

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING: 8TH DECEMBER 2020

11am, Tuesday 8th December 2020

Via Zoom

Present: Rotha Johnston (Chairwoman), Michael Kuhn, Elaine Sperber, Richard Hanna, Sheila Fleming, Róise Ní Bhaoill, Michael Fanning, Susan Picken, Greg Maguire, Brenda Romero, Adeline Dinsmore, Mark Huffam, Peter Weil, Camel Mullan, Tom Gray

In attendance: Richard Williams (CEO), Andrew Reid (Head of Production), Anne Dorbie (Chief Operating Officer), Aine Walsh (Head of ILBF), Bernard McCloskey (Head of Education), Mary McVey (Marketing Manager), Marie Shivers (PA to CEO)

Apologies: Fionnuala Deane, Linda McGuinness (Financial Controller)

No conflicts of interest were noted.

1.0 Minutes of the Board meetings of 16th September 2020

1.1 The minutes of the meeting on 16th September were confirmed as an accurate reflection of the meeting and were agreed and signed. Only one action is outstanding and that is for Rory Clifford to present to the Digital Innovation Group in the New Year.

2.0 Chairwoman's business

2.1 The Chairwoman formally welcomed Anne Dorbie as Northern Ireland Screen's recently recruited Chief Operating Officer and noted sincere thanks on behalf of the Board for Michael Kuhn's and Adeline Dinsmore's contribution to the Board over the last eight years. It has been a pleasure working with them and their value and input will be greatly missed. The recruitment process for the Chair of the Board will begin in January/February with interviews concluded by April.

2.2 The Chairwoman also formally noted the appointment of Peter Weil to the Investment Committee and Tom Gray to the Audit and Risk Committee which were agreed offline in November, alongside the Board's approval for Anne Dorbie's authorisation to access the bank.

2.3 The Chairwoman noted the DfE Minister's visit to The Northman set had been cancelled due to lockdown. No response had yet been received to the Chairwoman's subsequent letter requesting a zoom meeting to update the Minister on the strategy. In addition, no formal reply has been received from the NIO Director General in response to the Chairwoman's letter regarding funding for New Decade New Approach. The Board will be notified upon receipt of any responses.

3.0 CEO's Report including Performance Indicator Report and Investment Report

- 3.1 The CEO noted that the sector has largely kept Covid at bay and production has continued through this challenging period. He thanked Mark Huffam for helping Doineann with Covid testing after a number of false readings with their testing system. While, as noted above, no formal response has been received from NIO regarding ILBF/USBF funding, the BFI have had formal confirmation that they will receive £2m for the next financial year in line with the indicative figure that was discussed earlier on in the quarter. DfA have made contact with DfC regarding the Irish Government commitment. SMIL and Destination Hub/Belfast Film Centre are moving forward as is the BBC Partnership.
- 3.2 The Chairwoman highlighted that it is positive a lot is happening on the production front but is conscious of the requirement for regular Covid testing and ensuring Covid safe conditions. It is helpful that the Department has worked with us in ensuring that film and TV production can continue. Would be helpful to understand the pipeline of work for next year.
- 3.3 In response to this the CEO noted that large-scale is in a good place with a number of projects in the pipeline and the vast majority of next year's TV drama work is already in negotiation which will cascade down through all of the sectors.

Performance Indicator Report

- 3.4 The KPI Report is being simplified to enable it to more accurately capture the work we undertake. Economic returns are tightly measured by DfE but other KPIs don't capture the full forecast as they are running too far behind to make them helpful to the Board. We are exceeding targets across the board and only have a small number of targets, eg Exhibition, which relate to the reality that we have to accept in a global pandemic. The Chairwoman agreed and suggested that a cover note be drawn up in the future pointing out what the Board should be concerned about.
- 3.5 Michael Kuhn advised not to be too dependent on inward investment from major studios, we need to constantly be looking forward and thinking about what we want to achieve, primarily building a sustainable domestic industry. Independent companies in documentary, drama, animation etc are going to be continuing a growing infrastructure in Ireland.
- 3.6 The Chairwoman added that sustainable growth of the industry wasn't identified in the last strategy and we should think about how we should reflect this going forward?

Investment Report

- 3.7 The CEO summarised the Investment Report noting that there was a good scale and range of projects being supported. Roughly £9m of the £12m remaining has been earmarked.
- 3.8 Tom Gray asked if there was anything missing in terms of the Northern Ireland ecosystem that would prevent us from delivering on that investment commitment or that we need to get in place to sell and build a pipeline eg investment in skills, sufficient studio space. The CEO replied that there are always underlying things that reduce the value to Northern Ireland for these projects whether they are inward investing or local. We lose lots of value in these projects because certain expertise either doesn't exist or doesn't exist here in sufficient numbers. The biggest theme of next strategy will be ongoing skills development.

