

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee

Monday, 21st May, 2018

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

Members present: Councillor Walsh (Chairperson);
Alderman Haire; and
Councillors Campbell, Graham,
Johnston and Mullan.

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

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Copeland) and Councillors Dorrian, Hargey and O'Neill.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 12th March were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 9th April.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

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.

Annual Performance Report for 2017/2018

The Managing Director provided the Members with an update on Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd.'s (BWUH Ltd.) performance for Quarter 4, January – March 2018, and for the year, 1st April 2017 – 31st March 2018.

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She advised the Committee that this was the second year of operation for the company, as the new Waterfront venue had only been operational from the end of April 2016.

The Committee was advised that the business had hosted several high-profile conferences and events during the final quarter, including the IEEE Micro Electro Mechanical Systems (Mems) Conference, Carlson Wagonlit Travel/Pfizer, Rapid 7 Conference, Sleeping Beauty Pantomime and the Gradam Ceoil TG4 Traditional Music Awards.

The Business Support Director advised the Committee that it had been a good year for BWUH Ltd. and provided the Committee with a summary of the company's sales and overheads figures. He advised the Committee that the sales income was ahead of budget and of the previous year. He explained that this was mainly due to higher room hire and box office commission. The Committee noted the surplus, budget and the management fee reduction for the year.

He advised the Members that the number of activities held in the venues had increased, which had resulted in increased activity costs and employee costs. He explained that the event related costs were expected to be higher given that sales were higher but that the company would address the shortfall in technical skills and equipment as part of its cost management process.

In relation to the conference and delegate targets which had been set, the Managing Director outlined to the Members that, by year-end, BWUH Ltd. had delivered beyond each target, having delivered 40 conferences, generated 81,479 delegate days, and having delivered an economic return of £34million to Belfast and Northern Ireland as a whole.

She advised the Committee that, in line with the Company's more commercial approach towards conferencing and entertainment sales, a new Marketing Campaign Manager and a Head of Digital had recently been recruited, starting in Quarter 1 of 2018/2019.

The Members were advised that casual labour had been managed more efficiently throughout Quarter 4 but that it remained a key focus for the senior team and would be a significant priority for the Director of Event Operations.

She explained the repositioning of the Belfast Waterfront as the ICC Belfast for international promotional material, and outlined that the Waterfront and Ulster Hall branding would continue to be used for domestic material.

In response to a Member's question, the Managing Director explained that the company was working with both the Building Control Service and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to determine the number of staff which were required to be on site in the event of a fire.

The Managing Director outlined to the Committee that smaller events were more expensive to operate and, whilst they drove revenue, the company was required to

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examine event contributions to ensure all events were making an acceptable contribution. She advised the Committee that she wished to attract a higher number of National Association conferences to the Waterfront in future years.

(Councillor Johnston, Deputy Chairperson, in the Chair)

In response to a Member's question about the catering contract, she explained that work was ongoing to ensure that standards and the execution were in line with the expectations of an international venue. She advised the Committee that she would provide a more detailed update on catering at the next meeting.

In relation to employment opportunities within BWUH Ltd., she outlined to the Committee that they currently employed one placement student from Belfast Met and also had 10 Youth Action attendees completing work experience on various days. The Managing Director added that the creation of apprenticeships was a work in progress.

During discussion, a Member stated that he had received complaints about the high level of bird droppings around the Belfast Waterfront. The Managing Director advised the Committee that she was aware of the problem and that it was an ongoing challenge for the venue, due to its close proximity to the water. She explained that the windows were cleaned regularly but that they were looking at ways in which to prevent the problem.

In response to a Member's question regarding the industrial relations issues in relation to pay awards and job evaluation which had previously been discussed by the Committee, the Managing Director provided an update on the significant progress which had been made.

A further Member stated that she would be keen to see more publicity around the major events and conferences which were happening in the City. The Managing Director advised the Members that the Waterfront had recently hosted the recent Royal College of Nursing Congress for five days and that it had been hugely successful. She added that she would provide information on the media coverage which the conference had received to the next meeting.

The Committee noted the contents of the Year End report for 2017/2018.

Chairperson