

**THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND FOUNDATION OF THE BLIND INC**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD**

**ON SATURDAY 29TH APRIL AT 9:00am**

BLVNZ New Plymouth office, 129-131 Vivian Street

**Present:** Mr C Lansink (Chair), Ms Abel-Williamson, Mr F Alexander, Mr J Billings, Ms D McCaskill, Mr R Scott, Ms J Small (joined via Zoom), Mr R Patete (joined via Zoom).

By Invitation: Mr Mulka (Chief Executive).

Observers (Zoom): Vaughn Dodd, Benny Foar, Geraldine Glanville, Rodd Jacques, Allan Jones, Mary Schnackenberg, Raeleen Smith, George Taggart, Paula Waby.

In Person Brian Grainger, Aleister O’Donnell, John Bell, Bev McCulloch, Brendan Cresswell.

In Attendance: Ms E Painter and Ms M Randell (presenting item G7.4 at 10:00am).

Apologies: Ms AM Taggart (Vice Chair).

*(Note: The Minutes reflect the order of items on the Agenda, not necessarily the order in which items were discussed during the meeting).*

At 9:03am the Chair, Mr Lansink, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the Board members attending in person and via Zoom.

Ms Abel-Williamson opened the meeting with a karakia.

All present stood in silence as a mark of respect to members who had passed away since the last meeting on 29 March 2023.

The Chair announced that certain matters would be discussed in-committee, and to raise any requests to discuss items in-committee.

# STANDING ITEMS

## Directors’ Interests Register

The latest register of Directors’ interests was received. The Chair asked if there were any comments on the interests and asked attendees to raise any conflicts of interest related to the meeting’s agenda or such matters during the meeting.

# MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

## Minutes of the Board Meeting of 29 March 2023

Ms Abel-Williamson requested a word change to item 7.4 in the action register from “supporting blind people” to “domestic violence responsive training for staff.”

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the minutes of the full Board meeting held on 29 March 2023, noting the above change, be accepted as a true and accurate record.
Moved by Mr Billings. Seconded by Mr Scott.Motion Carried.

## Minutes of the Board In-Committee session of 29 March 2023

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the minutes of the Board In-Committee meeting held on 29 March 2023 be accepted as a true and accurate record.

Moved by Ms McCaskill. Seconded by Mr Billings. Motion Carried.

## 2.3 Status Report of actions arising from the last meetings

The report on the status of actions which arose from the last meeting was duly noted and taken as read and received.

* Ms Abel-Williamson gave an update on the wellness component of the health and safety training (item 7.4), stating that she contacted Shine to understand their cost structure, suggesting that the two days of training might be too long for BLVNZ staff. Ms Abel-Williamson is in discussions with Shine regarding a proposal and available options, including shortening the course, and will provide an update on the progress at the next meeting.

## 2.4 Any other matters arising from the minutes

There were no additional comments.

# CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORTING

## Report from the Chief Executive for the period 30 March – 29 April 2023

The Chief Executive’s report was taken as read and the meeting opened for discussion.

The Chair pointed out the dates mentioned in the Chief Executive’s report, indicating that it was actually a monthly update so the report really covers the period since the last report was written, and not the last meeting.

The Chair addressed the four items in the Chief Executive’s report, with the first item being the report against the business plan. The Chair then opened the floor for comments.

Mr Alexander requested an update on the youth and employment section of the report, particularly regarding the graduate programme. He asked for details about the programme, who is participating, and what outcomes have been seen.

Mr Mulka responded by explaining that the graduate programme is an internship initiative aimed at helping young people prepare for employment. It focuses on developing job readiness, work skills, and interview skills for those who are either seeking employment or in the education system.

Mr Mulka further elaborated that the organisation is collaborating with various companies to provide internships, either internally within BLVNZ as a starting point or moving into a three-month internship programme, which is funded by the organisation. The initiative aims to provide an opportunity to experience the work world and hopefully secure full time permanent employment in the future.

Mr Mulka mentioned that the details about this programme were communicated in newsletters, and it was launched just last month.

Mr Alexander inquired if there was any communication to sight impaired students who may not have received BLVNZ’s services or had any contact with the organisation but are transitioning from tertiary education to employment.

Mr Mulka responded that they are starting to reconnect with sight impaired students through databases and assess where they are in their journey, as some are doing well while others may not be. He reiterated that this is just the starting point.