4.0 Finance, Audit and Governance

Risk Register

- 4.1 Anne Dorbie summarised the changes to the Risk Register, notably a number of Covid risks being taken off, finance and operational risks being downgraded due to the COO recruitment, performance targets and exhibition and film festival risks added.

Audit and Risk Committee Update

- 4.2 Nothing further to report in addition to the Risk Register discussion above.

Management Accounts to 31st October 2020

- 4.3 The CEO has covered most of the business in CEO's report. Anne Dorbie reported the usual variances due to timing and that we are where we should be for this time of the year.
- 4.4 The Board noted the Management Accounts.

Strategic Resources Committee Update

- 4.5 The Chairwoman updated the Board on the last meeting which looked at Management Accounts, the KPI update and the general Covid impact on companies and within the organisation. The Committee discussed HR issues including new recruits and apprenticeships.

5.0 Other Committee Updates

SECWG

- 5.1 Adeline Dinsmore provided an update on the latest SECWG meeting which the CEO also attended. CLCs and other partners have really made the most of the online environment and the capacity to engage with more people and provide additional support for teachers who have improved their own practice with better communication. It is encouraging to see the numbers of participants on the teacher side far exceeding normal circumstances.
- 5.2 Adeline noted that the work of Northern Ireland Screen in terms of partner organisation is second to none and is a testament to the work of Bernard McCloskey and David McConnell and those who are delivering for young people. CCEA have restored the practical unit into the GCSE MIA qualification and have merged the skills unit. Sharing equipment is still an issue, but nothing that can't be managed by schools.

ILBF

- 5.3 A film on former Board member Aodan MacPoilin who sadly passed away in 2016 will be broadcast on BBC NI on 13th December and TG4 on 2nd January. Paper Owl's programme Sol will also air shortly. Training is on track and has been extended for new entrants by six months. Four new trainees have been appointed for the next scheme. The Fund has decided to make additional development funding available and will have an extra round in the Spring.

USBF

- 5.4 Richard Hanna noted that in late spring/early summer the Fund had its first call for digital content. We were unsure of what the response would be but it has been very encouraging to see a number of outcomes nearing completion. The variety of work is very encouraging and the Fund is looking forward to seeing the finished content.

CEFFWG

- 5.5 The newly formed group have met twice since October and was warmly welcomed by a good representation of exhibition partners within the sector. It has been good to see how successfully everyone is continuing to work through current challenges.

NI Heritage and Archive Group

- 5.6 Peter Weil noted that this reinstated Group met recently, with over 20 people attending. He was impressed by the team and by what a first-class job they were doing. The Group's aim is to make the archive as successful as possible to as wide a group as possible.

Skills/Training

- 5.7 Nothing further to add.

Investment Committee

- 5.8 Michael Kuhn named three projects which illustrate the exciting things happening in production in Northern Ireland: Dungeons & Dragons which is a huge achievement for Andrew Reid and his team to have brought in; Black Medicine, our own homegrown production; and Hope Street which is an interesting, daytime project. The scope of projects being encouraged and produced in NI at the moment is huge, especially the scale of the Dungeons & Dragons project which came about directly on the back of the visit to LA in February this year.

6.0 Strategy Development Update

Summary of Working Group actions

- 6.1 The CEO noted Anne Dorbie's useful summary document highlighting four critical areas for strategy development; the BBC Partnership, SMIL, Belfast Film Centre and extension of Belfast Harbour Studios. All are exciting and positive but all have independent timelines that we don't have control over and will have significant consequences for the Board.
- 6.2 The Chairwoman reiterated that ODS2 concludes in 2021 and we have more or less committed the significant bulk of our funding already. We require the department to engage with us on the future strategy early in the next financial year with a response no later than June. The Board supported this plan and agreed with the timeline.
- 6.3 To get the maximum amount of impact on the sector within NI we need to spend time between now and early 2021 looking at benchmarks with competitors on the FDI side, looking at what is happening in other areas, what the incentives are to help us benchmark what the ask is. The Chairwoman will send to the Executive a document with relevant benchmarking figures.

