

INVEST NORTHERN IRELAND
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
MINUTES 2025

Tuesday 14th January 2025

INVEST NI EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TEAM MEETING
Meeting Minutes: 14th January 2025
Room: 3M04

Chair: Kieran Donoghue

Attendees: Brian Dolaghan; Peter Harbinson; Paula Logue; Steve Harper; Alan McKeown

Apologies: None

Minute Taker: Arora Upritchard

		Action Assigned
1.	<p><u>Apologies & Conflicts</u> No apologies received. Executive Committee members confirmed there were no conflicts of interest.</p>	
2.	<p><u>Minutes of Previous Meeting</u> The minutes of the meeting of 14th December were approved and will be published online.</p>	
3.	<p><u>Outstanding Actions</u> All outstanding actions were discussed.</p>	
4.	<p><u>Independent Review Action Plan</u> Mary Gormley (MG) joined the meeting to present this item.</p> <p>MG provided a status update stating that a further three actions have completed, at end of December, bringing total completed to 24 out of 35 actions. Four actions are due to be completed before the end of the financial year namely SA29, SA9, SA30 and SA32. MG provided an overview of the status on each of these actions.</p> <p>BD asked if there have been any budgetary/personnel issues around the transfer of functions to Tourism NI. MG confirmed that a working group has been established to look at this, but no detail provided yet.</p> <p>In terms of measurement of impacts, MG stated that the PMO is continuing to work on this and had presented the benefits realisation template, and a sample of a benefits profile to the Board and IOG in December which was broadly endorsed. MG stated that the benefits template aims to ensure that, as much as possible, the measurement of impacts is included in the performance monitoring packs.</p> <p>KD asked if there is any update on SA7 Policy, MG stated that she had not attended December's IOG and will ask for an update from a colleague.</p> <p>Action: MG</p>	MG

	<p>MG stated that the organisation is in a good place in terms of the Action Plan. KD confirmed that the PMO team will remain in place for the time being and KD will take up the SRO lead on a temporary basis. KD also confirmed that IOG will meet twice this year in June and November which will allow time to progress the operationalisation of some of the actions.</p>	
5.	<p><u>High Potential Start Ups (HPSU) Competitive Grant</u> Susan O’Kane (SOK), Clare Mullan (CM), Ronan Trainor (RT) and Neil McGarry (NMcG) joined the meeting to present this item.</p> <p>KD welcomed the team and thanked them for their work on the skunkworks project. KD invited SOK to provide an overview of the tabled paper. SOK stated that the organisation is driving significant work with HPSUs, but oftentimes this is not well promoted. There is a desire to change the message and make it clear that Invest NI is open to early-stage innovative ambitious companies and an aspiration to spark renewed ambition amongst entrepreneurs. SOK detailed the proposal as laid out in the tabled paper.</p> <p>RT clarified that while the proposed changes are not drastically different, the key difference is in the messaging, emphasising what Invest NI can offer rather than letting businesses make assumptions.</p> <p>SH raised a query about why dedicated Invest NI Trade support to commercialised businesses isn’t currently available. SOK explained that a rule within Trade is limiting engagement with some businesses and proposed that HPSUs be ring-fenced and taken to the sectoral lead. SH agreed to review the rules. Action: SH</p> <p>BD suggested the paper could benefit from clearer articulation of the problem, what the terms of reference are and what we are trying to achieve. BD noted that there are many overlaps that need to be addressed, and the proposal will need to go through the Programme Approval process to further clarify these issues. SOK agreed but noted that the paper aims to address the challenges HPSUs face.</p> <p>AMcK proposed discussing the risk appetite for entrepreneurship and suggested a strategic review of what is being offered in this space.</p> <p>KD summarised the discussion, noting that while the proposal fills a gap in the marketplace, it has raised fundamental questions about Invest NI’s role in supporting entrepreneurship. KD stated that while the Executive Committee values the paper, it was not ready to approve the competitive fund and would instead pause to ask deeper questions. The Executive Committee will consider the insights from the paper and structure an entrepreneurship review, with a request for the team to contribute.</p> <p>The proposal was deferred, and AMcK was tasked with drafting Terms of Reference for the entrepreneurship review. Action: AMcK</p>	<p>SH</p> <p>AMcK</p>

