**ULSTER SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT LIMITED**

(Company Limited by Guarantee and not having a Share Capital)

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors

**Wednesday 28th August 2024 at 09.30am at Cambrai Street, Belfast**

**In Attendance**

Mr W Leathem Chairperson

Mrs S Wakfer Vice Chairperson

Mr R Donnelly Director (attending remotely)

Mr D Duffy Director (attending remotely)

Mr S Jackson CEO

Mr D Cowan Head of Employment Services

Ms N Donnelly Head of Operations

Ms L Beagan HR Manager

J Davy Acting Head of Finance (For Finance Report)

**Present**

Ms R Smyth Minute-taker / Executive Administrative Officer

1. **Welcome and Apologies**

Apologies were received from D O’Hara and R Havlin.

1. **Conflict of Interest**

Conflict of Interest: none noted.

1. **Minutes of the previous meetings held on 24th July 2024**
2. The minutes were approved.
3. **Matters Arising** – There were no matters arising.

Item 4 – The Chair will present a report from Deloitte at the September board meeting.

5a D Cowan informed the meeting that the consultation period has been extended.

8b The CEO offered a verbal update on procurement

1. **Action Log**

**Item 15** - Engage external consultancy firm to undertake audit of IT systems. The CEO informed the meeting that this has been signed off by the Department and a MoU signed with SIB who will visit Usel in September. It was agreed to close the item.

**Item 17** - Cyber Security training. **Action**: R Smyth to organise.

**Item 18** – CO3 to deliver social enterprise training at Strategy Day. The CEO is awaiting a response from CO3.

**Item 20** - Amendments have been received from Sponsor Branch on the ARAC ToR. **Action**: R Smyth to make amendments and bring all ToRs before the Board.

**Item 23** – Honorariums for Finance Manager and drivers. The CEO stated that all Usel actions are now complete and awaiting response from the Department.

**Item 29** - Executive Admin Officer. **Action**: Chair to check with other board members to see what they require from R Smyth.

**Item 43** - Workable Programme Findings. The meeting briefly discussed and the Head of ES gave updates on each level. It was agreed to close the item.

**Item 58** - Board Effectiveness Information from Deloitte. For September Board. It was agreed to close the item.

**Item 60** - ES Audit Report. The Head of ES updated the meeting, stating the report was largely positive.

**Item 62** - Payroll figures to be retested. The HR Manager gave the meeting updated data on the figures, host employers and the difference between statutory and enhanced payments. It was agreed to close the item.

**Items for closing**. The following items on the action log were agreed to be closed; items 35, 49, 51, 55,56. Item 52 contract management policy is on the agenda for the next SMT meeting.

1. **Written Procedures:**
2. Corporate Governance Policy - (Lessons Learnt Report). The meeting discussed the requirements for this policy and whether the provisions therein were covered in other policies.

**Action:** R Donnelly and D O’Hara to check the Lessons Learnt Report for context. SMT to review and bring before the September board meeting.

1. Recruitment & Selection Policy - (Lessons Learnt Report). This was approved.
2. Conflict of Interest Policy - (Lessons Learnt Report). The meeting requested L Beagan update the formatting. Otherwise, it was approved.

**Action:** L Beagan.

1. **Chairman’s Report – verbal update**
2. The Chair reported to the meeting that he and the Vice-Chair had met with the CEO and the HR Manager in August to discuss the EQIA for the ES budget Programme.
3. The Chair informed the meeting that shortlisting for new board members has been completed with seven applicants. Interviews will be conducted on the 26th & 27th of September.
4. The Chair reported that 1:1s are continuing.
5. **Chief Executive’s Report**
   1. **Delegated Authority Matrix.** The CEO gave an update on the progress made to date, stating a lot of manpower had been deployed on completing the retrospective business cases and resourcing this exercise has been tight. However, none of those submitted have yet been approved. The team will continue to work with DfC colleagues on this. Some further cases are on-going for this year and forward planning for 2025-26 is being actioned. He summarised by stating he will take the Board’s direction on this.

The Chair stated he will request a meeting with Sponsor Branch to discuss these. It was agreed the Delegated Authority matrix would be reviewed in detail for the September Board to ascertain what can be closed out.

