

Dóchas
The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

Dóchas Board 79 (3-20)
07/05/20

Dóchas Board

held via Zoom on
Thursday, 7 May 2020 at 11.15am

M i n u t e s

Present: Finola Finnan (Trócaire) Chairperson
Siobhán McGee (ActionAid Ireland) Vice Chairperson
Peter McDevitt (Self Help Africa) Treasurer
Paul O'Brien (Plan International Ireland)
Sarah O'Toole (CBM Ireland)
Louise Supple (Concern Worldwide)
Niamh Carty (Oxfam Ireland)
Grace Milton (External Board Member)

In attendance: Suzanne Keatinge (CEO of Dóchas)

1. Apologies and Agenda

For the record, it should be noted that Gerry Egan resigned from the Board on 1 May having served his full 6 year-term as an External Director. The Chair has asked that he remain on the Dóchas Emergency task group and Governance sub-committee as an advisor. It was agreed to make an exception that a non-member participate on a sub-committee under these extraordinary circumstances as his extensive experience on governance and knowledge of Dóchas would be valuable.

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 77th Board meeting (26/03/20) were approved: Peter McDevitt (Proposed), Siobhan McGee (Seconded).

4. 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.

It was noted that the Dóchas Charter, following sign off at the last meeting, has been designed and will be put on our website.

5. Response to Covid-19

The CEO shared a short presentation outlining Dóchas' strategy and focus in response to COVID-19 and some of the challenges that we face. A key concern was staff capacity, as both the Head of Membership Engagement and Operations Manager have to take time off over the next few weeks. However, we have recruited a project co-ordinator and we expect the Head of Policy to return from maternity leave in June on a full-time basis. The Board congratulated the team on the amount of

work that is being done to convene and support the sector during this period, whilst also noting concern around the extra workload.

In the general discussion, other key points included:

- Remote recruitment of the public engagement role (start date, 2 June) will be difficult, but given the urgency of getting this project started, it was felt to be important.
- The Catch-Up emails are very useful, but only if they are manageable in terms of workload.
- Given the urgent need for policy capacity in relation to the ODA work, it was suggested that Dóchas consider hiring an external consultancy and/or staff capacity. Dóchas has already applied for the PRII scheme which aims to team charities up with pro-bono PR support.
- We need to be careful that we are not setting up too many 'extra' groups during this period.

6. Revised Budget

A revised budget had been circulated in advance with a note explaining key changes. The treasurer noted that both the FARC and the Emergency task team has reviewed the changes proposed and were comfortable to recommend them.

The CEO stressed that it was now provisional on Irish Aid agreeing to pay our grant in full; they have been waiting for this revision before processing our grant. They have agreed to the 12-month salary provision in the public engagement project.

Decisions:

- The revised budget was approved: Sarah O'Toole (Proposed), Finola Finnan (Seconded).

7. Emergency Response Team report

The notes from two meetings of the Dóchas Board's Emergency Response team (ERT) were circulated in advance of the meeting. Key issues discussed:

- The CEO is continuing to stress the importance of mental health and to urge staff to take breaks where necessary, but she does not feel it's possible at this stage to mandate staff to take leave. We may need to be flexible by the end of the year, for example, looking at the numbers of days staff can carry forward leave into 2021.
- It was agreed not to discuss membership fees with members at this stage. The Board will need to agree messaging closer to the time. Recruitment of External Directors has resumed, and has been advertised. It will be important to propose candidates at the next Board meeting.

Actions:

- Finola and Niamh volunteered to join a staff coffee meeting to ensure some communication between the Board and staff. Other Directors are encouraged to participate as well over the next few months.
- We will aim to host the AGM on Thursday 23 July in order to comply with Company law that it is held within 15 months of the last one. We still need to get clarity on whether we are legally allowed to hold virtual meetings. Our constitution doesn't stipulate either but it does demand a quorum of no less than 18 members.

Decision:

- The notes of the ERT were agreed with one small amendment. Proposer: Peter McDevitt; Seconder: Siobhan McGee

8. ODA strategy options

The CEO gave a short update on Dóchas' work so far in defining an ODA strategy, which includes a first meeting of a 'task group', a first draft of a policy brief, and a short strategy proposal. There was a real urgency to do some lobbying in the next 3-week period to ensure ODA was in the new Programme for Government. The Board emphasised the importance of this work and that it needed to become a key priority for Dóchas.

Actions

- Send a letter to members, on behalf of the Board, asking for their collective support on this campaign, and stressing the urgency of it. Finola to draft, to be sent by 8th May

9. Report by the CEO

Copies of the CEO Report were circulated to members in advance of this meeting.

Decision:

- It was agreed that Dóchas would adopt the policy position in relation to debt relief, as supported by a number of our members, including ActionAid.

Action:

- Suzanne to share her short analysis of the DAC peer review report, and expect a soft launch on 20 May

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

The Treasurer said that the main focus of the last meeting (21 April) was the revised budget which has already been covered under agenda item 6. Other actions included:

- Dóchas does not feel it is eligible for the Wage Subsidy scheme so will not be applying
- We have sought a rent reduction from the landlord.
- The Treasurer has agreed to work with Operations Manager to streamline quarterly reporting.

11. Review of the Risk Register

The Risk Register was circulated to members in advance of this meeting, and included some additional mitigation actions in response to COVID-19.

Risks that remained 'amber' (there are no red ones) were briefly discussed:

- Risk 4 – 'poor governance of a member leads to the sectors reputational damage' - remains amber although there has been no new issue reported in the media
- Risk 6 – 'members leave the network' – this may be inevitable in the economic circumstances but it is beyond our control.
- Risk 7 – 'Income declines' – this is likely to occur in the circumstances but we have agreed a revised budget and the financial controls are in place.

It was agreed to keep Risk 8 – 'Irish Aid withdraws its support' – as green, and not elevate it to amber. While we remain concerned that our grant has still not been paid, nor do we have an MoU beyond December, we should feel confident that the relationship remains positive and strong.

12. Other Business

None reported

13. Dates of future meetings

The next Dóchas Board meeting will take place on Thursday 25 June 2020. The AGM will be held on 23 July 2020 (venue TBC).

Chairperson:.....

Date:.....