6.	<p>Segmentation Analysis</p> <p>George McKinney (GMcK) and Iain Joannides (IJ) joined the meeting to present this item.</p> <p>IJ presented the tabled paper outlining the segmentation analysis, as requested by Board, and a request for endorsement on the next steps. IJ provided feedback on the re-segmentation process, mentioning that staff had 8-9 weeks to complete it, with only around 100 records still pending. A few development errors were identified, including issues with the algorithm for customers without an NI postcode, but a workaround has been found.</p> <p>AMcK asked about formal governance regarding closing customers off in the system. BD suggested the matter be discussed initially at the Governance Council, with a final decision to be made by the Executive Committee.</p> <p>Action: BD to table at Governance Council.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the segmentation results, including portfolio size, sector, regional split, and peer comparisons. Staff feedback indicated value in the analysis, helping them focus on key clients. The Committee discussed the suggestion to incorporate the Portfolio Review process into the Annual Review and Job Plans. PL noted that the performance review is owned by managers and may not be in every staff member's job plan.</p> <p>Action: GMcK to share a sample client executive job plan with CEO.</p> <p>KD concluded by stating that the ask of the Committee is that Annex A is provided to the Board via correspondence. The Executive Committee were content that this can be provided with minor amendments.</p> <p>KD commented on the suggested timing of the setting up of the Business Development Committee, suggesting it be established earlier than proposed to oversee the Account Development process.</p> <p>Action: AMcK/GMcK/IJ to develop Terms of Reference for the Committee.</p> <p>AMcK wished to put on record his thanks to IJ and GMcK for all their hard work on this project. KD emphasised the iterative nature of the segmentation process, suggesting potential adjustments in the future, and stressed the importance of integrating it with the WIP. KD also thanked IJ and GMcK for the presentation and shared positive feedback from the recent workshop.</p>	<p>BD</p> <p>GMcK</p> <p>AMcK/ GMcK/IJ</p>
7.	<p>Development of the Agri-Tech Sector</p> <p>Stephen Wightman (SW), Grainne Moody (GM) and Jonny Duncan (JD) joined the meeting to present this item.</p> <p>SW opened the discussion, noting that the agri-tech sector has been identified as a priority by DfE. Within Invest NI there are a few touch points where agri tech has emulated from. C&GD Team have a couple of significant projects that have an agri tech focus on them. The tabled paper proposed a way to better integrate and coalesce efforts around this new sector opportunity, which spans various aspects across the organization. JD provided background on the sector.</p> <p>AMcK queried whether there are early-stage agri-tech clients not currently supported and how they can be reached. JD noted that some early-stage entrepreneurs are unsure where to seek support, but there is interest in the sector.</p>	

	<p>AMcK suggested these clients could be supported through the Ambition to Grow initiative.</p> <p>SH emphasised that this is more about cluster development than defining a sector, and although there is potential in agri-tech, there is no clear lead to drive it forward within the organisation. SW confirmed ongoing collaboration with the Collaborative Growth team to mobilise the industry internally, positioning it as a cluster approach rather than a sector.</p> <p>AMcK stated that there isn't capacity to create a new sectoral team, and the goal is to leverage existing teams to support agri-tech. AMcK asked what resources are needed to manage this over the next year. GM suggested that a dedicated person should be assigned to handle research, gap analysis, and stakeholder engagement.</p> <p>BD commented that he is unsure if this is a market opportunity for companies to sell into agri with tech or whether it's something the agri food industry sees most of the opportunities coming from. GM sees it as delivery of solutions to existing local companies and/or new companies and/or FDI, adoption of new technologies by companies or development of new technologies and they will be for companies based here existing and new.</p> <p>KD concluded that the proposal should not progress until he has seen a presentation on the Food & Drink Strategy. This will inform how agri-tech fits into conventional business moving forward. KD suggested allowing the cluster development to proceed and that decisions on resources and the future of agri-tech should be made after reviewing the Food & Drink strategy.</p> <p>KD thanked the team for their work.</p>	
8.	<p><u>Digital Strategy Update</u> Tanya Otterson (TO) and Steve Chambers (SC) joined the meeting to present this item.</p> <p>TO delivered a presentation updating the Executive Committee on the reset of the digital strategy, focusing on feedback and recent discussions. The presentation covered progress made on the client engagement model, customer journey, customer portal, communication and marketing, AI support, and data utilisation.</p> <p>Significant progress has been made with process improvements and system enhancements, streamlining a digital-first approach.</p> <p>AMcK emphasised the need to shift the strategy from being digital-led to having digital underpin everything the organisation does with customers, requiring cross-organisational collaboration to simplify language and access for customers.</p> <p>KD praised the presentation, highlighting the work underway and the benefits already realised. KD requested the addition of a note stating the formation of a Digital Strategy Delivery Group, which he would Chair, meeting quarterly with a task and finish approach, and potentially subgroups as needed.</p>	

