

MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTIETH MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE OF ARMAGH OBSERVATORY AND PLANETARIUM HELD ON 24 JUNE 2024 AT 11.00 AM IN THE PLANETARIUM BOARDROOM

Present: Mr J Briggs (Chair), Mr G Cox, Professor M Darnley, Revd Canon M Hagan, Professor C Jackman*, Mr P Kennedy, Dr K Lemon, Ms G McVeigh, Mr R O’Hara, Mr E Rooney and Mr R Wilson
* via Zoom

In Attendance: Professor M Burton (Director), Mrs C Corvan (Head of Corporate Services), Dr M Sarzi (Head of Research), Mr L Knox (Head of Finance and Income Generation), Mrs S Mackle (Education and Outreach Manager), Dr S Dane (Boardroom Apprentice) and Mrs L Brown (Corporate Manager)

Apologies: Professor R Hunter and Professor M Mathioudakis

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies were received as outlined above and it was noted that one of the new DfC nominees, Dr Ruth Hunter, had tendered an apology due to prior diary commitments.

2. WELCOME

2.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting extending a particular welcome to the new members Gráinne McVeigh and Ronan O’Hara, DfC nominees. He commented that they were joining at a very important and busy time and he knew that both could make a very significant contribution to AOP.

2.2 Following the Chair’s lead, each of the Management Committee members and AOP Management Team provided a brief introduction for the benefit of the new members. Thereafter, the two new members present did likewise.

2.3 The Chair advised that it was Sarah Dane’s last meeting as Boardroom Apprentice and thanked her for her contribution over the past year. In response, Dr Dane expressed thanks for the opportunity that had been afforded to her.

3. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

3.1 The Chair reminded members and officers of the need to declare any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest associated with any item on the Agenda, either now or at the relevant point during the meeting.

3.2 Mr Wilson declared an interest as Chief Executive of Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and a member of the Board of Governors of the Royal School should any matters relating to either arise.

4. MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8 APRIL 2024

- 4.1 On the proposal of Mr Kennedy, seconded by Mr Rooney, the minutes of the meeting of 8 April 2024 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- 5.1 There were nine actions arising from previous meetings, eight of which it was proposed to close. A number of these would be picked up on later in the meeting. One action from previous meetings remained ongoing.
- 5.2 There were no further matters raised.

6. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

- 6.1 The Chair reported that the Partnership Agreement had been considered by the Board of Governors on 7th May at which the revised draft had been approved subject to clarification on detail and authority delegated to the Director, Head of Corporate Services and Chair of the Management Committee to finalise. It had been signed by the Permanent Secretary on 22 May 2024. One of the outcomes was that the Director's delegated authority approval limit had increased to £150,000. The document was currently being designed.
- 6.2 At the request of the Chair, the Committee granted approval to amend any policies that referred to the MSFM to Partnership Agreement. **Action MC 24/6/24-01 – Any references to MSFM in Policies to be replaced with Partnership Agreement.**
- 6.3 The Chair advised that discussion had taken place at the Board of Governors regarding the formation of a Strategic Oversight Committee (SOC). He explained that there were a matrix of issues including the UNESCO bid; the partnership with Birr and Dunsink; the relationship with the Royal School and AOP's redevelopment project. In addition to this was AOP's relationship with Armagh and being fully part of the place of Armagh. There was concern that something to further one element would affect another and a need to ensure all of the issues were carefully examined and that AOP was much more agile. It was proposed to establish a SOC and the Board of Governors had delegated authority to the Management Committee.
- 6.4 Draft Terms of Reference for the Strategic Oversight Committee (SOC) had previously been circulated. The proposal was that the Chairs of the existing Committees plus the Director would form the SOC, with a minimum 5 and maximum 8 members and that it meet on a monthly basis, in person if possible. The Director would also sit on the Committee as a full member. The Committee would have delegated powers to take more agile action; respond to challenges, difficulties and opportunities as they arose over the next year and to be agile in the funding environment.
- 6.5 The Chair advised he had spoken to Mr O'Hara, whose experience and knowledge would be valuable on the SOC, and that Mr O'Hara had agreed to sit on the Committee. The membership of the SOC would be Mr Briggs (as MC Chair); Dr Lemon (SPRC Chair); Mr Kennedy (ARAC Chair); Mr Rooney (SPRC Chair) and Mr O'Hara. He sought nominees from other Management Committee members, in response to which Mr Cox indicated he was willing to sit on the SOC provided he could attend remotely and in relation to legal matters.
- 6.6 The Chair added that they could review membership during the year and that the Director would also sit on the Committee as a member. The first meeting was that afternoon and at that the Terms of Reference should be agreed.

