

INVEST NORTHERN IRELAND BOARD MINUTES 2024

January 25, 2024

February 29, 2024

**TWO HUNDRED AND ELEVENTH MEETING OF THE
INVEST NORTHERN IRELAND BOARD, 25 JANUARY 2024
MEETING HELD AT INVEST NI HEADQUARTERS, BELFAST**

Present:

Invest NI Board

Colm McKenna (Interim Chair)	Ciaran Mulgrew
Colin Coffey	Dawn McLaughlin
Dominic Darby	Melanie Dawson
Marie-Therese McGivern	Scott Ritchie
Kieran Kennedy	Michael McQuillan

Board Secretary: Trevor Connolly

In Attendance: Mel Chittock, Alan McKeown, Brian Dolaghan, Dónal Durkan, Paula Logue, Peter Harbinson, Steve Harper.

Minute Taker: Wendy Savage

The meeting commenced at 10:15.

The Chair welcomed three members of Invest NI staff, who joined the Board meeting in an observatory capacity. The Chair noted his intention to bring the Entrepreneurship agenda item earlier in the agenda to facilitate an important client meeting.

BOARD STANDING ITEMS

APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Patrick O’Gorman, Julie-Ann O’Hare and Jeremy Fitch.

(i) DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Ciaran Mulgrew stated that he would leave the meeting temporarily should there be any detailed discussion on the casework report at agenda item 3. It was confirmed that there were no other conflicts with any items under discussion today.

(ii) RAISING CONCERNS

Board members were reminded of their obligations under the raising concerns policy and procedures.

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the November 2023 Board meeting were agreed without amendment and will be published online. The Chair noted that the next meeting will be an Operational one on Thursday 29 February 2024, which will be held in Invest NI HQ. This will be the first meeting that Kieran Donoghue will attend as CEO. He also noted that the March Board, which will be Strategic in nature, will be held in North/West Belfast, location to be confirmed.

2. ACTIONS & UPDATES

The Board Secretary updated the meeting on the Actions list and the following was noted:

Action 85 – Spare Capacity within INI HQ – Paper included on January agenda.

Action 86 – NW Office location – Paper to be prepared for February Board meeting.

Action 87 – Entrepreneurship - Paper included on January agenda.

Action 89 – Updated Risk Appetite - Given other competing work priorities and the importance of this action, the Chair has deferred this agenda item to February's meeting.

Action 99 – Digitisation Paper - Paper to be prepared for March Board meeting.

The Chair provided an update on his recent meeting with the Interim DfE Permanent Secretary: Ian Snowden and advised that the Permanent Secretary had confirmed his commitment to ensuring that the good working relationship between DfE and Invest NI continues and is enhanced.

3. CASEWORKS FOR APPROVAL

Colin Coffey, BFC Chair, brought forward a recommendation to the Board for approval of one project. After a brief discussion, the project was approved by the Board.

Colin advised that a further 2 urgent projects would be dealt with via correspondence. The Chair queried why everything needs to be done urgently and, despite the Board's best efforts, we never seem to get ahead of the curve. He was also concerned as to the apparent lack of recognition, by Executive colleagues, of the need for Board members to have adequate time to read and assess the papers. Brian Dolaghan advised that the closure of ERDF and making sure Invest NI was fully aligned with the available slots in the DfE Casework process had both had impacts. Following further discussion Colin noted that he had asked for internal timelines to be reviewed and the potential of using the MS Project software to map out the process would be explored. The Chair asked that as much time as possible be given to Board members to consider the casework papers. Colin highlighted that, overall, the revised casework process was working well, but was also an iterative process which was still evolving.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF INDEPENDENT REVIEW ACTION PLAN

The Interim CEO advised that the governance structures for the implementation of the Action Plan were now up and running and the project management software has been rolled out to all Action Owners and Implementation Leads. The system covers all 35 Strategic Actions and is available to both Invest NI and DfE staff and provides live reporting of progress on key actions and tasks.

Mel advised that, since the software had been rolled out, an Action Owners Project Board had been held on Tuesday 16 January, where the continuing need for joint working to deliver the enabling tasks and strategic actions had been stressed. He confirmed that all Strategic Actions were on track for delivery. In response to some queries from the Board, Mel confirmed that a Risk/Issues Log was being developed and that work on Resource Requirements was progressing and would go to SRC for review.