Mr Scott mentioned that some of the organisation’s properties needed maintenance, particularly the offices in Dunedin and New Plymouth which he noticed could use some painting. He asked if Mr Mulka could provide a property report including details on the two items mentioned below and how they are being addressed moving forward:

1) ongoing maintenance programme and what measures the organisation is taking to ensure that facilities are kept at a high standard as part of the BAU operations.

2) capital maintenance, which refers to major expenses such as replacing a roof that would be categorised as a capital expense rather than an operational expense.

**Action:** Mr Mulka to provide an ongoing property report on the organisations maintenance programme as part of his Chief Executive’s report to the Board.

Mr Billings asked for further information on the emotional support programme mentioned in the Chief Executive’s report and how it could be expanded in collaboration with the Deafblind Association.

Mr Mulka discussed the collaborative partnership with the Deafblind Association to expand programme offerings and emphasised the unique needs of dual sensory loss and working with service delivery, audiologists and others in the community. He also mentioned the shift towards a more holistic approach with other providers in the community, which he sees as a positive step forward.

Mr Billing’s asked for an update from Mr Mulka about the awareness programme for the five professions and what progress has been made.

Mr Mulka responded positively to Mr Billing’s question, saying that a Head of Referrals and qualified optometrist has been employed and that some of the Board would have met her at the December AGM in Auckland. Mr Mulka explained that her focus and KPI’s are around the relationships with the professional community. He noted that she will be presenting at a conference to reconnect with the ophthalmology, optometry, and optometrist community. He further explained that this role also deals with referrals and registrations that are complicated cases in terms of being able to qualify for full membership. He added that one of the KPI’s for her role is the number of referrals from various bodies, and the purpose of this role is to reconnect with the professional community.

Mr Mulka mentioned that the organisation has a stand in the exhibition hall and a presentation to the entire seminar. He also mentioned launching RANZCO’s election manifesto to the government about the lack of support for eye health services in New Zealand, which coincides with Eye Health Aotearoa Trust that the organisation is heavily involved in and which Mr Mulka chairs. Mr Mulka commented on having quite a significant presence at the seminar, which the organisation hasn’t had in years.

Mr Mulka mentioned that BLVNZ is currently working on a cross-party call to action which is in its draft stage and will be formally launched in Wellington at a ceremony in early June. He added that there are certain politicians who are helping behind the scenes.

**Action:** Mr Mulka to circulate the eye health strategy to Ms Abel-Williamson.

Ms Abel-Williamson mentioned that the eye health expo planned for the end of June with a focus on “eye health in workplace). She requested information on BLVNZ’s plans for the expo, and the “love your eyes” campaign. Mr Mulka confirmed that the Board will receive the document in draft format before going public.

Mr Mulka mentioned that the organisation is actively involved with IAPB (The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness) and was one of the first countries to have an event two years ago, with the plan to continue involvement with the event.

Mr Mulka mentioned that there is an upcoming eye health seminar in Singapore at the end of June, which Eye Health Aotearoa is involved in.

Ms Abel-Williamson commented that IAPB is calling for the appointment of a special envoy on eye health at the United Nations level, with support from the World Blind Union and other organisations.

Ms Abel-Williamson raised a further two topics: the guide dog waitlist and the State of the Nation report. Regarding the guide dog waitlist, she expressed her surprise at the low numbers of people waiting and the slow reduction of the list and asked for an explanation of the reasons for this.

Mr Mulka responded to the query about the guide dog waiting list, stating that the list is experiencing multi disability needs and may not be the best solution for all situations. He mentioned going through the list to understand the requirements of the individuals and how some have commented that guide dogs are not appropriate for them at this point in their lives. As a result, the list has become more manageable, and wait times are now going down.

Mr Mulka mentioned that two staff members are attending the International Guide Dog Federation bi-annual conference in Vancouver, where they are discussing guide dog requirements dropping instead of increasing. He added that no one has pinpointed the reason for this trend.

Mr Alexander commented that it’s been a long time since the organisation has done an assessment of the guide dog waiting list and the assessing need.