- 6.7 Mr Wilson put his name forward for the SOC, which was accepted by the Chair.
- 6.8 The Chair referred to the paper on the Review of the Delegation process and advised that the issue of delegation had been brought to the Board of Governors and it had been content to leave the detail to the Management Committee and to report back. He referred to the session being facilitated by Mr Cox and hoped that it would be possible to bring back a firm proposal to the Management Committee in September. **Action MC 24/6/24-02 – Proposed Delegation Process to be brought to Management Committee in September.**
- 6.9 Confidential item removed
- 6.10 The Chair commented on the desire to build relationships with the Royal School to look at opportunities and that moving forward they should also speak with the Headmasters from St Patrick's and St Catherine's in terms of education.
- 6.11 The Chair referred to the recent appointment exercise as a result of which it had become clear that the process was not the best way of recruiting academics. The matter had been discussed with DfC and there was a recognition that this be given further consideration in due course. However, there was a mechanism of appointing three co-opted members.
- 6.12 Professor Burton reported that he had been in discussions with two senior members of the academic community and with a senior member from the Discovery Centres industry.
- 6.13 The Chair sought Management Committee approval for the Director to continue his discussions with the identified individuals and to follow whatever process was required by DfC. He hoped that it would be possible to bring a firm proposal to the September meeting. **Action MC 24/6/24-03 – Professor Burton to continue discussion with potential co-optees and progress with DfC.**
- 6.14 From within the new members, Management Committee made the following appointments to Committees:
- ARAC – Gráinne McVeigh
SPRC and SOC – Ronan O'Hara
REAC – Ruth Hunter
- 6.15 It was noted that there remained one vacancy on ARAC; the membership of SPRC mirrored that of SOC and the Management Committee Chair had spoken to Mr Rooney, SPRC Chair, regarding the potential of running the two meetings together; when the Terms of Reference for REAC were being reviewed provision could be made to enable the co-opted members from the research and education environment to sit on that Committee.
- 6.16 With regards to the Collaborative Understanding project, the Chair reported that Mr Stutt had spoken to a number of stakeholders and had produced a paper, however, further work was required.
- 6.17 The Chair reported that the revised Terms of Reference for both the Board of Governors and the Management Committee were considered by the Board of Governors on 7 May. The Board of Governors approved the changes to both sets of Terms of Reference and delegated authority to the Management Committee to approve further amendments. Updated Terms of Reference would be brought back to the September meeting. **Action MC 24/6/24-04 – Updated BoG and MC Terms of Reference to be brought to September meeting.**
- 6.18 The annual Management Committee effectiveness checklist would be issued in the coming days for completion.

6.19 Mrs Corvan briefly outlined the purpose of the Governance Training the following day which would include roles and responsibilities for the Board.

6.20 The Chair outlined the proposed meeting dates for 2025:

- Monday 31 March
- Monday 23 and Tuesday 24 June
- Monday 29 September
- Monday 15 December

6.21 With reference to the 2-day meeting the Chair said they would like to take members' views as to whether it was working and whether December might be a better time. **Action MC 24/6/24-05 – Feedback from members on timing of 2-day meeting to be sought.**

6.22 The Chair outlined the Agenda for the remainder of the day which included lunch with staff; presentations from PhD students; Dome Shows; SOC or Dome Show and Observatory Tour for those not on SOC; drink's reception in the Observatory followed by dinner in the Planetarium. The Agenda for the following day included a meeting of REAC followed by Governance Training, concluding with lunch.

