

Dóchas
The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

Dóchas Board 74 (5-19)
19/09/19

Dóchas Board

held in the Dóchas office on
Thursday, 19 September 2019 at 10am

M i n u t e s

Present: Finola Finnan (Trócaire) Chairperson
Peter McDevitt (Self Help Africa) Treasurer
Sarah O'Toole (CBM Ireland)
Louise Supple (Concern Worldwide)
Niamh Carty (Oxfam Ireland)
Gerry Egan (External Board Member)
Charlie Lamson (Sightsavers)
Grace Milton (External Board Member) – via Zoom

In attendance: Suzanne Keatinge (CEO of Dóchas)
Anna Farrell (Dóchas – Finance and Operations Manager)

Apologies: Paul O'Brien (Plan International Ireland)
Siobhán McGee (ActionAid Ireland) Vice Chairperson in the Chair

The Chairperson opened the meeting by welcoming those present. It was noted that Heydi Foster-Breslin has resigned from the Board following her resignation from Misean Cara. The meeting recorded a vote of thanks to Heydi for her work during her term on the Board.

Actions:

- Heydi to be invited to lunch after November meeting if available.

1. Apologies and Agenda

Apologies (see above) were noted. There were no changes to the Agenda as circulated.

2. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

All members present confirmed that there were no conflicts of interest.

3. Minutes of Board Meeting

The Minutes of the 73rd Board meeting (20/06/19) were approved: Niamh (proposed), Sarah (seconded).

4. Minutes of Dóchas AGM

The Minutes of the AGM (2/05/19) were considered to be an accurate reflection of the discussions that took place during the meeting: Niamh (proposed), Sarah (seconded). The minutes will be tabled at the 2020 AGM for formal approval by the membership.

5. Matters Arising and To-do List

Most of the items on the to-do list have either been completed or will be addressed during the course of this meeting.

6. Staffing situation and solutions

The Chairperson said that there has been a lot of unexpected staff changes of late, which was putting a huge strain on the team, and its ability to deliver on the strategy.

The CEO and FOM left the meeting to allow the Human Resources sub-committee to brief the board fully on the situation, and the plans to address them.

Following the discussion, the Board confirmed that it was satisfied with the actions taken to date, and was fully supportive of the recruitment proposals. They also agreed with the proposal to engage a consultant to offer HR support and provide some extra capacity in that regard. It was also agreed to discuss the alignment of the strategy with the proposed staffing structure, at the Board Away Day (7 October).

7. OECD DAC peer review feedback

As noted in the CEO report, the CEO outlined Dóchas' recent engagement with the DAC peer review process, which included the submission of a 'shadow memo,' (June) and supporting the CSO meetings during the review team's visit to Dublin. The meetings themselves were relatively light on substance around key policy issues, which was frustrating, but some key points that emerged included:

- A concern among CSOs that the relationship with Irish Aid had become a more transactional one, rather than partnership based. One specific action identified, *of particular relevance to Dóchas*, was to find new/different entry points for strategic dialogue;
- Transparency around funding decisions wasn't always forthcoming; NGOs, especially the smaller one, were feeling the strain of compliance; but Irish Aid's flexibility around funding was very much appreciated
- Irish Aid's high level of turnover of staff and the lack of expertise in some roles was noted as an ongoing problem; less so the number of staff positions which had improved.
- In terms of managing any increased to the ODA budget, Irish Aid's concern is around how much of that increase will go to other government departments, while CSOs were more concerned at the perceived increases going to the multi-laterals, including the big Development Banks, without any clear rationale. The shadow report urged the need for a conversation with CSOs to help us understand an appropriate balance of funding.

8. Report by the CEO

Copies of the CEO Report were circulated to members in advance of this meeting. In presenting the report the CEO highlighted the following:

- **Membership Issues:** VMM is relocating its operations to the UK; ChildFund Ireland is looking to merge or scale down their operations significantly; and while VSO will continue to operate in Ireland it has closed its physical office in Dublin. Smaller organisations are feeling the strain and we need to pay attention to that.
- **Board Away Day:** The first part of the day (7 Oct.) will focus on the development of the Membership Charter. The second part we will focus on the strategy in light of the staffing changes. The public engagement conversation will need to wait until we have recruited expertise in this area.
- **Working Groups:** We are struggling to find chairs and vice-chairs of some working groups. Traditionally some of the bigger agencies would step into these roles. It will be important to look into this as part of our review of WGs, which has been put on hold until next year. In the meantime, we will circulate the current list to encourage Board members to have a conversation within their organisations.
- **Safeguarding Code:** This has now been finalised, and members are invited to sign up to it.
- **Results Framework:** In reviewing the framework we need to be clear on what we can and can't do by year end while not taking on extra tasks. We should be comfortable with the fact that there are occasions when it is okay for us to say that 'this is not our job'.