Mel also referenced some comments on the survey that was undertaken on the Task and Finish Group process. He advised that these results are being analysed to identify the lessons learned. Some staff felt that it was not truly joint working, and we need to see how we can develop closer working relationships on the back of this.

The Chair stated that he had taken comfort from the 16th January meeting, which was well attended by Executive colleagues, that there would be no further slippage from the timelines in the published Action Plan. He stressed the importance of Invest NI being the engine room for the change set out in the Action Plan and the need for Executive colleagues to own that change. He reiterated the need for continued joint working and confirmed that he had invited Mary Gormley to join the February Board meeting to do a short system demo and provide the monthly progress update. The Chair advised that he was disappointed with some of the comments in the survey and also stated the need to develop partnership working.

5. COMMITTEE CHAIR REPORTING

The Chair referenced the report included as part of the Board pack and then invited Marie-Therese McGivern, SRC Chair to give a brief verbal update.

Marie-Therese advised that this had been a very busy period for SRC with their main focus being on the draft Corporate Strategy and the draft Communications & Engagement Strategy, both of which were being discussed during the meeting.

Marie-Therese commended the amount of progress made by the team working on the Corporate Strategy; but highlighted some areas where work by DfE is progressing slower than they would have liked. The Committee is receiving regular updates on the work to rationalise our Portfolio of programmes / interventions and the development of the new Performance Dashboard. Marie-Therese completed her update by advising that the focus of the Committee will now move to People and Culture; the Financial reporting information required by the Board; and Digitisation. She thanked the SRC Secretariat for their great work to date.

The Chair asked if either of the other Committee Chairs had any specific issues they wished to raise. Colin Coffey, BFC Chair, raised a point over the length of time taken to realise the remaining investments in a Fund approaching the end of its tenure and to expedite that closure. The Chair asked that the RPC Chair provide the verbal update at the February Board meeting, in addition to the normal Committee Chairs' written reports.

Action: RPC Chair to provide the verbal update at the February Board meeting, in addition to the normal Committee Chairs' reports.

Post Meeting Action Update - As there is a standalone Regional Strategy item on the February Board Agenda, the Chair has stood down RPC and asked that the verbal update be provided by the BFC Chair.

OPERATIONAL ITEMS

6. CEO REPORT TO BOARD

The CEO provided an overview of his Paper. He highlighted the following issues:

- The economic data from several different sources is still very mixed.
- UUEPC have concluded that the economic outlook for NI forecasts a subdued level of economic growth, with challenges specifically for the construction and retail sectors.
- Overall capital investment levels have fallen significantly in recent years and consequently there is a policy need to encourage both businesses and Government to increase capital investment expenditure.
- Performance Reporting - Concerns around the year-end delivery of 5 Targets (categorised Amber); and 1 Target, which will not be achieved and this is categorised as Red.
- Invest NI hosted some 30 of our overseas staff in the Northwest and this was a great opportunity for them to learn what the region has to offer as well as being able to engage with local stakeholders including the Council, Chamber, business investors and colleges. My thanks to Board members Dawn McLaughlin and Kieran Kennedy for their support and involvement. The visit was a great success and received a lot of positive media coverage.

One Board member stated that there are some very good news stories in the Construction sector and that the figures mentioned may be skewed.

The Chair highlighted the need to develop the Work In Progress pipeline for 2024-25 to ensure that we stop the downward trajectory of year-on-year reductions in Invest NI's budget. He also asked that the Board be kept informed of any new issues with the delivery of targets.

7. FINANCE REPORT TO BOARD

Brian Dolaghan made a brief presentation to supplement the Finance Report to Board. Key headlines were: (i) Resource - spend is ahead of YTD budget profiling but expected to normalise by year end. (ii) Capital - spend broadly in line with expected timing at 9-month

point. (iii) ERDF - remaining allocation has now been fully spent at 31 December 2023. In looking ahead, DfE has asked for submission of bids for resource and capital. There is an assumption that our 2023-24 closing position will be our opening position for 2024-25. Bids had been made for both resource and capital. There was a rising demand for capital funding over the next three years, on proposed interventions such as Productivity Support, Agri-Food, Energy Efficiency and Access to Finance. Brian confirmed that bids for the Shared Prosperity Fund were also back on the table for 2024-25. Board members responded by emphasising the need to redouble our efforts to have a pipeline of projects which could make use of all available funding. They also queried what would happen if the bids were unsuccessful and how staff were being allocated against key projects / programmes. The Chair asked that an exercise be completed setting out where we will end up as to the 2024-25 Budget position and what actions are to be undertaken if Invest NI's bids are unsuccessful.