7. REPORT FROM DIRECTOR

7.1 At the outset Professor Burton referred to the approval of the Partnership Agreement and advised that one final discussion had related to the role of the Director and that the Director should be active in the key areas of Research and Education. He said this was now explicitly part of the Partnership Agreement and was part of the history of the organisation and should continue into the future.

7.2 Professor Burton's report, which had previously been circulated, had been structured into sections in respect of Corporate; Research; Education and Outreach and History and Heritage activities. In terms of Corporate Activities it provided updates in relation to The Astronomical Observatories of Ireland (AOI) Partnership; UNESCO World Heritage Aspirations; AOP Redevelopment Project; Ministerial Visit; AOP Budget and Capital Projects. The Research Activities included updates on the Corporate Strategy for Research; The Changing Publication Landscape and Postdoctoral Positions. The Education and Outreach Activities provided updates on Spring Visitor Statistics; Event Company Tender; Staff Movements; New Planetarium Shows and Digistar Lite Projector Failure. In terms of History and Heritage activities there was a report on Activities and Outstanding Universal Value statement. Professor Burton took members through his report.

7.3 The Committee noted:

- activity associated with the Astronomical Observatories of Ireland Partnership included;
 - regular meetings of the three partners;
 - development of a governance structure, with an Oversight Board;
 - Terms of Reference of the Oversight Board having been agreed by AOP Board of Governors;
 - agreement having been reached to support a new Lindsay PhD scholarship for a project involving the LOFAR array at Birr;
 - preparation of a research strategy;
- progress on the application to the UNESCO Rol tentative list and the process of evaluation;
- the status of the OBC and funding applications for AOP Redevelopment Project;
- Minister Gordon Lyons MLA had visited on 29 May;

- that since the report had been written funding had been received for a Portable Planetarium Projector;
- a corporate strategy for Research was being developed through REAC and a draft would be considered at the meeting the following day;
- a positive update in relation to the changing publication landscape whereby the Board of the European journal Astronomy and Astrophysics (A&A) had decided to allow a waiver of publications charges to Northern Ireland Institutions. This included QUB as well as AOP. AOP would now be able to resume its subscription with A&A for access to the journal;
- updates on a number of Postdoctoral positions;
- the spring visitor statistics and notable events;
- appointment of the events company BNL;
- staff resignation;
- new planetarium shows and the potential opportunities;
- Digistar Lite projector failure;
- recent history and heritage activities;
- the Outstanding Universal Value statement that formed part of the UNESCO Tentative List application.

7.4 During his presentation Professor Burton responded to a query from Mr Cox regarding research publications explaining that the default publication would be Astronomy and Astrophysics, however there may be some cases where they may wish to publish via another journal. Each would be considered on a case by case basis, in particular to Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society which has published the most AOP publications.

7.5 Mr Wilson commented that Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council had used the events company appointed and had found it to be very competent.

7.6 Picking up on the Director's report, the Chair said AOP was inextricably linked to Birr and Dunsink and to the place of Armagh and these facets always needed to be considered in developing plans and moving forward.

7.7 There were no questions on Professor Burton's report and the Committee was content to accept it. The Chair thanked Professor Burton for his report.

8. Confidential item removed

9. UPDATE FROM BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING HELD ON 7 MAY 2024

9.1 In addition to matters previously reported the Chair provided a verbal update on the Board of Governors meeting held on 7 May 2024. It was noted that the Board of Governors had:

- appointed Archbishop's McDowell and Martin to the Oversight Board of the AOI;
- approved the revised draft OBC;
- approved the draft Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24 and delegated authority to the Management Committee to sign them off;
- agreed to delegate authority to the Management Committee to take forward and approve the 2024/25 Business Plan.

9.2 The Chair pointed out that the role of the Board of Governors was as an oversight committee and its chief responsibility was to ensure that the culture and character, history and patrimony was in keeping

with its vision and it had agreed that it was such. He stressed that whilst it met only once a year, it had an important role to play.

