

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee

Monday, 22nd August, 2016

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 Graham, Johnston, O'Donnell and O'Neill.

In attendance: Mr. D. Durkan, Director of Development;
Ms. C. Toolan, Managing Director of Belfast Waterfront
and Ulster Hall Ltd;
Mr. G. Fenlon, Interim Managing Director of
Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd;
Mrs. S. McCullough, Director of Sales and Marketing,
Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd;
Mr. I. Bell, Business Support Director and Company
Secretary, Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Attwood, Copeland, Hargey, Kennedy, Kyle and Mullan.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 21st 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 4th July.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Johnston declared an interest during discussion of Item 2, viz. Quarter 1 Finance and Performance Report, in that he was a Member of the Ulster Orchestra Board

Welcome

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. Catherine Toolan to the meeting, who had been recently appointed as the Managing Director of Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. The Chairperson wished her well in her new role and also thanked the Interim Managing Director, Mr. Geoff Fenlon, for his work with the company since his appointment in May, 2014.

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.

Quarter 1 Finance and Performance Report

The Managing Director presented the Shareholders' Committee with an overview of how the Company was performing in relation to the strategic goals which the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. had to deliver on by 2020/2021. She highlighted to the Committee that, although this was only Quarter 1, that the review of business performance against the indicators, as well as an analysis of actual performance against the budget, was positive.

The Director of Sales and Marketing advised the Committee of the sales forecast. She pointed out that the sales pipeline for conference and entertainment hire was strong, that the Company was on track to achieve the key conference win targets and that the Belfast Waterfront had exceeded the targets for Quarter 1. She assured the Members that the smaller number of contracts which had been signed for 2018–2021 was not a cause for concern as conferences were signing contracts later than usual. The Committee was advised that the feedback from those organisations which had held major events in the Belfast Waterfront so far had been overwhelmingly positive.

The Managing Director outlined the challenges which the Company was currently facing and the steps which were being taken to address them. The main issues were:

- an urgent need to implement the Venue Events Management System (VEMS);
- the need to make headway with improved taxi pick-up and drop-off points at the Belfast Waterfront; and
- the fact that the Liquor Licensing laws in Northern Ireland were impacting upon the venues' ability to provide the requisite services to certain clients.

A number of Members expressed concern regarding the Liquor Licensing legislation which was restricting the services that the venues could provide and asked whether a short-term licence could be obtained for the upcoming BBC Good Food Show. The Director of Sales and Marketing advised the Committee that the legislation provided that off-licence sales in Northern Ireland had to be demarcated with entrance and exit barriers, amongst other restrictions, and that it did not look likely that anything could be done in time for the BBC event on 14th – 16th October, 2016.

The Business Support Director advised the Committee that the maximum potential occupancy rate for the Ulster Hall was 91 days and that this was due to the Ulster Orchestra (UO) having largely booked the space for rehearsal time. It was pointed out to the Members that in peak months, such as May 2016, the orchestra had taken 45% of the bookable days.

During discussion, a Member asked whether consideration had been given to asking the Ulster Orchestra if they would move their rehearsal slots to 'off-peak' times, perhaps in exchange for a lesser rent. The Managing Director advised the Members that discussions were ongoing with representatives from the orchestra and that the Committee would be updated on any progress made.

The Committee was advised that a draft Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy was currently being prepared and that it would be presented to the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Board in November, 2016. It was also highlighted to the Members that the Company had already implemented a discounted venue hire for eligible groups and that it was also exploring opportunities with the University of Ulster to offer apprenticeships to students in building management, facilities/technical management and events management.

In response to a Member's question regarding the implications of Brexit, the Managing Director stated that she felt it was too early to tell and the Interim Managing Director added that he had had discussions with Legal Services in relation to the 'clawback' element of the funding if the specified targets were not met for the Belfast Waterfront and that an update would be brought to a future meeting on that.

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

Corporate Risk Management Process

(Mr. A. Harrison, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services, attended in connection with this item)

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services advised the Committee that the Chief Officers had recently undertaken a comprehensive review to identify and assess the main risks which existed in preventing the Council from realising its various objectives. He advised the Members that the Corporate Management Team had agreed key actions which needed to be taken in order to manage those risks to an acceptable level and that they had been captured in the Council's Corporate Risk Register.

He highlighted that the risk which was of particular relevance to the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd Shareholders' Committee was 'Managing Performance at BWUH – 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'. He pointed out to the Members that this was reflected as 'high' in the risk assessment and that this was due to the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. being a new venture for the Council.

The Committee was advised that an update report on how that risk was being managed would be submitted to the Committee in December 2016/January 2017 by the Director of Development.

The Committee noted the report and the proposed process for risk reporting.

Chairperson