

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND, AUTHORITY FOR UTILITY REGULATION (THE 'BOARD') HELD ON THURSDAY, 10 APRIL 2025 IN QUEENS HOUSE, BELFAST, AT 09.00 A.M.**

**Present:**

Rosamund Blomfield-Smith (Chair), John French (Chief Executive), Alex Wiseman, Claire Williams, Jon Carlton, David de Casseres, Isolde Goggin.

**In attendance:**

SLT - Kevin Shiels, Peter Russell, Colin Broomfield, Barbara Cantley, Elaine Cassidy, Brian Mulhern, Roisin McLaughlin, John Mills, Ciaran Mac Cann, Paula McCann, Barbara Stevenson, Sarah Teer, Leigh Greer, Marie-Therese Campbell, Jean-Pierre Miura, Ben Harris, Greg Irwin.

Colin Magee (items 3), Fiona Rooney (items 4 and 6), Ciara Brennan (item 5), Sean Lyons, John Earwaker and Kieran Laird (agenda item 6), Debbie Quinn (agenda item 10), Leanda Thompson (item 11).

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 None.

1.2 Rosamund Blomfield-Smith welcomed Ben Harris as part of the ongoing initiative to provide staff members with an opportunity to attend board meetings.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

2.1 None.

**3. IMPROVING THE NON-DOMESTIC CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE**

3.1 Barbara Cantley introduced this item about a proposed measures to address gaps identified in the existing non-domestic regulatory framework and to improve the market for the non-domestic consumer. Colin Magee provided further background and detail on the proposed measures.

3.2 The Board noted the size of the small business sector relative to the Northern Ireland economy and the impact on employment.

3.3 There was a discussion around small business tariffs. This included consideration of the relative complexity of the tariffs and the interplay between providing greater transparency on these tariffs and the ability of small businesses to negotiate deals.

3.4 The overall state of the market and the impact on small businesses was touched on. Board member comments on publicising deemed contracts and demand for pre-payment meters for small businesses were addressed. Market data information and regulatory scrutiny was also touched on in discussion.

3.5 The Board approved the implementation of proposed measures as presented and were briefed on next steps.

**4. POWER NI ADDITIONAL ALLOWANCES (ET TERMS) FOR 2024-2025**

4.1 Fiona Rooney introduced this paper which sought the Board's approval for additional price control allowances for Power NI, to be recovered through relevant Et terms of its licence.

4.2 Board member queries about IT aspects of the price control allowances and the impact on consumer bills were addressed.

4.3 The Board endorsed the minded-to position in respect of additional allowances for the 2024-25 year and approved the delegation to the CEO for approval of the final allowances following receipt of Power NI's 2024-25 year-end figures.

**5. SONI TRACK 1 FUNDING GOVERNANCE COST REQUEST**

5.1 Peter Russell introduced this item relating to costs associated with Track 1 of the SONI governance project. Elaine Cassidy addressed comments provided by Board members on the paper circulated in advance of the Board meeting.

5.2 There was an extended discussion on the assessment of costs sought by SONI given the business risks and the progress on transitioning to an independent company. Board members discussed the importance of ensuring that awarded costs were as efficient as possible, avoided duplication with other funding requests under the Track 2 element of the SONI governance project, while supporting beneficial synergies between the SONI and Eirgrid operations.

5.3 The Board also discussed aspects of the process relating to the SONI governance project. There was endorsement of a shorter handover period regarding the overlap of resource between new staff and those recharged. Clarification was provided on the timing of further requests under Track 2 and the need to plan for the Board's consideration of this, which may necessitate a specially convened Board meeting.

5.4 Given the nature of the governance project and the transition of SONI to an independent company, the Board endorsed ongoing engagement between the executive teams.

5.5 The Board approved the Track 1 governance costs as presented.

**6. POWER NI FINAL DETERMINATION AND ARTICLE 14(2) LICENCE MODIFICATIONS**

6.1 John Mills introduced this item which set out a minded-to position on key areas of the Power NI price control final determination.

6.2 Board members discussed several issues included the opportunity costs argument advanced by Power NI, the proposed cost sharing mechanism, and the approach to determining the margin.

6.3 The Board endorsed the minded-to position on key areas of the Power NI price control final determination. In noting the timetable for the final determination, it was agreed that a special Board meeting should be convened to decide on the price control final determination.

## **7. BOARD FORWARD AGENDA**

7.1 Given time constraints, it was agreed that discussion on this item should be deferred to another Board meeting.

## **8. MINUTES**

8.1 The minutes of the Board meeting on 20 March 2025 were approved for publication subject to a minor amendment. The minutes of the Board Advisory Forum on 20 January were also approved.

## **9. ACTION POINTS**

9.1 The action points were reviewed by the Board.

## **10. OFFICE REPORT**

10.1 John French introduced the Office report. He briefed the Board on ongoing stakeholder engagement and a recent crisis communications exercise. There was a brief discussion on plans for a SEM Committee strategy.

10.2 The Board was apprised of human resources items relating to pay, performance management, and the Best Companies survey. An update was also provided on the office accommodation move. The significant increase in network team operational approvals was also noted. The Board was also advised of the Department for the Economy's energy strategy action plan, and it was agreed that this should be circulated to the Board.

10.3 Board members noted progress on the Forward Work Programme quarter four update and an amendment to the narrative on the cost and performance project.

## **11. FINANCE REPORT SUMMARY**

11.1 Leanda Thompson provided an overview of the latest financial position, with a focus on the year end position. Clarity on final legal costs relating to ongoing litigation was also discussed.

11.2 The Board approved the finance report summary and also thanked Leanda for all her work, and wished her future success, as she stood down from her role at UR.

## **12. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER**

- 12.1 Paula McCann introduced this item which presented the corporate risk register as at end of March.
- 12.2 The Board discussed the latest position on several risks.
- 12.3 The Board considered, and approved, the corporate risk register (March 2025) as presented.

## **13. UPDATES**

- 13.1 Colin Broomfield reported on the Single Electricity Market. He provided an update on ongoing litigation, imperfections costs, capacity auctions and the Multi-Year Plan workshop planned for the following day. The Board noted the update.
- 13.2 Leigh Greer provided an update on security of supply noting that the winter season had ended. The Board noted the update.
- 13.3 Elaine Cassidy provided a litigation update, which was noted by the Board.
- 13.4 Barbara Stevenson provided the latest position on the statement of licence compliance work as part of the Compliance and Enforcement update. The Board noted the update.
- 13.5 There was no correspondence to UR for noting.

## **14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 14.1 Ben Harris provided some feedback on his attendance at the Board meeting.

There being no other business, the meeting concluded at 12.15 p.m.