10. NOTES OF MEETING OF FINANCE SUB-COMMITTEE HELD ON 8 MAY 2024

- 10.1 Notes of the Finance Sub-Committee meeting held on 8 May 2024 had been previously circulated.
- 10.2 Mr Knox explained that the meeting had taken place in a vacuum as at that stage there had been no funding allocation from the Department. The outcome of the meeting had been to write to the Permanent Secretary. Thereafter the Department had provided direction to submit a formal letter demonstrating savings that could be made and inescapable costs and Professor Burton had issued a letter to the Permanent Secretary. Subsequent to this AOP had received the allocation it had requested, but not what it needed, as they had agreed to make certain cuts.
- 10.3 Mrs Corvan pointed out that although they had been allocated what they had asked for they had made savings of £178,000 in that ask. The ask was to cover inescapable pressures and that was what had been allocated.
- 10.4 The Chair acknowledged that it was as good an outcome as they could have hoped for. He hoped there would be opportunities for in-year funding.
- 10.5 Mr Kennedy pointed out that they had taken a pro-active approach and Mrs Corvan advised that the Department had been appreciative of that.

11. UPDATE FROM THE RESEARCH EDUCATION AND OUTREACH COMMITTEE (REAC)

- 11.1 Dr Lemon reported that in terms of Education and Outreach REAC had been presented with the monthly visitor reports and had discussed how the Planetarium was at capacity for school bookings and noted that this could be doubled with improved facilities which could hopefully be resolved with the redevelopment in the future. REAC had discussed use of the events company to source suitable events.
- 11.2 In terms of the development of an Education Strategy it had been noted that given the forthcoming busy season with both schools and the public this couldn't be progressed until after the summer. REAC would provide the Education Team with whatever support it could and whilst it didn't have an exact timeline it was hoped that the Strategy could be ready by the December Management Committee.
- 11.3 On the research side, Dr Lemon reported that REAC had discussed the changes to the publication environment and the ongoing discussions around that; the PDRA pay scales and the use of NICS pay scales within the organisation. The Head of Research had presented a proposed structure for the draft Research Strategy and that summary was being discussed at REAC the following day with a view to bringing a draft Strategy to the Management Committee in September.
- 11.4 REAC had agreed to have Intellectual Property as a rolling agenda item for each of its meetings to allow discussions for matters as they arose. There had been an update on progress on the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers including actions identified for the forthcoming financial year.
- 11.5 The Policy on Academic Integrity in Research: Code of Practice and Procedure had been considered by REAC and was recommended for approval by the Management Committee.

- 11.6 The Director had presented a paper to raise awareness of the challenges involved in the diverse range of specialised research and education ICT needs. REAC had also considered a paper on a proposal for a Digital Theatre Education Officer. REAC had agreed to support both of these in any way it could.
- 11.7 REAC had noted that preparation for the next REF was ongoing and funding applications for small grants and legacy award schemes.
- 11.8 There being no questions, the Management Committee accepted the report from REAC and approved the Policy on Academic Integrity in Research: Code of Practice and Procedure.

12. UPDATE FROM THE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE (ARAC)

12.1 Mr Kennedy reported that:

- a pre-meeting, without officers, had taken place with the internal and external auditors at which no issues had arisen;
- the annual ARAC Self-Assessment would be issued within the coming days; and
- the ARAC Terms of Reference, which were reviewed every three years, were now due for review and would be brought to ARAC in September.

12.2 In terms of Internal Audit, ARAC had considered the Terms of Reference for the three internal audits to be conducted during the financial year – Human Resource Management; ICT Systems and Security and Finance – Income and Procurement and recommended these for approval.

12.3 ARAC received an update on the five outstanding Internal Audit recommendations carried forward from prior years. One relating to PRONI had since progressed through the Validation Panel and would now proceed for Ministerial approval before being laid with the Assembly; two were deemed to be complete and two had not yet reached the implementation date.