**Action:** Chair to request a meeting with Sponsor Branch.

* 1. The meeting briefly discussed the upcoming development of the financial statements and the necessity for an agreed position between Usel and the Finance Department.
  2. The CEO gave an update on Human Resources, covering current recruitment exercises, statistics on joiners and leavers, sickness rates, employee relations and training initiatives.
  3. **Empower**. The Head of ES gave an update on the Empower programme stating it is going well and up against targets. He informed the meeting on the Compliance and Governance audit, stating data was still required on VAT.
  4. **Skills for Work & Life**. The Head of ES gave an update on the programme stating that it continues to be above target, and the new intake has proceeded through induction. He reported on a meeting with DfE and upcoming consultation. He also requested the Board members RSVP the invitation to the Graduation Day.
  5. **Workable.** The Head of ES stated this is going well. An action plan is in place and the audit will probably go ahead in October.
  6. **Employment Services.** The Head of ES stated this is also going well. The HR Manager talked through a legal opinion received from P Hopkins BL which the meeting briefly discussed.
  7. **Jobstart**. The Head of ES stated that the target for this programme has been exceeded.
  8. **Step-up**. The Head of ES informed the meeting that there is 100% sustainment on this programme.
  9. **Cafes.** The Head of ES reported that targets were exceeded in July. In addition, although Belfast Zoo received 40,000 visitors in July, no complaints had been received at the café on the service and performance of a staff team 76% of whom have a disability. The Chair commended the team on their performance.
  10. **Document storage**. The Head of Operations informed the meeting that business planning on this is close to being finalised and will be presented to the September Board. There is positive interest from new customers. S Wakfer queried the current insurance provision. The Head of Operations responded that the insurance provider is aware of the change in operation and there is no substantial change.
  11. **Industrial Sewing**. The order book is full until January and more orders are expected.
  12. **Licence Renewal.** This is all in order for waste carriers.
  13. **DfC Service Review**. No issues were recorded, and the service was rated outstanding from 99% of respondents with one satisfactory rating.
  14. The Head of Operations updated the meeting on a grant available for software which the Procurement Manager is applying for. New locks were fitted at the weekend and work is progressing on security cameras. Cyber Essentials accreditation is in and the business case is with the Department.
  15. **Procurement Training**. Training for SMTs will be completed shortly. The meeting briefly discussed if board members should be evaluating tenders, the Chair stating that they should have an overview.
  16. **Internal Audit.** This was conducted early August, and the draft report will be circulated. It was overall very positive, showing great improvements. An IT audit will commence 20th September.
  17. **2701 Business Case**. This is still pending. The Procurement Manager will ask for it to be moved along.
  18. **Cleaning Supplies**. The business case has been with Sponsor Branch since May, waiting on approval.
  19. **Tenders for Qu 3&4**. The Procurement Manager has requested staff to have these ready in good time.
  20. **H&S**. There was one minor incident and one recycling incident which have been reported with no further action required. The new H&S officer has commenced employment.
  21. **Building**: A meeting was held with the insurance assessor to discuss liability provisions and a review of building. The assessor was very impressed with the level of cleanliness and tidiness. They suggested additional fire extinguishers and a camera, and these are being actioned.
  22. **Safeguarding**: There were no incidents to report and no criminal disclosures to report.

1. **ES Program Closure**
2. The CEO updated the meeting on a positive conversation around Grant in Aid issues. The figures have been reviewed and regularly discussed. It was established that no amendments can be made internally to resource. Discussions have been held with the Department for Communities around additional budget allocations for resource. The meeting discussed and agreed that the EQIA should be submitted.
3. The HR Manager presented a spreadsheet on payroll and explained the data therein.
4. **Finance Committee Meeting and Finance Report Updates**

A verbal update was given on the Finance Committee meeting and the Finance Report presented. The meeting briefly discussed budget figures and any potential impact on risks.

1. **Risk Register - Deep Dive SR02, Recruitment and Retention of Staff**
2. The HR Manager gave an update to the meeting on recent trends in recruitment and retention, stating that some recruitment exercises have had a poor response due to the salary and pension levels, stating better results may be possible after the pay remit is received. The CEO commented that transparency and open communications with staff have been helpful as the staff team are aware that the A.O. and Board are appreciative of their situation. The Chair commented that he will raise the pay remit with the DfC and that the pension would be looked at after the remit is received.
3. **Succession Planning**. The need for adequate succession planning has been communicated to staff and is currently with the Senior Management Team.
4. The Vice-Chair requested the wording in SR02 be amended in relation to pensions.

**Action**: HR Manager.

1. **Contract Register** 
   1. The CEO spoke to the register explaining how it is set up and stating that it is an important document that will develop further. The Chair queried the section on e-learning.

**Action**: SMT to review

* 1. The meeting discussed how business case writing is conducted by the staff team and the need for derogation of spend up to £30k to be approved by the Accounting Officer in line with other ALBs due to the length of time obtaining approval on business cases. The meeting concurred.

1. **Governance Tracker (Issues Log)**

The CEO presented the tracker to the meeting, explaining its function. The meeting briefly discussed.

1. **Marketing Strategy for USEL 23-27**

The Chair congratulated the Marketing Manager on an exceptional piece of work and requested he give a presentation to the September Board.

**Action:** R Smyth to change date to 24-27 and insert Derry / Londonderry.

1. **Any Other Business**
   1. The Vice-Chair queried Canvas training for Board members and the date due. It was agreed members should try and complete by October.

**Action:** HR Manager to remove other modules.

* 1. The Chair reminded members that appraisals need to be done and stated he would contact them.

**Action:** Chair to organise appraisals

1. **Date of next meeting –** 25th September 2024