

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee

Monday, 13th November, 2023

MEETING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BELFAST WATERFRONT AND ULSTER HALL LTD. SHAREHOLDERS' COMMITTEE HELD IN HYBRID FORMAT

Members present: Councillor Bower (Chairperson); and
Councillors Brooks, Canavan, Cobain, Duffy,
Flynn, Ferguson, Gormley, Maghie, McAteer,
McDowell, Nelson, Ó Néill and Verner.

In attendance: Ms. J. Corkey, Chief Executive, ICC Belfast
(Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd.);
Mr. I. Bell, Director of Finance, Risk and Corporate
Services, ICC Belfast (Belfast Waterfront and Ulster
Hall Ltd.);
Mr. F. Grant, Operations Development Manager;
Mrs. C. O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and
Risk Services; and
Mrs. L McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were recorded from Alderman Copeland and Councillor McCabe.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 19th June 2023 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.

Schedule of Meetings 2024

The Committee approved the schedule of its meetings for 2024, as outlined below, and agreed that all meetings would commence at 5.15 pm:

- Monday 22nd January;
- Monday 11th March;
- Monday 17th June;
- Monday 16th September; and
- Monday 18th November.

Capital and Maintenance Report

The Operations Development Manager advised the Committee that the smoke curtains in the main auditorium and the replacement of the chiller units were now part of the Capital Programme and that the tender for consultancy to support the delivery of both items had been undertaken. He outlined, however, that there was no capital financing associated with the project and that it would therefore also be subject to the Council's capital governance processes, including going before the Oversight Group and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to secure the necessary finance.

In respect of the escalators at the Waterfront Hall, he outlined that all issues had been resolved and that the recommissioning and certification had taken place on 14th July, 2023. The Members were advised that the escalators were on a three-year comprehensive maintenance agreement and that all maintenance required during that period would be covered at no additional cost to the Waterfront Hall, subject to fair usage and excluding damage such as vandalism.

The Operations Development Manager advised that 85% of the Solar Film had been installed, with the Terrace Restaurant and Bar 1 having been completed. He outlined that the vertical glazing and roof panels in bar 2 were almost completed, with installation dates and times to be agreed with the Waterfront Hall Facilities Team.

In respect of the refurbishment of the toilets, the Committee was advised that the designs had been agreed with the Waterfront Hall Facilities Team, the Building Control approvals had been received and the design package for the tender was being finalised that week. It was reported that there had been delays in progressing the project due to staff absence. However, it was anticipated that the tender process to appoint a contractor would be initiated the following week and that the process could likely take up to 16 weeks. The Members were advised that a revised programme for the installation work was to be agreed with the Waterfront Hall Facilities Team following the successful appointment of a contractor.

The Committee noted the updates which had been provided.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following 3 items is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the Press and public from the meeting during discussion of the item as, due to the nature of the item, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Internal Audit Update

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services provided the Committee with an update on the outcome of an internal audit undertaken at the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall (BWUH) Ltd. between December 2022 and February 2023.

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She reminded the Committee that a three-year Internal Audit Plan for 2021/2022–2023/2024 had been agreed by the BWUH Ltd. Audit and Risk Committee in December 2021. The update related to the second year of the three-year plan and it had been agreed with the BWUH management to complete the planned audit for 2022/2023 in two parts.

The Members were advised that the update related to the first of the two audits for 2022/2023 and that it comprised sales and marketing, performance and risk management. She reported that the audit report had been agreed with the BWUH Ltd. Chief Executive and Director of Finance & Systems, and the Executive Summary had been presented to the BWUH Ltd. Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee on 5th September, 2023. The Members noted that the report would be presented to the Council's Audit Assurance Board in November 2023 and the Council's Audit and Risk Panel in December 2023.

In respect of the second audit for 2022/2023, she explained that the draft report on cyber security, data protection and finance had been issued to the BWUH management for its response. She explained that the Council's Audit, Governance and Risk Service was currently agreeing the timing of the 2023/2024 audits with management in BWUH Ltd. It was also reported that it would be liaising with management regarding the development of the next three year audit plan and the associated service level agreement.

She provided the Committee with a summary of the Internal Audit on Sales and Marketing, Performance and Risk Management, which had found that there was "some improvement required". The Committee was advised that BWUH Management had agreed an action plan to address the issues identified.

In response to a Member's question, the Chief Executive of the ICC Belfast confirmed the measures which were now being implemented in terms of secondary checks.

After discussion, the Committee noted the update which had been provided.

Performance Report for Quarter 1 YTD 2023/24

The Chief Executive of the ICC Belfast provided the Committee with an update on Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd.'s (BWUH Ltd.) business performance for Quarter 1 Year to Date, covering the period 1st April, 2023, to 30th June, 2023.

The Members were advised that the company had recently welcomed a new cohort of placement students, working within the Sales and Marketing and Event Operations Departments. She explained that the higher-level apprentices had successfully completed year one of their Lead Customer Operations course. She highlighted that one of their apprentices had also recently been nominated for the Apprentice of the Year.

She informed the Committee that BWUH Ltd. was working alongside Queen's University on the development of a Technical Services Graduate Programme.

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The Committee was advised that the ICC Belfast, together with the Waterfront Hall, had been awarded the "Green Meetings Gold Award" by Green Tourism. The Committee was advised that the award recognised the commitment of tourism businesses that were actively working to become more sustainable and that the Gold Award was acknowledged worldwide as the industry standard for exceptional environmental and sustainability practices. She highlighted that it was the first purpose-built conference venue on the island of Ireland to receive the accolade.

The Director of Finance, Risk and Corporate Services, ICC Belfast, provided the Committee with an overview of the company's performance against the budget for the first quarter. He advised the Committee that the first quarter had been reasonably busy but, as expected, it had been much quieter than quarter one the previous year.

The Committee was advised of the risks and the opportunities for the business in the coming year.

In response to a Member's comment regarding the fact that the venues were now "cashless", the Chief Executive of the ICC Belfast advised the Committee that 95% of ticket sales were made online, with just less than 5% made over the telephone, and that very few people attended the venue to buy tickets with cash. She added that the hospitality team was also now "cashless" and that the Automated Teller Machine (ATM) had been removed from the premises due to low usage. She reported that the customer experience had improved since removing cash, as transactions were made more quickly.

In response to a further Member's question, she outlined that, post Covid-19, confidence was returning to the industry and that people still saw the value in a good night's entertainment.

After further discussion, the Committee noted the update which had been provided.

Financial Statement and Annual Report for the year ended 31st March 2023

The Committee was provided with the BWUH Ltd. Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st March, 2023.

The Chief Executive of the ICC Belfast reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 19th June, 2023, it had been presented with the Quarter 4 Year to Date performance overview. She outlined that the full audited accounts were now available and had been included for notation by the Shareholders' Committee.

The Members were advised that the BWUH Ltd. Annual Report and Financial Statements had been presented to the BWUH Ltd.'s Audit Risk and Compliance Committee on 27th June, 2023. They were agreed as final by the Committee and were electronically signed on the 28th June, 2023. Those were then adopted by the Board on 5th July, 2023.

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The Committee noted that the report included the Independent Auditors Report, which was unqualified.

The Committee noted the contents of the BWUH Ltd. Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st March, 2023.

Chairperson