9.	<p><u>Human Resourcing</u></p> <p>PL presented a paper outlining current resourcing priorities, assurance that good governance is in place in relation to recruitment processes, and a high-level forecast of the impact upon headcount of resourcing to achieve our strategic objectives.</p> <p>The paper emphasises that resourcing and redeployment are focused on strategic priorities and business-critical functions, ensuring robust processes and oversight for effective resourcing decisions. Budget will have a substantial impact on our ability to effectively execute our new Strategy and as such a key recommendation is to secure the necessary budget to support the associated resourcing requirements.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the details of the paper and suggested some amendments.</p>	
10.	<p><u>Utilisation of HQ Building</u></p> <p>Mark McFarland (MMcF) joined the meeting to present this item.</p> <p>PL presented a paper outlining the proposed usage and modernisation of Invest NI HQ as a flagship building, seeking agreement to begin initial work. MMcF clarified that the sample design was just an idea, and if approved, staff and groups would be involved in developing detailed plans for each floor to ensure uniformity.</p> <p>KD emphasised the need to creatively consider how the building should represent Northern Ireland, promoting the organisation’s services and sending the right message to the marketplace. SH agreed, suggesting the building should be a showcase for Northern Ireland, like other competitors globally, given that the building is now 20 years old.</p> <p>AMcK asked about alternative options, while BD stated the organisation needs to assess its future needs in the next 3-4 years before determining the extent of refurbishment. BD also noted that regional office alignment with HQ standards would need to be considered, with MMcF confirming that regional offices are under review. KD suggested that if the HQ renovation proceeds, the look and feel should be replicated across regional offices and overseas.</p> <p>KD concluded that the paper should be expanded to include discussed options, with a focus on socialising design concepts with the Board and considering the possibility of relocating.</p>	
11.	<p><u>New Programmes</u></p> <p>BD presented a paper addressing whether new Programmes are following the implemented process. The process has been issued to staff, and the team is confident that it is working, though ongoing training will ensure staff adherence. The paper aims to provide the Executive Committee with assurance that the process is in better shape.</p> <p>KD asked who is responsible for compliance with the guidance, it was confirmed that Managers and Directors are responsible for adherence. BD stated that it had been previously agreed that any new Programmes need Executive Committee sign-off, following Major Project Sign On, and this will include evidence of process</p>	

	<p>compliance. BD highlighted the need for a methodology to quickly move Programmes from concept to delivery and emphasised the importance of speed in the process.</p> <p>Although a few Programmes have followed the process, no feedback has been received yet. Ongoing training and refreshers will be scheduled every 9-12 months to ensure continuous adherence.</p> <p>Action: BD to ask for feedback.</p> <p>The Executive Committee noted that guidance.</p>	BD
12.	<u>Any Other Business</u>	
12.1	Board agenda – The Committee noted the agenda of the forthcoming Board meeting and the stakeholder event.	
12.2	Belfast Harbour Strategy Launch – SH agreed to attend on behalf of the organisation.	
12.3	Employee Survey – PL asked colleagues to encourage staff to participate in the forthcoming focus groups.	ELT
12.4	New Committee Structure – It was agreed to commence discussions on make up of new Committees. BD to circulate paper he has commissioned in advance of discussion next month.	BD
12.5	Temporary Promotions – The Committee discussed the ability of staff to apply for promotion if on probation. PL confirmed this will be reviewed as part of policy review.	
12.6	Prioritisation Project – BD briefed the team on a forthcoming prioritisation project.	
	<u>Date of Next Meeting</u> 11 th February 2025	