

Westminster Foundation for Democracy

Company number: 2693163

Minutes of Meeting of Board of Governors of Westminster Foundation for Democracy in Room T, Portcullis House on 29 November 2017

Present: Sir Henry Bellingham MP (Chair)
Rushanara Ali MP (Vice Chair)
Andrew Rosindell MP
Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP
Dame Margaret Hodge MP
Patrick Grady MP
Simon Walker
Thomas Hughes
Sue English
Anthony Smith (CEO)
Paul Naismith (Finance Director)

In attendance: Kerrie Doogan-Turner (Board Secretary)
Andrew Patrick (UK Ambassador to Burma) (via telephone for Agenda item 5)
Clare Vallings (Senior Governance Adviser, DFID Burma) and Joe Rolling (Head of DFID Liaison Office, Burma) (via telephone for Agenda item 5)

1. Apologies

No apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of interest

No new interests to declare.

3. Matters arising

Minutes of meetings held 13 September and 12 October 2017

In a review of the action points from the two previous meetings, the Board confirmed an exit meeting took place with former Board member John Osmond. The emphasis placed on Board oversight of WFD's financial management in this meeting was noted.

Regarding the proposed visit to Bahrain, it was agreed that Dame Margaret Hodge MP would accompany Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP in place of Rushanara Ali MP.

The Board approved the minutes.

Update items

4. CEO's report

Funding opportunities

An overview of upcoming funding opportunities was presented to the Board, including opportunities surrounding the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). Work is underway for a proposal that covers parliamentary standards and women's empowerment in partnership with Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Secretariat (CPA-HQ) and UK branch (CPA-UK).

Media handling

Following some media attention around the Conservative Party conference observation programme, the Board discussed policy options for co-sponsorship and other funding principles. The Board also asked for further work on the following areas:

- Evaluations had confirmed the value of UK party conferences to WFD's international work given the interactions with party members and departmental officials. However, inclusion of Political Party conference fees in WFD projects needed to be justified as genuine costs rather than a subsidy to the party.
- VFM for consultancy was essential and WFD should consider a standard rate, or clear guidance on when higher rates might be justified.
- There were a range of different provisions for travel policy across government and in other similar organisations like CPA-UK. It would be helpful to review the appropriate policy for WFD, including the possibility of specific provisions for those carrying out work for WFD on a *pro bono* basis.

Action point 1 – Review travel policy and branding guidelines. Develop policy on standard rates for consultancies.

5. Myanmar

The Board asked the Ambassador to provide an update. The main points were:

- The position had worsened since the Board's last discussion in October. Although the violence inside Rakhine had largely stopped, intimidation continued and another 150,000 Rohingya had left the country for camps in Bangladesh, bringing the total to about 650,000.
- The civilian authorities had begun to assert themselves more, including by signing a returns agreement with Bangladesh and taking some steps to prepare for returns. Inter-faith meetings were also taking place. However, it was still uncertain whether the military would allow returns to happen, and in any case

the conditions would be worse than before. Attempts to secure accountability for their actions was clearly a red line for the military. A UN Human Rights Council report was due in March 2018.

- The military's popularity had increased as a result of the actions in Rakhine and they were exploiting this to strengthen their political position. One likely objective was to win the next elections. This was not out of the question since the constitution gives them 25% of the seats anyway. They would only need 32% of the vote to secure a majority in parliament.
- British Ministers were reshaping the UK's engagement to put Rakhine at the centre of its work. Their short-term objective was to provide humanitarian support and to support safe returns of Rohingya to Rakhine. UN involvement would be needed for this. The longer-term objective was to address the racist environment in Myanmar that led to this treatment of the Rohingya.
- The British government saw WFD's engagement with the parliament as part of the longer-term objective. For all its weaknesses and faults, parliament contained the best collection of future leaders that Myanmar had, including moderates that disagreed with the actions against the Rohingya. We needed to strengthen them and broaden thinking in parliament. Parliament could also have an important role in supporting the government's implementation of the Rakhine Commission recommendations.
- The idea of working with civil society in conjunction with parliament was good and would fill a gap in local engagement with civil society. But some more work was needed to identify the right organisations.
- A pause in WFD's operations would very probably be interpreted as a withdrawal.
- Both HMG and the international community more generally had so far concluded that they should reconfigure their engagement rather than withdraw. The shared assessment was that withdrawal would fatally wound ASSK, who remained the best hope for changing the behaviour towards the Rohingya.