Mr Mulka explained that in the past, the organisation tried to accommodate everyone who requested a guide dog, but now they are trying to be more objective and assess if a guide dog is the right solution for them. He mentioned that the organisation has values and principles that have been around for more than ten years to assess clients, and the use of a white cane is a prerequisite for suitability for a guide dog. Mr Mulka added that often, mobility skills get overlooked in the assessment process.

Ms McCaskill questioned if the vision loss assistance dogs have had an impact on the guide dog waiting list and suggested that their needs may have changed.

Mr Mulka noted that the organisation has made 6 or 7 placements of vision loss assistance dogs, which provide a certain type of support that may not be impacting the wait list for guide dogs. He mentioned that with the waitlist of 30 people in a country of our size and scope, this is a good news story. He also referred to the unique circumstances outlined in the report that contribute to the wait time.

Mr Scott asked Mr Mulka regarding the process of identifying when a client might not need a guide dog anymore and how early in the process this can be determined.

Mr Mulka explained that there isn’t a standard way to identify when a client may no longer need a guide dog, but it starts with a conversation between the client and their O&M specialist, where further questions can arise about their living environment, family situation, and impact of having a dog. Mr Scott summarised this as a proactive process.

Ms Small asked Mr Mulka if he had considered collaborating with older people agencies such as Age Concern, given that a lot of the organisation’s clients are older people and that their sight issues may be age-related, and they might need a different training programme to suit.

Mr Mulka responded that Age Concern was one of the organisations that they have the best collaborative relationship with, and they have considered the needs of older people with age related sight issues. He also expressed a desire to have a relationship with all the health retirement home providers in the country.

Ms Small mentioned that the rehab services offered by the DHB’s could complement the service delivery of the organisation.

Ms Small expressed her satisfaction with the decrease in the guide dog waiting list and acknowledged that people with multiple needs, not just vision related, are being accommodated where possible.

**Action:** Mr Mulka to provide an update on the vision loss assistance dogs and vision talk pilot programmes.

Mr Patete asked about point 4.0 in the Chief Executive’s report regarding the appointment of Head of Advocacy and their priorities. Mr Mulka responded that Juliana Carvello was appointed to the role and is working under Diane Roger. He mentioned that the action plan for the role is a big move for the organisation and it was identified as a need by the organisation’s client base, and they responded accordingly.

Mr Patete inquired about the progress of the online course related to the Treaty of Waitingi and how it was progressing.

Mr Mulka responded that the uptake of the online courses has been excellent with great feedback received so far from staff. He highlighted that the modules discuss principles and values systems and noted that the online tool has generated significant interest and optimism. He further added that accessibility and other features are all there and on track. Mr Mulka discussed Board participation and noted that only a couple of Board members had expressed interest. The Chair mentioned that the Board was looking at three different options and Mr Mulka suggested that the online option might be the easiest and encouraged Board members to take advantage of it.

The Chair acknowledged progress made on the new equipment services and the recent announcement about it. The Chair also expressed appreciation for the appointment of someone to lead the advocacy programme.

The Chair addressed the emotional support item in the Chief Executive’s report and expressed concern about the quality of counselling provided by generic counsellors who may not have direct knowledge of blindness, deafness and low vision. The Chair asked Mr Mulka if any thought had been given to this concern and if the term “counselling” was appropriate. The Chair referred to emotional support as a strand in the business plan and asked how this concern might ultimately be addressed.

Mr Mulka responded that service team managers are currently looking into the issue of emotional support and the use of the term “counselling.” He suggested that the focus should be on emotional support rather than professional counselling, as it had been discovered that previously, the service provided was emotional support rather than professional counselling. He emphasised the importance of clarifying the goals of the service and that the organisation has third party counselling services available for clients with significant needs beyond emotional support or one-on-one support groups. Explaining that feedback from clients who engaged with the professional counselling service has been very positive.

The Chair referred to the support and service that was being provided, even if they weren’t trained counsellors, that it would be good to identify the essential element that is needed in a service to blind people to ensure that they are moving in the right direction.

Mr Alexander asked about the baseline qualifications for the counselling services, to which Mr Mulka responded that it is a professional certification as a counsellor.

Mr Mulka discussed the key principle in the business plan of frequent contact for those members in isolating circumstances, which is driving the emotional support programme. He mentioned that weekly support group meetings, bi-weekly and monthly meetings are being used to connect people who may be uncomfortable with individual circumstances. He noted that a pilot programme for young members and clients with emotional support programmes is underway and that going through vision loss during teenage years can be a challenging experience.