There was also a discussion on the need for the ARAC, BFC and SRC Chairs to meet to discuss and agree what type of financial information was required to be presented to the Board.

Action: Executive Director Finance to prepare a Paper for the February Board meeting setting out where he thinks we will end up as to the 2024-25 Budget position and what actions are to be undertaken if Invest NI's bids are unsuccessful. Paper to also include analysis of staffing allocation by key programme / outcome.

8. ARAC UPDATE

The ARAC Chair gave a brief verbal update from the last ARAC meeting on 7 December. The main points are summarised below:

- NIAO has provided final report.
- Internal Audit reports were reviewed.
- Governance Council provided an update.
- Mid-year review of Assurance Statement completed.
- Corporate Risk Register reviewed.
- ARAC ToR updated to reflect change of name and membership.
- Progress on completion of PPE's was discussed – for those <£1m, from April 2023 there had been a significant reduction in the number outstanding and this was to be reviewed again at the end of January 2024. For those PPEs >£1m, an external procurement exercise is ongoing with a timeframe for completion by March 2024.

The Chair stated his concern that Invest NI's inability to complete PPEs on time was, and had been for some time, an ongoing issue. He asked whether there was sufficient understanding across the organisation as to (i) the importance of completing timely PPEs and (ii) disseminating the resulting Lessons Learned.

SPECIFIC PAPERS

9. CORPORATE PLAN

Gerard McNally joined for this item. Gerard advised that, following the Board Strategy workshop on 18 January, all comments from Board members were being reviewed and would be incorporated into the next iteration of the Paper. He thanked the Board for their interest and feedback at the workshop. Board members thanked Gerard and his team for the huge amount of work undertaken to date and noted that the engagement with SRC had been time well spent. Board members were content to approve the Paper. The Chair asked that the draft 2024-25 Invest NI Business Plan come to the March Board meeting for approval.

Action: Draft 2024-25 Invest NI Business Plan to come to the March Board meeting for approval.

Gerard left the meeting.

10. ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROPOSALS

George McKinney, Gren Armstrong and Keith Forster (DfE) joined the meeting for this item.

George McKinney gave a brief overview of the Paper and asked the Board to approve the establishment of the Entrepreneurship Backbone Team (EBT). Board members discussed the proposal and focussed on risk assessment, availability of follow-on funding, how the team would be integrated within other Invest NI activities and the degree of engagement with DfE on the proposal. Keith Forster confirmed there had been good partnership working with colleagues in Invest NI and stated that this collaborative working needed to continue. Keith suggested that DfE would now be best placed to chair oversight of the team, if approved, with Invest NI providing the operational delivery.

Both the Interim CEO and Chair noted that the proposal to establish the EBT itself was strategic in nature and hence appropriate for the Board to take a view on, however, the final nature and resourcing of the structure was operational.

The Board were content to approve the establishment of the EBT but noted that the final nature and resourcing of the structure should be a decision for the CEO. The Chair asked that the Board be kept apprised of progress on the EBT and its proposed structure and resourcing. George, Gren and Keith left the meeting.

11. SPARE OFFICE CAPACITY – HQ

The Interim CEO referenced the Paper and asked if Board members had any comments or questions. Board members felt that there had been good progress made since the November Board meeting; but asked if there had been consideration as to inviting other Trade bodies (e.g. IoD) to use space in the building and the potential to hire out event space or potentially offer space to SMEs / Start-ups. Board members stated that our building should be the first port of call for anyone needing space to work. The Interim CEO advised that he is happy to look at all options and asked the Board for more time to consider some more creative ideas. The Chair asked that an update paper is brought to the February Board meeting.

Action: The Chair asked that the CEO provide an update paper for the February Board meeting.

12. COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY – OVERVIEW PAPER

Marie-Therese McGivern, in her role as SRC Chair, introduced this Agenda item. She explained that SRC had focussed their attention on helping the team shape the Strategy to make it more strategic and less operational / reactive and more about stakeholder engagement. Marie-Therese also stated that a huge amount of work had been completed and the Strategy will require a culture change across the organisation, as we move to a different way of working.

Peter Harbinson confirmed that the draft Strategy would now be discussed with the incoming CEO, before finalising.

Board members thanked Peter and his team on the progress made and stated that this piece of work would be fundamental to how Invest NI works going forward. One Board member also questioned whether international business should be covered separately due to its own nuances. Steve Harper advised that there are Comms staff embedded throughout the international office network who are young, enthusiastic and bring a renewed vigour to communications. He also noted that they needed the right tools and equipment to enable them to do their jobs, especially in respect of mobile video recording and editing. Alan McKeown confirmed that he would investigate this issue further. The Chair noted that this would require a culture change, with the Comms team acting more as facilitators, rather than gatekeepers, and ELT taking more ownership. He also suggested the Comms team be open to procuring external PR support. Board members were content to approve the Paper.

PAPERS TO NOTE

13. MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

This paper was noted with no comments.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair brought to the attention of members the NI Public Sector Chairs' Forum Leadership & Governance Conference 2024, taking place on Wednesday 6 March 2024. The Chair asked that should anyone wish to attend; they contact the Board Secretariat.

The Chair brought the meeting to a close by noting that this was Mel Chittock's last meeting as Interim CEO. The Chair, on behalf of the Board, thanked Mel for his leadership and dedication over the last two years, which have themselves been a highly challenging and complex period for both Invest NI, the Department and Northern Ireland. The Chair noted Mel's resilience in staying the course over the past two years and thanked him for his openness and honesty and his hard work and advice throughout his term as Interim CEO.

The Board meeting ended at 13:40.

15. DATE OF THE NEXT BOARD MEETING

The next Board meeting will be Operational in nature, will commence at 10:15 on Thursday 29 February 2024 and will be held in Invest NI Headquarters, Belfast.

Wendy Savage, February 2024

Chair

**TWO HUNDRED AND TWELFTH MEETING OF THE
INVEST NORTHERN IRELAND BOARD, 29 FEBRUARY 2024
MEETING HELD AT INVEST NI HEADQUARTERS, BELFAST**

Present:

Invest NI Board

Colin Coffey (Chair for this meeting)	Ciaran Mulgrew
Michael McQuillan	Dawn McLaughlin
Dominic Darby	Melanie Dawson
Marie-Therese McGivern	Julie-Ann O'Hare
Kieran Kennedy	

Board Secretary: Trevor Connolly

In Attendance: Kieran Donoghue, Alan McKeown, Brian Dolaghan, Dónal Durkan, Jeremy Fitch, Mel Chittock, Paula Logue, Peter Harbinson, Steve Harper.

Minute Taker: Wendy Savage

The meeting commenced at 10:15.

Colin Coffey, on behalf of the Board and ELT, passed on everyone's condolences to Colm McKenna, who was unable to chair his final Board meeting due to a family bereavement. Colin, in his role as Senior Independent Director (SID), chaired the meeting.

The SID welcomed Kieran Donoghue to his first Board meeting as CEO and four members of Invest NI staff, who joined the meeting in an observatory capacity.

BOARD STANDING ITEMS

APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Colm McKenna, Patrick O’Gorman and Scott Ritchie.

(i) DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

It was confirmed that there were no other conflicts with any items under discussion today.

(ii) RAISING CONCERNS

Board members were reminded of their obligations under the raising concerns policy and procedures.

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the January 2024 Board meeting were agreed without amendment and will be published online. The SID noted that the next meeting is on Thursday 28 March 2024, which will be held in Invest NI HQ. This will be John Healy’s first meeting as the new Chair.

2. ACTIONS & UPDATES

The Board Secretary updated the meeting on the Actions list and the following was noted:

Action 85 - Spare Capacity within INI HQ: paper included on February agenda.

Action 86 - NW Office location: paper included on February agenda.

Action 89 - Updated Risk Appetite: paper included on February agenda.