12.4 In relation to ICT matters, ARAC had considered the ICT Risk Register, which identified 16 risks across 5 risk categories and included a new risk 'Business travel to high risk countries'. Of the 16 risks, once treated, 5 remained high, 9 moderate and 2 low. ARAC had also considered a revised ICT Policy. The Committee was content to recommend approval to the Management Committee.

12.5 ARAC Chair referred to the intention of having a ½ day workshop deep dive into risk management and risk appetite, identifying all the risks and assessing them and it was hoped that as many members of the Management Committee would attend that as possible.

12.6 The Corporate Risk Register identified 9 risks across 5 risk categories. Of the 9 risks once treated, 5 remained extreme, 1 high and 3 moderate. The Chair explained that the Risk Register had been updated prior to learning about the indicative budget allocation and whilst there might be a slight softening of some of the risks they remained beyond one year. ARAC recommended approval of the Corporate Risk Register.

12.7 The Chair reported that ARAC had considered a number of documents relating to Business Continuity:

- update report on Business Continuity Plan;
- Business Continuity Plan;
- Options Paper on Business Continuity Plan Exercise; and
- an Incident Report in relation to the suspension of Worldpay Merchant Services.

12.8 ARAC recommended approval of the Business Continuity Plan.

12.9 In terms of external audit, NIAO had provided a verbal update advising that work was under way.

12.10 ARAC had noted:

- the Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24;
- the Finance Report; and
- a letter dated 6 June 2024 re Minister's Initial Budget Allocations for 2024-25.

12.11 In respect of policies, ARAC was content to recommend approval of the:

- Policy on Acceptance & Provision of Gifts and Hospitality; and
- Information and Security Policy (Card Terminals) which was a new policy.

12.12 The Management Committee accepted the report from ARAC and approved the Terms of Reference for each of the Internal Audits; ICT Risk Register; ICT Policy; Corporate Risk Register; Business Continuity Plan; Policy on Acceptance & Provision of Gifts and Hospitality and the Information and Security Policy (Card Terminals).

12.13 Mr Cox referred to the Paper regarding ICT Systems and Security, Paper 4 and enquired if agreement had been reached between the academic community and corporate side. In response, Mr Kennedy confirmed that it had but there was still some work to be done and added that one of the purposes of the deep dive risk management workshop was to bring forward all the risks. He said there were other papers they did not have time to consider, including the recent data breach at the British Library. Because the risk register formed the underpinning of governance ARAC wanted to really take time to challenge themselves as to what the risks were and to develop something that was meaningful.

12.14 Mrs Corvan clarified that the Paper referred to by Mr Cox was the Terms of Reference for the Internal Audit. She explained that there were three internal audits to be carried out during the year and ARAC had asked for them to be developed and brought through for consideration.

12.15 Mr Cox acknowledged that it was not easy to balance ease of use when collaborating internationally and preventing cyber attack. The Chair added that the dynamics of cyber-security and unique research was difficult but they had to try to solve it.

13. UPDATE FROM THE STAFFING POLICY AND REMUNERATION COMMITTEE (SPRC)

13.1 Mr Rooney reported that SPRC was required to carry out its annual self-assessment evaluation and the 3-yearly review of its Terms of Reference was also due. The Committee had agreed to hold a special meeting to consider both matters and report back.

13.2 In terms of staffing issues, SPRC had noted that the pay offer for 2023 would be included in June salaries; evaluation of the PDRA posts had been returned and these would be brought into the pay structures at AOP and the recruitment of two PDRA positions had been successful.

13.3 SPRC had considered a report on mandatory Unconscious Bias training that had been undertaken by a number of staff with good attendance and excellent feedback. A further session was being planned for those who had been unable to attend that session and a session for Management Committee members was also being arranged.

13.4 Mr Rooney advised that SPRC had considered the responses to the annual employee engagement survey which had taken place during May 2024. He reported that the response rate was down on the previous year and there were a number of comments on issues that would need to be looked at. In

terms of comments from previous years' surveys, he said that staff had felt that they looked at the positives and ignored the negatives and it was therefore important for the Management Committee to make sure that it was content that sufficient action had been taken to address concerns raised. There had been below average scores in relation to communication and transparency of decision making. SPRC had also considered a discussion paper on communication in terms of how the organisation communicated better on information sharing and decision making. He said that having a communication framework would be valuable for all within the organisation and this would be taken forward through the SOC. He encouraged all Management Members to read the results of the staff survey.

