

For publication

National Adult Literacy Agency

Board Meeting Wednesday 13th May 2020 5pm – 7pm

Present: Mary Bambrick (MB), Chairperson, Anna Touhy Halligan (ATH), Louise Canavan (LC), Lee Mitchel (LM), David Heylin (DH), Kevin Kelly (KK), Marie O’Gorman (MO’G), Olive Phelan (OP), Hazel Cryan (HC), Pat Ayton (PA), Ciaran Casey (CC). Apologies: Michael Duffy (MD)

In Attendance: Inez Bailey (IB).

Minute Taker: IB for item 1-4, 6 and 7 and LC for item 5.

Decisions taken at the meeting:
1) All minutes adopted – Minutes from the last board meeting on 5 February 2020 and all minutes from subcommittee meetings adopted.
2) New date for the AGM approved
3) Career Break approved for IB

Item 1: The agenda was adopted with no conflict of interest or loyalty noted.

Item 6: MB asked IB to update the Board on NALA’s status since deploying the Business Continuity Plan since 12th March. IB reported all staff were healthy, working remotely and the Agency had created a dedicated response to members as well as the public since the outbreak of COVID-19. This included dealing with COVID-19, specific information and support. Webinars have replaced training with very strong numbers participating. SOLAS funding has been confirmed and other income, mainly Plain English was holding up well. NALA’s efforts during COVID- 19 resulted in positive feedback from our funder, stakeholders and many members. Further details are in the CEOs April report.

Item 2 and 3: Minutes for all sub committees were adopted.

Item 7: The April Financial Accounts were noted, confirming income and expenditure forecast on target.

Item 4: The AGM will take place virtually on the 2nd September 2020 with a quorum of 3 members (likely the 3 Officers), at least one physically present in NALA, in line with legal advice supplied by Mason Hayes Curran.

IB left the meeting at 6pm and minutes for the remainder of the meeting were taken over by LC.

Item 5: Private members discussion. Staff leave request was approved.

MB advised the Board that a staff request had been received from IB. She first set out the normal process that is followed when a staff request is received for consideration by the board and confirmed this process had been followed including engagement with the Staff and Policy Subcommittee which would propose a recommendation to the board.

She noted that as with all staffing/HR matters, for reasons of privacy and confidentiality, papers are not circulated to the board. She confirmed, however, that due process had been followed and the process was documented.

MB advised that on 5 May, IB notified MB that she had an offer for a new job opportunity and that she wished to take this up and request a career break from NALA to do this. MB said that she had congratulated IB on the new job offer. IB has 25 years' service with NALA, the majority of those as CEO, and she has been integral to its achievements.

Since the request had been received the Staff and Policy Subcommittee (PA, LC and co-optee Michelle Soden), had convened virtually on two occasions (8th & 12th May). MB had also engaged with Kealin Ireland (KI) on several occasions - KI is an external HR consultant to NALA on HR matters.

In recommending a decision to the board, the Subcommittee had used the existing Staff Handbook; board decision-making tool (available to all board members); five criteria that she outlined in detail and which covered the extent of the Subcommittee's considerations. This included; (precedent for career break request, ability to recruit a new CEO, impact on outside structural/political changes, impact on the quality and performance of the organisation, and cost implications for NALA), as well as the current environment challenges in light of the COVID-19 public health emergency.

MB stated that the Subcommittee had deliberated on the request and had focused on the best interest of NALA as an organisation. It had regard to the existing career break policy within the staff handbook.

The Subcommittee recommended to the board to grant a career break to IB for a three-year period.

MB stated that a decision about the request was needed from the board. After that verbal notice of the decision would be given to IB as soon as possible, following which written notice would be given to IB, with the help of KI, including consideration of the necessary career break contract terms and conditions, if this was applicable.

Each board member contributed to the discussion. MB clarified any queries raised.

The Chair (MB) called a vote on the matter for clarity on a decision.

1. All members agreed that a secondment opportunity was not suitable in the situation
2. A majority of members voted in favour of offering a career break to IB for 3 years.

MB confirmed that she would verbally inform IB of the decision and subsequently engage with KI on a formal offer and contract for career break (terms and conditions) for IB if she accepted the offer. MB would keep the board informed about the matter and any next steps that required attention. She confirmed that the matter should remain confidential until the board was advised otherwise.

Decision: To offer to grant a three year career break opportunity to IB.

Meeting closed at 8pm. Total duration of discussion 2 hours.

Item 8: Date of the next meeting is 24th June 2020.

Please note: All sensitive and personal matters will be removed from NALA's Board minutes before publishing.