Action 99 - Digitisation Paper: paper to come to the March Board meeting.

Action 102 - Committee Chair Reporting: Colin Coffey, in his role as BFC Chair, is to provide the verbal update at today’s meeting.

Action 103 - Budget 2024/25: paper included on February agenda.

Action 104 - Invest NI Business Plan 2024/25: paper to come to the March Board meeting for approval.

3. CASEWORKS FOR APPROVAL

Colin Coffey, in his role as BFC Chair, advised there were no projects for approval by the Board at this meeting and referenced the Casework Approvals Report in the Board pack. Colin

advised that an urgent, upcoming project would be dealt with via correspondence in order to facilitate the availability of the DfE casework panel. The CEO advised that, on initial inspection, he felt the casework process may be over engineered and has set up a small group, under the auspices of Mel Chittock, to look at the end-to-end process. Kieran advised that he would provide an update at the next Board meeting.

4. COMMITTEE CHAIR REPORTING

The SID referenced the written update from RPC within the Board pack. There were no questions from members. Colin Coffey, in his role as BFC Chair, then provided a brief verbal update from his Committee. He advised that the meetings to date had been principally focused on information gathering by the members and the last meeting had focussed on skills and competitiveness. In future, BFC's approach will be to look for interlinkages with our strategic outcomes and work closely with SRC on this.

One Board member advised that the challenge role of the Committees is critical, and asked that the SRC, BFC and RPC Executive Secretariat ensure that officials who attend are properly prepared for robust, but professional and constructive, scrutiny and challenge from the members and it is understood that this is a key role of the Board.

Another Board member asked if BFC feel Invest NI is getting value for money and economic benefits on the fees paid to Fund Managers. Colin confirmed that delivering value for money was critical, as was ensuring that our funded market interventions were delivering Invest NI's strategic outcomes.

In respect of Access to Finance, Colin noted that he was working with Brian Dolaghan on the arrangements to provide governance and oversight of the funds being delivered by fund managers on Invest NI's behalf, and that a paper would be shared with the CEO and then the Board, in due course. Colin also noted that the projects coming forward to Casework were still being written in isolation and were not always clear as to where they fitted in delivering Invest NI's strategic outcomes. He suggested he would discuss this further with the CEO, offline.

Marie-Therese McGivern, SRC Chair, provided a short verbal update to members stating that the team is working on the Invest NI Business Strategy to ensure alignment to the Minister's Economic Vision and that the digital team had provided an update on the excellent progress being made. She highlighted the ongoing engagement with Peter Harbinson and Paula Logue

on their respective strategies. Marie-Therese also stated that the development of the performance dashboard is progressing and will be transformative for the Board and the organisation, when complete. The Committee will now start to focus its attention on the Finance strategy and reporting. As a first step, the four Committee Chairs will be meeting soon to discuss and agree the type and format of financial information that is to be provided to the Board.

OPERATIONAL ITEMS

5. CEO REPORT TO BOARD

The CEO provided an overview of his Paper. Kieran thanked colleagues for preparing his report and having taken the report as read, highlighted the following:

- EY Global Outlook has projected moderate GDP expansion in 2024. They attribute this to an increased likelihood of a soft landing following consecutive economic shocks. The Outlook reports that a more open path to a soft landing should help rebuild confidence.
- The restoration of power sharing and a Stormont Executive is an encouraging development for future investment.
- Encouraging to see a good flow of new business projects through January from both local companies and inward investment, across all of the NI regions.
- Invest NI hosted some 30 of our overseas staff in the Northwest and this was a great opportunity for them to learn what the region has to offer as well as being able to engage with local stakeholders including the Council, Chamber, business investors and colleges, with very positive feedback from stakeholders.
- The first of 6 Supporting Women Leadership Development workshops took place on 2 February. The CEO thanked Board members Kieran Kennedy and Dawn McLaughlin for welcoming the cohort and offering continued support and encouragement to the wider Invest NI team.
- Performance Reporting - Concerns around the year-end delivery of 3 Targets which are categorised as Amber. Two Targets were reported as Red, as they will not be achieved by year end.
- The increasing significance of the non-financial support that Invest NI is providing to companies and the importance of capturing this information going forward and reporting it externally as a key enabler of business growth.

A Board member asked ELT to comment on the number of new start employees and whether these posts were essential. The Board member also asked whether the hybrid working policy was being considered as more companies are asking staff to return to the office. Paula Logue, Executive Director, People and Culture advised that this issue had been discussed extensively at a recent ELT meeting. Research had been completed which indicated that there was no drop in staff productivity. Hence, the existing hybrid model - 40% office based for staff - would remain. The Board member stated that collaborative working also needs to be considered and Managers need to see their staff to understand their skill sets or learning requirements and that Invest NI should also balance their hybrid working policy with that of the private sector.

Paula Logue accepted these points but advised that the timing was not right currently to change the policy but that it would be kept under review. Another ELT member also advised that this had been debated amongst the team and that to promote collaborative working, anchor days had been introduced for teams with ELT members driving this.

The CEO advised that at the most recent staff briefing he had given an assurance to staff that the hybrid working policy would remain as is for now; but would be reviewed as plans progress around Invest NI's Corporate Plan and target operating model. Another ELT member also added that the hybrid working policy is an important competitive advantage when trying to recruit professional grade staff.

A Board member commented on how we are measuring staff productivity in the organisation and asked if the process is fully transparent. A Board member sought assurances that the budget applied to Skills would not be cut moving forward. An ELT member advised that this is a critical area and there would be no cut to the budget moving forward.

The SID mentioned that a person has been employed to look at the area of economic inactivity and mentioned that in conversation, representatives from EY had mentioned that they want to help / assist Invest NI in this area. Colin Coffey to pick this up direct with Steve Harper. One Board member cautioned that Invest NI needed to be aware of other organisations' roles, especially in the Third Sector. Steve Harper advised that Invest NI is currently working with the Department for Communities (DfC) on this, our role being to signpost individuals and companies to the dedicated DfC programmes, which are funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund. It was confirmed that the person employed will also be looking at attracting in, and attracting back, talent.

An ELT member advised that his team had met with DfE policy leads to discuss the metrics needed to operationalise and measure performance in achieving the Minister's Economic Vision. It had been agreed that Invest NI would write to DfE with their proposals for the metrics.

Action: Paper on the metrics which have been developed internally for each of the Minister's four economic objectives, as set out in his Economic Vision, to be presented to the March 2024 Board meeting for approval.

A Board member asked if, given the tightness in the labour market, we should now be targeting specific companies / sectors. Another Board member also raised the definition of a "Good Job" and how this could mean different things to different people. The subsequent discussion identified the need for levels of progression, involving 'stairways' and there was not one single answer or definition that fitted all circumstances.

6. FINANCE REPORT TO BOARD

Brian Dolaghan made a brief presentation to supplement the Finance Report to Board. Key headlines were: (i) Resource - spend is ahead of YTD budget profiling but expected to normalise by year end; (ii) Capital - spend broadly in line with expected timing at 9-month point and (iii) ERDF – Invest NI were working closely with DfE to maximise drawdown. Brian confirmed that Invest NI had been asked to resubmit bids for the 2024-25 Shared Prosperity Fund.

SPECIFIC PAPERS

7. 2024-25 BUDGET PAPER

Brian Dolaghan advised this paper came about from an action from last month's meeting and explained that the Business Scorecard reflects the nature of our spend in respect of jobs creation and skills. Brian stated that 65%-70% of the budget is already committed based on contracts signed in previous years, with the uncommitted balance relating to current year programme activity. Brian went to explain that he had tried to show the nature and structure of the budget and its flexibilities in the paper to address the question of how we will manage if we do not get our desired budget allocation. Brian advised that he had also tried to give a flavour of staff costs analysed against our key drivers.

The SID stated that from the papers it seems we will move into 2024-25 with a budget pressure of £6m and asked how do we achieve a balanced budget in 2024-25. He also asked about how the 2024-25 pay settlement was to be managed. Brian stated that Invest NI had always started each year off with an opening budget pressure, i.e. more demand than budget, because history had shown that things will change, previous agreements will not drawdown as expected and this was required to avoid making in-year easements. In respect of 2024-25 pay, Brian stated that how this was to be managed would be clarified when Invest NI received its final Budget allocation from DfE.

