

## AHDB Horticulture Board meeting

### MINUTES OF THE 54<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE HORTICULTURE BOARD HELD AT 09:30 ON 23<sup>rd</sup> JUNE 2020

#### Teleconference

**PRESENT:** Hayley Campbell-Gibbons (HCG), Ruth Ashfield (RA), Mark Eves (ME), Roma Gwynn (RGw), Jamie Dewhurst (JD), Rob James (RJ), Keston Williams (KW), Michael Barker (MB), Rob Saunders (RS), Peter Judge (PJ), Robert James (RJ)

#### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Jane King (JK) – CEO, Nicholas Saphir (NS) - AHDB Board Chair, Lenka Rihova (LR) - Minute taker

#### **APOLOGIES –** n/a

#### **AGENDA ITEM 1 – Apologies for absence**

The Chair opened the meeting at 9:30am and welcomed those in attendance. HCG welcomed KW, ME, MB and PJ to their first official Board meeting.

There were no apologies for absence.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 2 – Declarations of interest**

Committee members were reminded of their obligation to declare interests before discussion of relevant items. There were no declarations of interest.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 3 – Minutes from the meetings held on 27<sup>th</sup> April, 10<sup>th</sup> March, and 20<sup>th</sup> May.**

The minutes of the meetings were accepted as a correct record and will be signed by the Chair.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 4 – Actions from the meetings held on 27<sup>th</sup> April, 10<sup>th</sup> March, and 20<sup>th</sup> May.**

HCG recapped on the matters arising and action points, confirming all items were either ongoing, on the agenda or still in progress.

*Action 6.3.1* A call focused on IPM to be arranged. RG gave a summary on SceptrePlus project, which will be extended to allow planned work to be completed.

*Action 7.6.1* HCG raised all the budget caveats at the main AHDB Board meeting, where they were all taken on board and noted. The budget was approved.

*Action 1.6.2* HCG had requested more detail on qualitative responses and is liaising with Defra.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 5 – Chair's report**

The report was taken as read and no questions were raised.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 6 – SSD update (SSD report, Labour barometer, Operational report)**

The SSD report, which is an overview of strategy development, research, knowledge exchange and communications activities, was taken as read.

RA reported on the Labour barometer questionnaire (contact with around 45 growing businesses across all edible sectors).

A new version of the Ops report should be available in the near future, recognising the difficult board members had in reading and interpreting the information in its current format.

The Board discussed the *Pick for Britain* project & website. The website itself and AHDB's role in the campaign were welcomed and recognised as positive. The website has been very popular. It raised the profile for Horticulture and the need for seasonal labour, but hit-rate on the site is not always translating into jobs on farm.

The AHDB labour barometer survey was endorsed by the board. More detail on geographical and sector situation is being analysed for future reports once the data set is more comprehensive. As the season progresses and knowledge of impact increases, additional questions can be added better understand specific issues.

The Board discussed the pressure on recruiting local labour & managing a pandemic. Some growers took a decision not to recruit local labour due to a risk of bringing Covid-19 into the farm. Note deletion

The NFU & AHDB labour surveys cover different aspects of the labour landscape. AHDB labour survey is believed to be adding value and has been welcomed by Defra as a timely, independent source of evidence to help inform their policy decisions.

## **AGENDA ITEM 7 – Finance update (Management accounts, Finance update)**

HCG welcomed Nicholas Saphir, the new AHDB Board Chair and JK.

RA delivered a summary presentation on finance. Key points & areas covered:

### **Management accounts for May 2020**

- ⇒ Budget and Activity Plan set and agreed on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020
- ⇒ Forecast has reduced spend on R&D and KE due to Covid-19
- ⇒ Support Expenditure & Reserves

As a Horticulture Board, a strategic decision was made to bring down our income to improve focus and efficiencies. The Board is not comfortable with the level of central costs where they are currently, which needs addressing.

### **Panel finances**

- ⇒ Levy reduction modelling for POBOF and HNS

It was proposed to extend the POBOF target reserve position to 27/28. The Board requested more work on this issue and to look at the options available and potential knock on impacts for other sectors. There was a request to review the financial model (panel hypothecation) to consider if it was still fit for purpose or if Hort could implement a less complex and restrictive financial structure.

AHDB has shared with growers the HTA and NFU survey, which is looking at the financial impact of Covid-19 on the ornamental sector. We hope to be able to use this data to better understand the impact.

RA gave an update on the Levy Reduction Working Group.

The recommendation from the Hort Board to the Executive is that we run a similar efficiency savings exercise across other functions, central and support costs.

There had been no applications to defer a levy payment to date.

## **AGENDA ITEM 8 – Introduction to Nicholas Saphir / Strategy Planning**

HCG welcomed NS. The Board members each introduced themselves. NS introduced himself to the Board, sharing his background and extensive experience in agriculture and industry.

NS has been impressed with the work that was taking place at AHDB in order to overcome challenges caused by Covid-19. NS positively commented on the *Pick for Britain* website. AHDB can deliver across the whole range of activities, but there are some issues that need addressing.

NS shared his views on AHDB's role over the next few years in relation to the 5-year strategy. The focus needs to be on evidence which is critical for the industry and for AHDB to help with risks & opportunities. The Board had a wide-ranging conversation around how the strategy and organisation would/could deliver for Horticulture. The next step for NS and the leadership team would be finalising the strategy and business plan. The aim is to drive costs and refocus the organisation to deliver a real value to the levy payers, be open and transparent.

A comment was made regarding a possibility to rework the statutory instrument. NS confirmed that there is an appetite for legislative changes (DEFRA).

The Board explored ideas around how the future of farming may change and the role that AHDB could play. Environmental performance, investment and operating to new policy and trade arrangements will be the biggest challenges.

AHDB is adding value to growers by assisting them to tackle the day to day applied challenges of growing - solving problems through research and crop protection. It was felt that a significant change to that would be a challenge.

The aim is to have an organisational structure that will deliver, remove bureaucracy and have a more focused approach to the programmes we are investing in. The Board discussed what changes may be coming and their potential impact on the offer to growers.

The Hort Board are keen to 'press send' on the New Look Horticulture vision, but it was agreed that this would be put on hold until there is clarity around the future of AHDB and delivering to sectors.

The Chair thanked NS for sharing his thoughts on a wide number of topics.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 9 – Request for Views & New Look Horticulture (Interim panel arrangements, Hort Innovation – Australia Hort levy body).**

The reports were taken as read.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 10 – Industry updates**

The report was taken as read.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 11 – AOB**

The Board agreed to hold a monthly check-in call for as long as we are restricted to remote meetings.

It was suggested to hold AHDB Horticulture conference in autumn/winter. It will be discussed at the next Board meeting.

The date of next formal meeting is 5<sup>th</sup> November.

The meeting closed at 12pm.