

Minutes of AFSB Meeting 30 – 18 November 2016

Time	14.00 – 16.00	
Venue	Food Innovation Centre, Loughry College	
Present	Tony O'Neill (Chair)	
	Norman Fulton Brian Dolaghan Declan Billington Eugene Rooney Jim Dobson	Trevor Lockhart David Dobbin Owen Brennan David Small Ian Marshall
Apologies	Francis Martin John Thompson	David Dobbin
Observers/Officials	John Hood, InvestNI	Colette McMaster, DAERA
Support Team	Dan Cartland Emma Murphy	Fiona McCausland Karen Wilson

1. Welcome

The Chair thanked all for attending and noted that the meeting would cover two issues: an update on FBIS and AFPIS, and discussion on the Marketing Body paper.

2. Update on Farm Business Improvement Scheme

Tony noted that he had heard a number of positive comments in respect of the ongoing FBIS workshops.

Norman confirmed that the workshops had been well received by farmers, with a recorded attendance to date of 2,744. He noted that there was a lot of interest in Tier 1 in particular, and he was aware of a number of poultry projects which were well advanced. Norman reminded the Board that the deadline for applications to Tier 1 is 16 December, and that Tier 2 would close on 24 February 2017.

3. Update on Agri-Food Processing Investment Scheme

Norman advised that Angela Reavey, SIB, was working on the business case, developing the rationale and need for the scheme, focussing on key outcomes such as Gross Value Added, exports, innovation and productivity. He confirmed that AFSB feedback on the detail had been taken on board, resulting in a simpler scheme than previously envisaged and the fact that there would be no cap on the value of project/grant. He noted that there would be a single tier, and a single grant rate of up to 40% would be available dependent on the needs of each project, with particular emphasis on those projects which would not get bank support. In this instance, Norman explained that this would favour riskier / larger projects.

Norman advised that he hoped to receive an advanced draft of the business plan by Christmas, with a view to securing the necessary approvals and opening the

scheme by the end of March 2017. He confirmed that InvestNI would be the delivery agent for the scheme, and the necessary modification to the RDP would be submitted before the end of 2016. Colette confirmed that the budget of £27m was for the period up to 2020.

4. Marketing Body Paper

Eugene provided an overview of the Marketing Paper which had been circulated prior to the meeting. Eugene confirmed that Government was keen to ensure the body was established and that it should be a private sector led entity. He noted however the challenge of ensuring that the body was sufficiently funded to undertake meaningful activities whilst retaining its private sector status.

Discussion took place in respect of the necessary funding split to ensure the body retained a private sector identity and would not be deemed a public body. It was agreed that, while the minimum required private sector contribution was 51% to avoid being classed as a public body, a split of at least 60 (industry): 40 (public) would be preferable. It was noted that SF&D had been established with a 20: 80 split (industry:public) and had reversed that funding split over time.

It was noted that the quantum of funding required by the body had yet to be agreed. Owen noted that it was important that any funding identified within the delivery bodies (e.g. InvestNI) should be ring-fenced, particularly in light of emerging circumstances such as Brexit.

Industry representatives highlighted their concerns over the ability of the Body to direct the work of the delivery partners and to hold them to account. John noted that InvestNI, as the main public delivery body, had already committed to working with the body and that the funding currently spent on agri-food would be ring-fenced, with further bids made as the need arose. He noted that he felt a greater challenge lay in bringing the industry together to identify a shared marketing strategy / brand for Northern Ireland.

Eugene noted that the proposed delivery committee, based on the SF&D model, would involve the key stakeholders from both the private and public sector, and would be chaired by the CEO, working to the agreed strategy determined by the Marketing Body's Board.

The Chair drew discussion to a close, noting that further clarity was needed on the quantum of funding and structure being proposed prior to any decisions being made.

5. Date of Next meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the AFSB will take place on 20 January 2017.