A Board member highlighted that, with the high level of ongoing commitment, the forthcoming Review into rationalising Invest NI's programmes and interventions was a key enabler to create headroom in the budget and ensure that all programmes were fully aligned to delivering the Minister's Economic Vision. A Board member thanked Brian for the analysis on the headcount mapped to the key drivers but noted that, from what was presented, it was difficult to determine whether sufficient staff were in the right places and asked how the data could be further interrogated.

The SID asked that Brian keep the Board fully informed, in a timely manner, on what is clearly a fast-moving and complex position, as it was likely that challenging budget decisions may well need to be urgently taken.

A Board member referenced the Taoiseach's recent speech where he committed funding of over €800m for Shared Island investment priorities and referenced developing pilot co-operation schemes by enterprise agencies (up to €30 million) and asked if anyone had reached out to find out how this money would be received. The CEO advised that he had already reached out to the Shared Island Unit in the Taoiseach's Office and would update the Board.

8. REGIONAL STRATEGY PAPER

Alan McKeown advised that there were a number of pieces of work ongoing to address the actions in the Action Plan; but that he was also aware that the CEO is looking at the target operating model for the organisation and any work on the Regional Strategy needed to be cognisant of this. Alan advised that work is ongoing with each of the Councils to identify their Unique Selling Points (USP) and on the co-design of targets and deliverables which are aligned to the Minister's Economic Vision. He also highlighted that while his team was fully

engaged with Council officials, it was the elected Council Members who were the final decision makers.

The SID commented that he did not accept that Invest NI is reaching out as much as possible, especially to other ALBs. Kieran Kennedy stated that the Regional teams are continuing to work with all of the Councils in looking at all of the commitments made in the Action Plan. Dawn McLaughlin stated that in the North West a value proposition is being pulled together by the Council and Invest NI were involved in that process. Alan advised that he would like Invest NI to help co-ordinate these value propositions across NI, then identify the unique value added for each Council.

The CEO confirmed that he was embarking on a series of visits to each of the Regional Offices. The SID asked for a Paper to be prepared which set out the current status of all of the Regional Offices, in respect of capacity, fit out, location etc.

Action: A Paper which sets out the status of each of the current Regional Offices in respect of (i) the appropriateness of their current location, (ii) their visibility, (iii) accessibility to external visitors, (iv) their physical capacity and (v) the quality of accommodation to come to the April 2024 Board meeting for discussion.

Julie-Ann O'Hare left the meeting.

9. IMPLEMENTATION OF INDEPENDENT REVIEW ACTION PLAN

Mary Gormley and James McEvoy joined the meeting for this item. Mel Chittock introduced this item; he was able to provide assurance to the Board that delivery of the Action Plan was a priority across Invest NI. He advised that significant progress had been made and the Project Management Office (PMO) had been extremely busy with more than 70 meetings taking place in February alone. The Project for the Web software has been developed and rolled out, along with the risk reporting and interdependencies reporting to all Strategic Owners and Implementation Leads. A monthly checkpoint template had been introduced; but this is adding an additional layer of bureaucracy and the team is currently looking at solutions to digitise this. Mary Gormley advised that the PMO are engaging with all of the lead action owners on a formal and informal basis and there is currently a focus on those actions with due dates up to June 2024. Mary provided a demonstration of the live Project for the Web software and explained that there is a large amount of data held below the headline pages, which can be drilled down into by all of the lead action owners. Mary advised that an initial Risks dashboard had been developed and the team is actively working on integrating feedback from Dom Darby

and Ciaran Mulgrew. Mary also advised that an Interdependencies dashboard was being developed which was, by its nature, very complex with 19 interdependencies having been identified to date.

Dom Darby commended the team on the amount of progress made and their digital first approach. He stated that the last Implementation Oversight Group (IOG) meeting had been challenging – DfE had expressed a lack of confidence on progress and queried the robustness of the internal challenge function - and asked how the team planned to address this. Ciaran Mulgrew stated that DfE has the same access to all of the information and have full visibility on progress.

Mel stated that despite all of the information being available he was concerned that the next IOG meeting would be a re-run of the last and had therefore set up a meeting with DfE in advance to discuss. Dom Darby stated that there are two distinct audiences within DfE, those looking after the governance, and those requiring an overview. We need to make that distinction depending on the nature of the meeting and how we present the information. He suggested using deep dives into specific actions as a means to illustrate to DfE how we are working.