- 13.5 There was also a separate student survey as the issues differed for students from those of employees.
- 13.6 Mr Rooney felt that where MC members needed to get more involved they should and it was important to take action as appropriate. He added that there was also some very positive feedback.
- 13.7 SPRC considered and was content to recommend approval of the Employers Pension Discretions Policy; Volunteer Policy and Recruitment Policy.
- 13.8 SPRC had received an update on Project Juno and the Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Strategy. The Project Juno accreditation was changing and SPRC had received a report on the changes. SPRC had also agreed to rename the Juno Committee to reflect a remit covering equality, diversity and inclusion in the organisation.
- 13.9 The Committee considered a report on progress against targets in respect of the Diversity Mark Charter Bronze status which was due to be submitted in August.
- 13.10 SPRC had reviewed sickness absence figures, which were low and a question had been raised if this was a recording issue. Absence management would be covered in the Internal Audit on Human Resource Management.
- 13.11 The Management Committee accepted the report from SPRC and approved Employers Pension Discretions Policy, Volunteer Policy and Recruitment Policy.

14. PERFORMANCE AGAINST BUSINESS PLAN 2023-24

- 14.1 The Corporate Plan Non-KPI Objectives and KPIs for the financial year 2023-24 had previously been circulated.
- 14.2 Mrs Corvan explained that the paper on Non-KPI Objectives provided quarterly updates on progress against Business Plan objectives. She briefly elaborated on the KPIs that had not been met and reported that DfC had commended AOP at the recent Partnership Meeting on its performance.
- 14.3 Mr Cox stressed that whilst there wasn't much comment on the information provided it was incredibly useful and should continue to be provided.
- 14.4 The Committee approved the 2023-24 Non-KPI Objectives and KPIs.

15.0 FINANCE

- 15.1 A Finance Report prepared by Mr Knox and a letter dated 6 June 2024 regarding the Minister's Initial Budget Allocations had previously been circulated.

- 15.2 Mrs Corvan suggested that AOP note that it was an indicative budget allocation until the conclusion of an Equality Impact Assessment exercise which would be ongoing until September.
- 15.3 In terms of the Finance Report Mr Knox reported that the budget presented did not take into account any potential savings in respect of publication costs and included very ambitious income targets for the Planetarium.

16.0 DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2024-25

- 16.1 The draft Business Plan 2024-25 had previously been circulated.
- 16.2 Mrs Corvan advised that the draft Business Plan would be updated in light of the budget, however it had been written on the basis that the budget allocation would cover inescapable pressures. She explained that the Business Plan approach had been streamlined to identify what was important to AOP to deliver in 2024-25, with the four priorities:
- Maintain Organisational Performance;
 - Maximise Efficiencies and Self-Generated Income;
 - Progress the Redevelopment Project; and
 - Participate in the Astronomical Observatories of Ireland (AOI) Partnership.
- 16.3 The draft Business Plan included a number of focused objectives with strategic actions with only a small number of meaningful KPIs. Mrs Corvan anticipated that DfC may wish to see the number of KPIs increased.
- 16.4 Mrs Corvan drew attention to Appendix 1 which mapped the four core objectives across the Corporate Plan Pillars.
- 16.5 Professor Burton expressed caution about forecasting a 5% increase in visitor numbers due to changes in booking habits away from advance booking and the impact of good weather. Mr Cox suggested Ms Leslie, a member of the Board of Governors, might have some insight into this.
- 16.6 In response to a query from the Chair as to whether there was any harm in having a KPI that might not be attained Mrs Corvan advised that it had been reflected in the Risk Register that the targets were challenging. She commented that 2023 had been a very wet summer and the Planetarium had benefitted from that. It was hoped that the Robots exhibition, which was due to start, would boost numbers. In arriving at the target they had discussed that an external events company had been contracted to provide a programme of focussed events for school holidays and whilst it was a challenging target it was one that they had felt they could meet.
- 16.7 The Education and Outreach Manager stated that they needed something to aspire to and focus on. She acknowledged the reliance on the weather but added that they could look at what they could do differently when the weather was good such as promoting the outdoor activities. Mrs Corvan explained that it had been a priority to maximise income because of the challenging budget situation. An events company had been contracted in and all of the events should be making a profit and on that basis it was felt that a 5% uplift should be fairly achievable.
- 16.8 Discussion ensued during which Professor Burton reiterated that he was uncomfortable with forecasting a 5% increase in visitor numbers when the trend had been flat over the past year. Mr Rooney felt they should be able to gather trend information and make an informed decision on that basis. He referred to the redevelopment project and the need to set the aspirational vision for AOP adding that the Business Case had been based on AOP being a much more significant organisation in

