had been extremely positive.

In terms of Sales activity, the Members were advised that representatives of BWUH Ltd. would attend IMEX America, between 10th and 12th October 2017, where more than 3,000 suppliers from the global meetings industry would be in attendance.

The Managing Director, in response to a Member's question regarding apprenticeships, advised the Committee that the company was working with the Ulster University to explore apprenticeships in building management, facilities/technical management and event management and, while it was taking longer than originally expected, that BWUH Ltd. was working to ensure that the correct environment and support systems were in place within the company before hiring apprentices.

In response to a Member's question regarding the use of casual labour, the Managing Director stated that, while she appreciated that it was not ideal, the use of

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casual labour was essential within the events and meetings sector, given that some months were significantly busier than others. She pointed out that the company had, however, made a commitment not to reduce the number of full-time staff.

The Managing Director referred to a letter from the staff of BWUH Ltd. which had been sent to the Chair of the BWUH Ltd Board. It raised concerns regarding the organisational structure, job evaluation, a two-tier workforce and a pay award, and had been copied to all Members of the Shareholders' Committee. She explained a number of points in relation to the proposed pay increase and highlighted the differences between the terms and conditions for those employees who had formerly been employed by Belfast City Council and those who were new-start employees with BWUH Ltd. She stated that she had spoken to a Trade Union representative in relation to the concerns which had been raised and outlined that the Chairperson of the BWUH Board had since responded to him. The Members were advised that the Managing Director would also send a formal response and would provide all Members of the Committee with a copy.

The Committee noted the update which was provided.

Annual Report and Financial Statements

The Managing Director reminded the Committee that it had considered the year-end position and overview at its Annual General Meeting on 19th June, 2017. The full accounts had not been available at that time and it was agreed that they would be submitted to the next meeting of the Shareholders' Committee for notation.

The Committee noted the Annual Report and the Financial Statements for the period ending 31st March, 2017.

Chairperson