

Minutes of Meeting of Board of Governors of Westminster Foundation for Democracy, on 19 September 2024*Meeting IN-PERSON (CLIVE HOUSE) AND VIA TEAMS: 9:30-11.30am.*

Present: Yasmin Qureshi MP (Chair)
Mark Babington (Vice Chair)
Liz Saville Roberts MP
Milica Delevic
James Deane
Anthony Smith (ex-officio, CEO)

In attendance: Chris Levick (Regional Director, ECA)
Janet Bamisaye (Acting Finance Director)
Sadia Ali (Office Manager, Yasmin Qureshi MP)
Zeba Tahsin (Fast Streamer, WFD)
Clare Scott (Board Secretary)

Welcome and Apologies

The new Chair Yasmin Qureshi welcomed the Board members to the meeting.

It was noted that that there were apologies for absence given by Natasha Kurzeja.

The meeting was quorate.

Declarations of interest

None were raised.

Minutes and matters arising

The Board approved the minutes of the February Board meeting, and the exceptional meeting held in March.

Action point 1

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

Complete.

Action point 2

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

Incomplete – Report not received before Julie's term ended.

Action point 3

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

Ongoing – Will be added to away day agenda.

Action point 4

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

Complete.

Action point 5

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

Chair's opening comments

The Chair, Yasmin Qureshi MP opened the meeting by thanking the Board for selecting her as the new Chair.

Yasmin also expressed her thanks to the previous Chair, Richard Graham MP and asked for a letter of appreciation to be completed from the Board thanking him for his exceptional work as Chair. Mark Babington was also recognised as coming to the end of his term, though it was noted that he had agreed to extend his term if required.

1. Post-Election Governance

The CEO informed the Board that there was no meeting held in June due to the UK General Election being called; the ARC meeting, chaired by Mark Babington was able to proceed.

Board and Committee appointments

The CEO informed the meeting that currently no new Board members had been appointed. The Board has currently 5 vacancies; 4 Political members and 1 Independent member. Nominations have been put forward for the 2 vacant Conservative political positions, but no nominees have been confirmed for the vacant positions for Labour and the Liberal Democrats. In relation to the independent vacancy prior to the election 2 names were going through the appointment process but were unable to be appointed in time.

The CEO informed the Board that engagement with the new government is ongoing with a need to understand their priorities so that we can ensure strategic alignment while still operating independently. Pre-election discussions were informative but currently it is not known which Minister WFD will come under; 2 options have been suggested Lord Collins and Anneliese Dodds. The Board agreed that a formal letter should be written by the Chair to the Foreign Secretary asking for clarification and a decision on who will be the Minister overseeing WFD.

ACTION – The Chair to write formally to the Foreign Secretary asking for clarification and a decision on who will be the Minister overseeing WFD.

Party Political Engagement

The CEO presented Doc 2_Engaging new parties to the Board. The Board were informed that it is practice of WFD to offer programme funding to each party that is represented in Westminster parliament. There are 2 new parties in Westminster parliament, Reform and Traditional Ulster Voice (TUV) who in the event of them wanting to establish a programme would need to do it through the multi-party office and funding would be determined by the standard formula used by WFD.

The CEO proposed to the Board that the Board Chair writes to the leaders of the two parties describing the work of WFD and suggesting a meeting if they would like to establish a WFD funded programme.

The Board discussed briefly the merits of approaching the leaders of the two parties and agreed that the Chair should write to them. Liz Saville Roberts MP, the multi-party-political representative noted that interacting with the other parties has changed due to the change in representation in parliament and asked that she be updated with any information that needed to be communicated to the other parties that came under her purview.

DECISION – The Board agreed that the Chair should write to the leaders of the Reform and Traditional Ulster Voice parties.

ACTION – The Chair to write formally to the leaders of the Reform and Traditional Ulster Voice parties.

2. Quarterly Progress Report

The Board were informed that Quarterly progress report has now been split into an overview report and an in-depth report to make reading and interaction easier for Board members. The CEO informed the Board that the overview report (Doc 3a) shows that good progress is being made against the 3 strategic goals with the in-depth report (Doc 3b) providing the context behind the progress.