the future. He suggested reviewing whatever information they had to inform what the appropriate target should be.

- 16.9 Professor Burton noted that the Planetarium had been operating at capacity over the past two summers while the redevelopment plan aimed to raise that capacity. Mr Rooney commented that a model based on how people booked would be subject to quite a bit of volatility.
- 16.10 Commenting that the targets were predicated on a 5% uplift in footfall correlating to a 5% uplift in turnover Mr O'Hara queried to what extent income was linked to footfall. Mr Knox advised that there would be a price increase from 1 July and Mrs Corvan added that off-peak times were also being targeted through some events.
- 16.11 In response to a query from the Chair as to whether there was an opportunity to review the figures in-year it was noted that the next stage, once approved by the Management Committee, would be submission to the Department and ultimately the Minister and it would be difficult to amend once approved by the Minister. It was anticipated that once submitted to DfC the Department would engage with AOP on the document.
- 16.12 Mr Rooney reiterated the need for an evidence base to support the proposed target and in response to a suggestion from the Chair of submitting the Business Plan to the Department as it currently stood and bringing a feedback report in September for further discussion Professor Burton reiterated that he was uncomfortable with the target.
- 16.13 Discussion ensued regarding the targets during which Ms McVeigh suggested having a range and queried whether, keeping the ambition, a stretch target would be acceptable given that there were so many variables. Professor Burton advised that the previous year's target had been 67,000 and 72,000 had been achieved in it as well as in the previous year (i.e. in 2022-23 and 2023-24). Given this, the capacity limits and the change in booking habits now being experienced, he felt the target should remain at 72,000 for on-site visitors.
- 16.14 The Chair asked if the Committee was content to rework the target on the basis of their ambition and the evidence base and to approve the document on that basis and Mrs Corvan pointed out that the target could be reviewed and that this would also require the budget to be re-worked.
- 16.15 In response to a query from Mr Rooney regarding a number of Objectives for which the Strategic Action was 'Alignment of Operational plans and individual staff action plans with business plan objectives' Mrs Corvan explained that this had been used where there were no other strategic targets. Mr Rooney suggested removing that from the strategic targets and to include as an overriding strategic action for the organisation. He said it should be a requirement of the organisation and if there was nothing specific against the objectives a qualitative update could be provided.
- 16.16 In terms of the budget included in the Business Plan, Mr Knox advised that if they revised the visitor numbers downwards that would create a pressure and further savings would have to be found. Additionally, Mrs Corvan pointed out that the budget had been aligned with the letter that had been submitted to the Department and it would be important to maintain this.
- 16.17 The Chair suggested maintaining the current target and to include a form of words which expressed the ambition versus the evidence base within the Business Plan.
- 16.18 There being no dissent the Management Committee was deemed to have approved the suggestion.

17.0 AOB

17.1 The Committee noted the:

- dates of the meetings for 2024 – Monday 30 September and Monday 16 December;
- availability of training as outlined in the report;
- PR Coverage Reports March-May 2024.

The Chair thanked members for their attendance and participation.

The meeting concluded at 1.04 pm.

Signed as a true record of the meeting

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(Chair)

Dated: