

Raidió Teilifís Éireann
Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of RTÉ
held on Thursday 18 April 2024 at 10am at RTÉ and via Teams

Present: Terence O'Rourke (Chair)
Kevin Bakhurst
Anne O'Leary
Susan Ahern
Aideen Howard
Noreen O'Kelly
Neasa Hardiman
Terri Moloney
Shirley Bradshaw
David Harvey
Daire Hickey (Teams)
Jonathan Ruane

In Attendance: Mike Fives (Group Financial Controller) 5/6
Gavin Deans (Commercial Director) 5/6
Adrian Lynch (Deputy DG) 6/8
Niamh O'Connor (Deputy Director of Content) 6
Deidre McCarthy (Director of News & Current Affairs) 6
Eimear Cusack (Director of HR) 6
Vivienne Flood (Head of Public Affairs) 6
Grace Berkery (Head of Corporate Strategy) 6/7
Robert Shortt (Company Secretary)

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Board Minutes & Matters Arising

TOR said the approach to minute taking would be reviewed and Board members would be consulted in due course. The Company Secretary highlighted some changes to the Board Tracker and invited changes to its structure. NOK advised that the ARC Action Tracker template could be adapted.

The Minutes of the 28 March 2024 meeting were approved.

3. Director General's Report & ILT Minutes

KB brought the Board up to date with the status of the EAC reports and their expected publication.

The draft response to the recommendations made by the PAC was also discussed. Its recommendation regarding the C&AG and its possible implications regarding RTÉ's audit process was explored.

KB said a fresh engagement was underway with the Department of Social Protection on the Scope investigation and he would report back on its progress.

KB also updated the Board on the latest discussions with TG4 regarding proposals for an Irish language news service.

KB said Google Showcase was ready to go. JR and DH questioned the need for two additional staff to service it. KB said it was a 24 hour operation and the new staff would sit within the digital news team where there was currently no spare capacity.

4. Committees & Subsidiaries

NOK brought the Board through the issues covered at the ARC.

JR asked that the Board would have a deeper session on the Superannuation Scheme and separately on cyber risk. DHI recommended that the organisation prepare a crisis communication plan to deal with any data leak events.

TOR gave the report from REMCO, which included amendments to its Terms of Reference and informed the Board its members were examining further changes to better reflect its Management Development remit.

SA brought the Board up to date on the activities of the Audience Council which included liaising with AHO on exploring the potential to bring in someone under 18 to become involved in its work.

5. Financial & Commercial Update

MF brought the Board through the details of a strong commercial performance in March with increased sales around VOD delivering a surplus against budget of ██████k. Commercial income was ██████ ahead over the first quarter.

LF sales were down ██████ against Budget in March, which was down 25% yoy. However, due to ongoing uncertainty, no recognition was made of the additional ██████ in funding which would have been a budgeted ██████ in the month. The deficit at month end was ██████ which was ██████ adverse against budget.

GD told the Board he would like to see another quarter of activity before undertaking any analysis of sales around digital.

6. Strategy

JR said there had been great work done of the Strategy but it would mean different things to different people. The ILT would have to start thinking about those perspectives with important stakeholders, particularly staff. He also referred to very tight targets in the financial underpinnings of the Strategy and the absence of a contingency, with no margin for error.

SB said her concern was the Strategy should be more transparent about a fundamental shift which would, in her view, see RTÉ become a publishing house for the independent sector. SB also said she considered it would be a shift away from what RTÉ was mandated to do under the Broadcasting Act.

KB said he didn't agree. He said News & Current Affairs, Sport and Radio would all still be produced in-house. KB agreed that it was a shift and there would be more spending in the independent sector where RTÉ already commissioned children's, factual and other content.

The ILT entered the meeting.

AL brought the Board through the updated financial model underpinning the Strategy.

NOK questioned the level of ambition on bringing down costs and increasing revenues.

AL said the context of the assumptions underpinning the model was the inability of media companies to compete against tech giants and therefore holding revenues over the course of the Strategy would be a massive task.

KB added that, where they could, costs would be driven down but realistic assumptions had been made about [REDACTED]

AOL asked about the terms of the VEP and whether they would encourage the required take-up of the scheme.

KB and EC said they were in the middle of discussions with the Department but there were some indications [REDACTED] and it had been agreed that no one on the ILT could apply.

TOR said RTÉ financed the switch to digital terrestrial television at the start of the last decade and that government invested in Montrose back in the 60's and this now represented a similar shift and would be the cost of public service broadcasting for the next decade. TOR said that didn't change the Strategy and would be a choice for government.

KB said RTÉ had a significant range of public service obligations and this Strategy would enable the organisation to meet and enhance them.

Further discussion took place about the percentage of programmes and what kind of programmes would be made in-house following the implementation of the Strategy. Discussion also took place about the suitability of the current studio facilities for future programmes.

Views were exchanged regarding the extent to which RTÉ would become a publisher-broadcaster in its visual programming and the extent to which staff in the affected divisions were aware of what would be a fundamental shift.

TOR asked that the Board be kept informed when the timings on the sequencing of publication of the EAC reports and the Strategy became clearer. TOR also said the comments of SB had been noted, that further tweaks to language may be needed and that NOK would get to examine the numbers again.

It was agreed to approve the Strategy in principle and return it to the Strategy Committee for any further detailed work. TOR thanked all involved for their extensive work.

7. Performance Commitments

GB said the proposal was to submit the Performance Commitments simultaneously with the Strategy. GB said CnM was happy with the simplified document and suggested that any further feedback would come through the Programme Committee.

The proposal was approved.

8. Financial Approvals

The contract extension for the supply of large screen devices was approved.

The renewal of the contract for Phonographic Performance Ireland (PPI) was approved.

9. Appointments & Authorisation Approvals

The reappointment of Mike Byrne to serve for a second term as Chairperson of 2RN was approved.

Authorisation for Mike Fives to act as signatory for the Market B accounts was approved.

10. Board Reflection

NOK said attention should be given to the scheduling of Board meetings next year to ensure they didn't follow too closely.

AHO was happy to acknowledge the appointment of a new Arts & Media Correspondent.

KB said a new Economics Correspondent was also about to be announced as well as a new Eastern Correspondent. KB also noted the retirement next month of Eileen Magnier as North West Correspondent after serving in the role for 34 years.

There being no more business to conduct, the meeting ended.



Signed: _____
Chair