The acting Finance Director presented Doc 3c_Change of authorised bank signatory to the Board and proposed a resolution to authorise a change to the current bank signatories by removing Chris Lane, Femi Otukoya and Louise Collins and adding the new Director of Operations, Natasha Kurzeja. The Board agreed to the resolution.

DECISION – The Board agreed the resolution to change the current bank signatories by removing Chris Lane, Femi Otukoya and Louise Collins and adding the new Director of Operations, Natasha Kurzeja.

The acting Finance Director provided an overview to the Board of the finance report included in the Quarterly progress overview (Doc 3a).

The CEO presented the corporate risk register and commentary paper (Doc 4a and b) to the Board and gave an overview of the current strategic risks being monitored.

The CEO advised the Board that over the recent months, focus had been on the following risks:

Risk 1: Short- or long-term funding

Risk 7: Inadequate or insecure systems and

Risk 9: Constraints on market competitive remuneration .

The Board accepted the risk register reported and discussed the points raised. The Board noted that risk related to reputation was an overarching risk that needed to be reflected for all risks on the register as they all had an impact. The CEO informed the Board that WFDs leadership team were aware of the importance of reputation and the impact of external factors would have on it. It was agreed that at its next review this would be considered for all risks.

The CEO informed the Board that a proposal had been put to WFD about the possibility of hosting an Israeli NGO visit to the UK. The delegation would consist of 2 Israeli and 2 Palestinian women visiting London and Belfast to learn about the Northern Ireland peace process. The CEO informed the Board that following the meeting he would email with the full details, any political considerations and the benefits of hosting the delegation for their consideration.

ACTION – CEO to email the Board members with further details of the Israeli NGO visit for their consideration and approval.

3. Report of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee

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

- Annual report and accounts (ARA) – Confirmation was received that following a smooth process the ARA was laid before parliament before summer recess
- Systems Improvement Project (SIP) – The ARC received an update on the progress of the SIP and how the work being carried out would strengthen systems and decrease the risks associated.
- Internal Audit – The contract for the Internal audit service ends in March 25 and will be put out to tender.

4. WFD planning for the Spending Review

The CEO informed the Board that the spending review for the new funding period has commenced and WFD have been informed that this will be a two-stage process. The first stage will be rollover funding for 2025/25, with the second stage covering the new multi-year funding. For stage one a return was requested at the end of August, which set our baseline as £6.5m. Management included justification in the return for WFDs baseline being £8.5m following the £2m GIA increase confirmed for this year. Currently it is not known when the outcome of the first stage will be confirmed, however the Board will be updated as soon as it is received.

The Board were informed that support from the current political governors would be welcomed during this process and further details would be shared when required. The CEO noted that an all-party group on Democratic governance that had previously discussed was being looked at due to the current regulations in place regarding them. The Chair agreed that the group was a good idea to share WFDs work, if the right officers could be recruited.

5. Regional Programme Focus – Europe and Central Asia

Christopher Levick, Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia (ECA) joined the meeting and provided an overview on the dynamic and challenges the ECA portfolio experienced with focus on:

- Ukraine – this programme despite the challenges faced in the country has doubled in size with increased staffing now in place.
- Georgia – The October elections for Georgia are a critical period in light of the recent foreign agents law. The new law does not directly apply to WFD though it does place some restriction on our work. Preparation has already begun around the possible outcomes of the election and WFDs response.

The Board thanked Chris for his informative presentation and agreed that there are many challenges managing the portfolio where restriction and democratic back-sliding is seen.

6. Any other business

The Board were informed that the Board Away day would be postponed until the new Board members had joined. It was agreed that an informal meeting would be planned for the start of November if there was an update related to the Board appointments and the first stage of the spending review process.

ACTION – Informal meeting to be arranged for the start of November if there is a significant update related to the Board appointments and the first stage of the spending review process.

The Board were informed that currently WFDs communication team are running the Democracy Can campaign and would welcome the boards support by sharing the social media posts and videos with their network.

There being no other business to discuss, the Board noted that the next formal Board meeting would be held 28 November 2024.