Dom also referenced the new Purpose and Vision 2026 statement, which were developed as part of the published Action Plan. He asked what work was being done within Invest NI to ensure that the five ways of working in the Vision were embedded with all Invest NI staff. Paula Logue responded and acknowledged there is more work to do with staff on culture and values.

Mary and James left the meeting.

10. NW REGIONAL OFFICE

Mel Chittock introduced the Paper. He emphasised the need to deliver value for money, while recognising that both quantitative and qualitative factors had to be taken into account. There was discussion amongst Board members, with the consensus being that the two of the opportunities presented were more attractive options. The CEO advised that he had not yet seen any of the sites and would like to do so, before coming to any final decision.

Mel highlighted that progress would be shaped by a forthcoming decision by the Derry City and Strabane District Council and that further information was required to finalise the Business case. In light of this, he suggested that he come back to the Board when this work has been completed, which may be March or April.

The SID highlighted that ELT should engage with Board members to utilise their skills, knowledge and experience when addressing specific subjects of interest.

A Board member stated their frustration at the amount of Board time devoted to this paper, with no decision yet made. Mel responded by advising that they were waiting on information from external organisations which had slowed the process down.

Action: The SID asked that an update be provided to either the March or April Board, as appropriate.

11. RISK APPETITE STATEMENT

This paper was presented by both Dawn McLaughlin as Chair of ARAC and Trevor Connolly, the Board Secretary.

Dawn McLaughlin provided background and context by advising that the paper is the culmination of the Board workshop held in September 2023 and benchmarking work subsequently undertaken. She noted that public sector organisations cannot be culturally risk averse and be successful and that it is the responsibility of the Board to determine, and continuously assess, the nature and extent of the principal risks that the organisation is exposed to and is willing to take to achieve its objectives. She highlighted that the role of Invest NI - intervening due to market failure, providing support to businesses to develop commercial opportunities which would otherwise not be backed by the private sector and implementing programmes to deliver our strategic objectives – means that, as an organisation, we will fundamentally take on more risks than other public bodies. As noted in the Board paper, this critical point has been formally recognised by the NI Audit Office. Taking the paper as read, Dawn asked members for any questions before proposing the Risk Appetite Statement for approval.

Board members praised the quality of the paper and were content that as an organisation we should be taking more risks. They questioned whether as an organisation, Invest NI is ready to embrace this change and advised that if approved the Risk Appetite Statement must be embedded in the culture of the organisation, with staff empowered to take more risks where appropriate. Trevor confirmed that as a document, it will not do anything; it needs to be embedded across the organisation to help people do their jobs. Trevor stated that it also needs to be discussed with DfE.

The CEO complimented the paper and advised it made a great framework to move forward. Kieran asked how the document would be kept up to date in a changing economic environment. Dawn advised that the document will be reviewed annually by the Board. Board members questioned how this would be disseminated to staff and stated that staff needed to be properly trained on how to use the Risk Appetite Statements. Dawn advised that the information would be disseminated to staff through the Central Compliance Team and also reiterated that a discussion would be required with DfE to keep them informed.

The CEO advised that the organisation needs to embrace this and that we should also be careful not to punish risk takers and how it is embedded in the organisation would be critical. The Risk Appetite Statement was approved by the Board, without amendment.

PAPERS TO NOTE

12. MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

This paper was noted with no comments.

13. SPARE OFFICE CAPACITY – HQ

Mel Chittock introduced the Paper. The SID noted that a variety of external organisations were keen to meet and discuss the options.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The CEO gave a brief update on his two recent and very constructive meetings with the Minister and advised that the Minister had sought, listened to and reflected Invest NI's views in his published Economic Vision statement.

The SID brought forward a paper, on behalf of the interim Chair, to constitute an Executive Performance Assessment Committee (EPAC). The Board approved the paper, on the proviso that the format of the ToR be updated to follow that of the other Board Committees.

The Board meeting ended at 12:40.

15. DATE OF THE NEXT BOARD MEETING

The next Board meeting will commence at 10:15 on Thursday 28 March 2024 and will be held in Invest NI Headquarters, Belfast.

Wendy Savage, March 2024

Chair