After the Embassy left the meeting the Board discussed options. All Board members considered the actions against the Rohingya to be abhorrent and that criminal proceedings should be pursued against those responsible. As agreed in October, business as usual was not an option. Rushanara and Margaret said that they thought that WFD should temporarily suspend WFD activities in Myanmar. The other Governors said that, although things might change in the future, eg when the UN HRC report was released, WFD should remain engaged.

As far as the options in the paper were concerned, there was recognition that some of it was a continuation of previous work, since there was a need to secure acceptance of the overall programme by the parliament. As far as the new elements were concerned, it would be important to think creatively to identify additional elements, including ways of influencing ASSK directly. One option would be to use some high-profile UK political figures with experience of conflict in other countries to speak directly to her (the Board should also discuss this with Speaker Bercow). Another would be to get some experts in conflict resolution involved who could apply the techniques that had been used successfully in other countries, or even in other parts of Myanmar, to the Rohingya. WFD should be clear what it thinks about the treatment of the Rohingya.

The Board decided that the WFD team should keep working on the options in time for the meeting with the Joint Coordination Committee of the parliament in January to present the 2018 work plan.

6. Funding options for political party offices

Options to amend political party funding in the next grant cycle were presented to the Board. A key objective was to ensure the effective management of WFD programmes by all of the party offices, including those with more restricted levels of resources.

The Board agreed that WFD should take forward the ideas in the paper in preparing the draft budget for 2018-19. However, it would be essential to take into account the impact they might have on the work of the two larger offices.

Action Point 2: The draft Budget should include narrative covering the handling of political party funding.

7. Audit and Risk

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARC) met on 13 November 2017. Chair of the ARC, Thomas Hughes, outlined the main points from the meeting:

- Moore-Stephens' interim audit in January will cover all issues from the National Audit Office's 2017 Annual Audit.
- The planning for the 2017-18 annual audit has been revised to ensure its timely completion.
- The ARC reviewed the internal audit of local security plans and agreed that progress had been made but implementation of the plans needs to accelerate.
- The internal audit contract will be tendered at start of 2018.
- Management accounts forecast a deficit of £89,000. Action will need to be taken to ensure WFD breaks even. The deficit was the result of lower third-party funding than originally anticipated.

8. Strategy implementation

The WFD conference in September 2017 launched the new strategic framework. Increased work on elections and with civil society organisations will complement existing core areas of political parties and parliaments, though this change will be introduced gradually in the next financing period, partly depending on available funding. Discussions were under way with the FCO and DFID regarding the level of WFD funding in the next grant cycle.

9. Programme Quality Committee

The Programme Quality Committee (PQC) met on 21 November 2017. Chair of the PQC, Sue English outlined the main points from the meeting:

- Concerns raised about the delays in finalising the next core grant and the impact this will have on staff contracts and overall impact of programmes.
- Visa issues for inward visits are having an impact on programme travel costs. It would be valuable if WFD could raise this issue with the Government.

Action point 3: WFD Board to consider writing to the Home Office about this issue.

10. Quarterly Progress Report

Paul Naismith presented the latest Quarterly Progress Report:

- Core revenue for 2017/18 is slightly higher than forecast due to benefit of some underspend from the previous year being carried forward. This means that if 2018/19 funding remains the same, then year on year comparable revenue from core grant will be down.
- Forecast revenue from third party sources stands at approximately £4.3 million but is dependent on work being fulfilled. The success rate of our bidding was lower than we had expected.
- There was additional investment in central costs, principally in the finance capacity, which, combined with the reduction in third party spend, meant there was a slight increase in the share of total revenues taken by WFD administration.

On programme performance, Anthony Smith said that the level of programme performance was satisfactory with a very small number of red-rated programmes.

11. Any other business

- The sexual harassment scandal revealed in the UK Parliament was flagged. The Board welcomed a review of WFD guidelines in this area to ensure a robust response in dealing with any inappropriate instances, especially regarding overseas visits.
- Rushanara Ali MP praised WFD parliamentary and political party work in Jordan following a recent visit with the Labour Party funded programme to meet civil

society leaders in the region. Inspiring success stories, especially around WFD's work with women, should be used to promote WFD much more.