- 6.4 Each of the working groups will engage as appropriate with sectors going forward with executive leads engaging with board leads. Ideally this would be undertaken once the interim evaluation has been received, which is due at the end of January. The report will be circulated to the Board once received. An additional Board meeting will likely be needed before the next scheduled meeting on 16th March.
- 6.5 The Chairwoman confirmed that one-year funding for next year has been received. This is our last year of funding and we expect pushback from the department for one-year funding after that. Mark Huffam noted that larger scale projects are usually planned at least a year in advance. If we are not in a position to make any offer or commitment to production companies for 2022 they will go elsewhere. We need to feedback to the department at the next O&L meeting that the Board are in agreement that we cannot sustain the growth of the industry with one-year funding. We need to be able to give people the assurance that we have the funding.
- 6.6 Michael Kuhn noted that the contextualisation point is extremely important. For the relatively small amount of money being requested the impact in our sector on employment is much quicker than any other big investment project.
- 6.7 In terms of the interim evaluation and economic impact, the Chairwoman suggested we add to that the impact on tourism, for example Banbridge Studios, the development around NI resulting from Game of Thrones and the investment of £20m by Belfast Harbour in new studios. These would not have happened if not for our investment. Carmel Mullan noted that these didn't all come about in a one-year period and funding should therefore reflect this. Susan Picken also suggested that DfC funding should be aligned with DfE funding if possible as that is the area that will develop the skills crucial to further developing the industry in NI. The Chairwoman will seek a further meeting with the Permanent Secretary.
- 6.8 The Board were in agreement with the above.

Mid Term Evaluation

- 6.9 The Mid-Term evaluation will be discussed again in more detail at the additional meeting in January once the report has been received.

SMIL

- 6.10 The CEO strongly advocates support for SMIL which has been distilled down to something that is very focussed and industrially relevant in terms of virtual production. It is an industrial facility as well as a research facility with the tying in of the BBC as a founder supporter and will bring them together with Belfast Harbour and Ulster University. The full Outline Business Case will be circulated to the Board once we have sanction to do so.
- 6.11 Greg Maguire noted that this is a critical piece of infrastructure for the development of a sustainable industry in NI. It is computer aided film production, mixing live action and digital imagery in real time and providing real time feedback on set. The full business case goes into a great deal of detail. The biggest disadvantage it has right now is timing – it would be in use now if it were open but has to go through various government departments for approval. Tom Gray added that the biggest concern is tying the existence of VP to SMIL.

- 6.12 The Board is largely supportive despite concerns about the timing but it is difficult to make a supportive case to the department without having full access to the information. Permission to circulate the full OBC will be sought as a matter of urgency.
- 6.13 The Film Centre is also sitting in parallel tracks and needs to hit the same deadline. Belfast City Council have a lot of material and are only just reaching the point that it is willing to share that. It was suggested that the Board ask Bryan Gregory and Wendy Langham to present to the Board on City Deal and SMIL at the next additional Board meeting. Mark Huffam added that to be able to offer this facility would be a complete game changer for NI's profile worldwide.

BBC Partnership

- 6.14 The renewal of the BBC Partnership will be an opportunity to nudge a number of projects towards commission and to aggregate them together to give the sector in NI its moment. Besides SMIL the first capital invest decision the BBC is making is the purchase of a new OB truck. Aim high will hopefully be rolled out again with a greater focus on diversity and new and emerging talent.

7.0 Marketing Calendar

- 7.1 The Board noted the marketing calendar and thanked Mary McVey for her work behind the scenes.
- 7.2 The Board also thanked Anne Dorbie for the policy review schedule and workplan. Some policies will be coming forward for noting at the next meeting.

8.0 Any Other Business

- 8.1 No other business was discussed.

9.0 Date of Next Meeting

- 9.1 The date of the next meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday 16th March 2020 at 11am via Zoom** although an additional meeting will be arranged for the end of January 2021.

Point	Detail	Actioned by	Update
3.4	Draw up a cover note for the KPI Report noting what the Board should be concerned about	Anne Dorbie	
7.3	The Chairwoman will send to the Executive a document with relevant benchmarking figures.	Chairwoman	
7.4	Circulate Mid-Term Evaluation once received	CEO	
7.4	Arrange an additional Board meeting in late January	Marie Shivers	
7.5	Feed back to Department at next O&L meeting our concerns over one-year funding model	CEO	
7.7	Add Tourism impact to evaluation	Anne Dorbie	
7.10	Circulate the SMIL OBC to the Board once permission received	Marie Shivers	

7.13	Organise presentation on SMIL and BFC to Board	Marie Shivers	
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Signed: 
(Chairwoman)

Date: 16th March 2021