

**Minutes of Meeting of Board of Governors of Westminster Foundation for Democracy, on 22 February 2024***Meeting IN-PERSON (CLIVE HOUSE) AND VIA TEAMS: 9:30-11.30am.*

**Present:** Mark Babington (Vice Chair)  
Rt Hon Dame Maria Miller MP  
Liz Saville Roberts MP  
Milica Delevic  
Anne McLaughlin MP  
Julie Elliott MP (Vice Chair)  
Yasmin Qureshi MP  
James Deane  
Anthony Smith (ex-officio, CEO)

**In attendance:** Shannon O'Connell (Director of Policy & Programmes)  
Janet Bamisaye (Acting Finance Director)  
Clare Scott (Board Secretary)

**Welcome and Apologies**

The Vice Chair, Mark Babington welcomed the Board members to the meeting.

It was noted that there were apologies for absence given by Richard Graham MP.

The meeting was quorate.

**Declarations of interest**

None were raised.

**Minutes and matters arising**

The Board approved the minutes of the November 2023 Board meeting.

**Action point 1**

CEO to share his letter to the FCDO on the implications of the Israel-Palestine war with all Board members. **Completed.**

**Action point 2**

The WFD Strategy Mid-Term review outcome to be placed on the agenda for the February meeting. Complete – **Update shared as part of CEO's report.**

**Action point 3**

Political Board members to look into holding introduction to WFD sessions within their parties with focus on younger colleagues. **Relevant Governors are invited to report back during February meeting.**

**Action point 4**

Regional Director of Asia-Pacific and Americas to provide Board member Rt Hon Dame Maria Miller with further information on the Indonesia programme "Advancing Equal

Societies through Women's Political Leadership in ASEAN". **Complete – Further information provided.**

**Action point 5**

Political Party annual actions plans to be shared with the Board when finalised. **In progress – to be circulated by e-mail in March.**

**Chair's opening comments**

The Vice Chair opened the meeting by welcoming new independent member James Deane to his first Board meeting.

The Chair informed the meeting that the focus should be on the Budget for FY 24/25 including the recent allocation of £2m extra funding and the annual programming plans.

**1. CEO's Report**

The Board accepted the CEO report (Doc\_2) as presented. The CEO provided an overview on the main points of the report.

**WFD Strategy Mid-Term Review**

The CEO informed the meeting that a light touch review of WFD's 2022-25 strategy was being conducted. The main part of the review will focus on policy issues with focus on whether there have been developments that affect the relevance of the work we carry out.

The Board briefly discussed the emerging conclusions of the mid-term strategy review and welcomed that initial feedback indicates that the strategy is being implemented effectively and provides effective high-level guidance.

The Board raised how the Israel/Palestine war and the resultant increased pressure on staff had affected wellbeing and if staffing had been affected. The Board were informed that staff within the MENA region are being supported which they have reported is welcomed due to local restrictions that are in place. It was agreed that an engagement session would be arranged between Governors and MENA staff to provide further support.

**ACTION – An engagement session to be scheduled between MENA staff and WFD Governors.**

The Board discussed the implications of AI technology and the threat that it can pose to democracy. The Board were informed that WFD was pursuing three main areas of interest related to AI technology: Democratic oversight of AI, Implications for changes to parliamentary procedures and impact on campaigning and electoral integrity. The Board discussed how AI technology can be used to disseminate disinformation via "fake news". Julie Elliott MP referred the Board to a report that had been produced by a committee she had sat on that dealt with this and agreed to share the report to the Board. It was also agreed that the implications of AI technology would be added to the Board away day agenda.

**ACTION – Julie Elliott to share with the Board the report related to AI technologies and disinformation.**

**ACTION – The implications of AI technology to be added to the Agenda for the Board away day.**

Public Body Review

The CEO informed the Board that as they may be aware the public body review has concluded with the draft report circulated to the Board in December. The Board discussed the recommendations that had been made as part of the review.

**2. Quarterly Progress Report**

The Board accepted the Management Quarterly Progress Report (Doc\_3) covering the Q3 FY2023/24 period. An overview was provided of the main points from the summary slides (4-8) with discussion .

Milica Delevic informed the Board that as part of the Programme leads remit, she had attended WFD's quarterly programme review meeting and had been impressed with the commitment to oversight and scrutiny of the programmes. The Board were informed that there are currently 3 programmes with a red rating and the review provided adequate assurance that they were being managed appropriately.

The risk register and commentary paper (Doc\_4a and b) were taken as read with no issues or areas of concern highlighted by the Board.

**3. Report of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee**

Mark Babington advised that the Audit and Risk Assurance committee (ARC) Chair met in February and focussed its time and attention on:

- NAO Audit – The ARC received a positive update from the NAO regarding their interim audit fieldwork with planning finalised for the final fieldwork to be completed and presented to the ARC in June.
- Internal Audit – The ARC reviewed the completed Learning & development report with substantial assurance received and only minor issues noted.
- Priorities for 2024/25 – The ARC discussed and set their priorities for 2024/25 as:
  - A smooth transition period for the change in Chair that is expected when Mark's term ends.
  - Monitoring of the public body review implementation plan
  - Progress of the end of year arrangements and the presenting of the annual report and accounts.

**4. In-depth review: Annual plan & Budget for next financial year.**

The CEO and acting Director of Finance presented to the Board the Draft Budget 24/25 (Doc\_5) to the Board. The Board were given a brief overview of the assumptions that had been used and the risks and mitigation factors that had also been considered when setting out the Budget for 24/25.

The Board were informed that the Budget included the additional £2m uplift that had been signalled in the International White Paper though details on how it was to be utilised had not yet been set out. It was agreed that once the revised budget which includes the planned allocation of the additional £2m of GIA was completed it would be shared with the Board for comments.

**ACTION – Revised 24/25 Budget to be shared with the Board for comments.**

**5. Programming Priorities for FY 24/25**

The Director of Programmes and Policy joined the meeting and provided an update on the programming priorities for FY 2024/25 (Doc\_6).

The Board were informed that the priorities were set before the additional funding of £2m was known but will be using it as an opportunity to increase WFD's impact for democratic renewal with FCDO will be taking a close interest in how the funding will be utilised. Currently the priorities for the funding will be reinforcing existing work in locations where there are important opportunities but there is no or limited third-party funding available.

The Board discussed the benefits and use of AI in relation to WFD programming, the effect elections will have on programmes and the priorities for the political party offices (PPO) for the next year. It was agreed that Shannon would share WFD's election strategy and the PPO annual plans.

**ACTION - WFD's election strategy and PPO annual plans to be shared with the Board.**

**6. Any other business**

There being no other business to discuss, the Board noted that the next formal Board meeting would be held 27 June 2024.