Actions:

- Suzanne to circulate list of working group chair vacancies.

9. Report from Sub-Committee on Finance, Audit & Risk (FARC)

A full report on the last meeting (9 Sept.) were circulated to members in advance of today's meeting, and many of the items have already been addressed under other agenda items. In light of ongoing changes to staffing, the expected budget re-forecasting was postponed until the November meeting.

10. Report from Sub-Committee on Governance

A full report on the last meeting (12 Sept.) were circulated to members in advance of today's meeting. In presenting the report from the meeting the Chairperson focussed on the following:

- Malachy Cardiff (Self Help Africa) has joined the committee and will participate as a non-Director.
- The CEO is in conversation with a possible Board nominee to see if they are interested in being co-opted to fill the casual member vacancy. If they are, the matter will be brought to the November Board meeting for discussion and decision.

11. Review of the Risk Register

It was noted that copies of the Risk Register, which was reviewed by the FARC (9 Sept.), were circulated to members in advance of this meeting.

In terms of risks that 'moved' or remained 'amber' (there are no red ones):

- Risk 1 moves from green to amber in light of the current staff capacity issue which could result in a perception that we are unable to deliver our strategy if communications around the issue are not managed sensitively.
- Risk 4 in relation to reputational risk to Dóchas of media reports about poor governance of NGOs remains amber.
- Risk 6 remained amber but for different reasons than previously. We don't expect members to leave the network because of our new fee proposal, but some small agencies are struggling.
- Risk 7 moved from amber to green following the signing of our MoU and receipt of funding from Irish Aid (July).
- Risk 12 remains amber pending upcoming staffing changes and recruitment processes as discussed under item 6 (Staffing situation and solutions).

The Chairperson said that we will use the opportunity of the away day (7 Oct.) to look at review how the risks relate to our strategy.

12. Draft Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy (for approval)

This policy was developed to fulfill an Irish Aid requirement. It was reviewed by the FARC (9 Sept.) and it is recommended that it be approved.

Decision:

- The Policy was approved: Peter (proposed); Finola (seconded).

13. Draft Conflict of Interest Policy (for approval)

This policy was reviewed by the sub-committees on FARC (9 Sept.) and on Governance (12 Sept.) with both recommending that it be approved.

Decision:

- The Policy was approved: Peter (proposed); Finola (seconded).

14. Other Business

Frontline Defenders: The chair reported on a recent meeting with the CEO of Frontline Defenders who continued to have an objection to the new fee system, particularly for NGOs who received relatively small amounts of funding from Irish Aid and/or other Irish sources. While they recognise the value of Dóchas membership and are keen to participate, they asked the Board to relook at the fee system, and consider a calculation based on a portion of funding from Irish sources.

During a general discussion, while it was regrettable that the principles applied to the new fee system made it difficult for some organisations, it was the best option available to satisfy the diverse range of funding models among the network, and lessen the administrative burden for Dóchas. Furthermore, as the new fee structure had been passed at the recent AGM - after extensive consultation - it was not appropriate to revisit the decision at this stage. However, the system will need to be reviewed every three years so this idea for a hybrid model maybe considered at that time.

Action

- Finola to send a letter to Frontline confirming the Board’s discussion

Other

- Finalists for the **Dóchas Awards 2019** (23 October, city centre, 8.30am to 11.30am) have been selected and will be announced tomorrow. There was concern around the accessibility of the venue, which would be checked again.
- A Dóchas delegation, including the CEO, will be in New York for UNGA.

15. Dates of future meetings

The **Board Away Day 2019** will take place on Monday, 7 October 2019 from 9am – 4pm in the dlr LexIcon, Haigh Terrace, Moran Park, Dún Laoghaire.

The next meeting of the Dóchas Board will take place on 21 November at 10am in the Dóchas office.

The **Dóchas Christmas Drinks** will be held on 18 December (venue TBC).

Chairperson:.....

Date:.....