The Chair commented that in the past there were positive reports about the emotional support service even though it was not provided by qualified counsellors. He emphasised the importance of understanding the needs of individuals who are facing a lifetime of blindness and helping them cope with this life-changing experience in a positive way. The Chair expressed concern about the possibility of losing the special support provided to blind people by contracting out to generic counsellors, and emphasised the need to understand and develop a new identified area that everyone understands.

**Action:** Mr Mulka to provide an update on the counselling services matter in six months time.

The Chair mentioned the “in flight” list of projects and BAU activities, expressing satisfaction that they are all progressing as planned. However, a concern was raised about the delay in providing adaptive technology support to three individuals who have been waiting four months. The Chair acknowledged the previously discussed challenges in recruiting replacements for departed staff and requested that the report reflect significant delay by some individuals in accessing this particular service.

Mr Mulka responded by addressing the specific cases raised by the Chair, stating that the waiting time of four months for adaptive technology support is not typical or representative of the overall situation. He referred to the data that analyses wait and response times, emphasising that the current wait time in ACATS not four months.

Other Board members acknowledged that there are indeed members waiting for adaptive technology services. Mr Alexander highlighted the need for these services in areas such as employment and education, where configuration and assessment of software and hardware compatibility are necessary, requiring about 4-6 hours of work. He noted that there is currently only one person in Auckland handling this workload. The Chair mentioned the restructuring of accessible formats and expressed concern about someone who still requires adaptive technology support.

The Chair requested Mr Mulka to familiarise himself with the delays and concerns that are not adequately reflected in the report, questioning whether they can accept this information without further inquiry. Ms Small suggested that the issue might lie in how requests are being captured, allocated and determined, indicating that the problem could extend beyond the waitlists themselves.

**Action:** Mr Mulka to investigate the waiting times for receiving adaptive technology services in ACATS and provide details regarding the duration of the wait and the underlying reasons for any delays.

Ms Abel-Williamson mentioned the new advocacy position and highlighted that the action plan includes collaborating with consumer organisations involved in advocacy. She acknowledged that the person in this role is still new and suggested that there would be a definite outreach effort similar to what has been done with other initiatives.

The Chair addressed item 2 of the Chief Executive’s report regarding the “Parnell Facility.” He expressed the understanding that the facility would not be opened outside of normal working hours due to it being located in an apartment block. The Chair mentioned exploring other options in the Parnell Precinct and referred to the agreement of the retirement village proposal. He highlighted the need to consider the limitations of the new regional office being located under a block of apartments, which may not provide an appropriate space for large, noisy functions in the recreation area. The Chair expressed surprise and questioned the justification for effectively closing the offices outside of working hours, and this was not anticipated.

Mr Alexander expressed his opinion that member groups should have access to the facility at any day or time, including weekends, for their activities. He emphasised the importance of providing flexibility and convenience to member groups in terms of accessing the facility.

Mr Mulka clarified that the new facility will be open for use from 8.30am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday, during the initial stage. He suggested that once the organisation is settled into the new building and comfortable with the day-to-day operations, the possibility of utilising the facility outside of regular working hours can be revisited and reconsidered. He acknowledged that there were alternative options available in the Precinct for meetings outside of these hours. The Chair expressed his disagreement, stating that he doesn’t see the necessity of withholding access to the facility outside of working hours.

Mr Scott inquired about the timeline for allowing consumer organisations to use the new facility outside of working hours. Mr Mulka replied that by the end of the calendar year would be a reasonable expectation, considering that the building is still undergoing construction.

Mr Scott proposed that Board revisit the issue at their first meeting in 2024. Mr Mulka confirmed that this was the information communicated to the consumer groups during their meeting. Mr Scott expressed concern that the Chief Executive’s report did not mention the plan to revisit the matter.

The Chair acknowledged ongoing discussions with the Board, Mr Mulka, and the consumer organisations affected by the facility’s limited availability. Exploring alternative options during this interim period is currently underway. The Chair emphasised that the Board has made a decision that serves as a temporary measure while they adjust to the new building, which is still under construction. The situation is being approached with a “wait and see” approach.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the Board receives the CE Report.

Moved by Ms Abel-Williamson. Seconded by Mr Billings. Motion Carried

**C3.2 KPI Report (Excel spreadsheet)**

The Chair raised a question about the restructure of the accessible format services, mentioning that the Board has allocated a higher budget to it. He acknowledged that the service has been reduced and expressed concern about the limited flexibility in providing materials to BLVNZ clients. He emphasised the importance of closely monitoring the accessible format services to evaluate how effectively the non-education needs of clients are being met. The Chair expressed the desire to be informed about the requests received and whether they are being fulfilled, as well as the strategies in place to stay informed about the diverse information needs of clients and how they communicate those needs. The Chair suggested that this information could be reflected in data of KPI’s. He clarified that the accessible format services should not be used for embossing materials on demand, as it was a library decision to move away from stocking physical books on shelves. The Chair referred to a previous report from Mr Mulka mentioning embossing volumes on demand and confirmed that this practice should not be part of the accessible format service.

**Action:** Mr Mulka to provide a proposal outlining the most suitable measures for reporting the accessible formats activity to the Board at the meeting scheduled for 1 July.

Mr Mulka discussed the comprehensive scope of the audible accessible format materials and emphasised the need to determine priorities, allocate resources, and define the accessible format for the client database. He committed to preparing a detailed report for the Board, which would include an overview of the progress made, identified priorities, handled requests, and the overall processing of accessible formats. This report is scheduled to be presented at the Board meeting on 1 July.

The Chair acknowledged that the changes in the accessible formats service have brought about a closer examination and a focus on the specific aspects, which was not evident in the past when it was part of a broader context. This shift allows for a more thorough assessment.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the Board receives the KPI report.

# STRATEGIC ITEMS

## Summary of Ratings April Board Skills Matrix

The Chair presented the purpose of the matrix, which was to identify any noticeable skills gaps and determine if co-option would be necessary to address them. The Chair sought feedback and comments from the Board regarding any perceived gaps and asked if they were satisfied with the outcome of the results.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the Board noted that the exercise had been conducted and agreed that there was no need for co-option to address any skill shortage.

# COMMITTEE REPORTS

## Update from the Audit and Risk Committee

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, Mr Patete, presented an update on the committee’s meeting held on 19 April.

Mr Patete discussed the draft 2023/24 budget report presented by management during the committee’s meeting. He highlighted that the report contained detailed information regarding revenue and costs across the organisation. The report generated valuable discussion, and several points and questions were raised, indicating a thorough review of the budget.

Mr Patete expressed that the committee was not yet ready to provide endorsement for the draft budget report and acknowledged the need for further discussion. He emphasised that there is ample time available, as the committee is a month ahead of schedule with the draft budget report, allowing for thorough examination and deliberation of this specific item.

Mr Patete provided an update on the management accounts, stating that the accounts for February and March, along with the BLVNZ accounts, were presented. He reported that the YTD result is positive, with income exceeding the budget by approximately $2.9M until the end of March. This is primarily attributed to legacies, which have performed well above budget. On the expenditure side, costs are lower than budget by approximately $2.5M, primarily due to personnel costs resulting from high-level vacancies. Overall, the financial position remains healthy.

Consequently, the YTD surplus is significantly higher than the budgeted amount. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the fair value of the investment portfolio has rebounded after experiencing a decline over the past few months.

The FPL accounts for February and March were presented and this entity is performing in line with budget. There were no significant variances to date.

The group accounts for February and March were received, and it was noted that the group’s performance is exceeding the budget expectations. This positive outcome is primarily due to the strong results of BLVNZ.

The risk register was received, and it was noted that there have been no significant changes since the last update.

The committee received a comprehensive report from the ICT team regarding cyber security measures and updates. The report highlighted various initiatives aimed at protecting against cyber-attacks. The committee expressed a high level of assurance in the management of this area and commended the ICT team for their thorough report.

The Mercer quarterly investment report, covering the period until the end of March, was presented. The report showed a positive return of approximately 4% in the value of the investment portfolio.

The Board had a brief discussion regarding upcoming events, including the scheduled 3 yearly review of the investment portfolio. Planning has already begun for conducting the review and organising a workshop with the full Board. The aim is to align the investment portfolio with the Board’s profile and ensure the appropriate portfolio structure. Currently, the portfolio is balanced, with half of the funds allocated to cash-based investments and the other half to equity. The Board is to verify and ensure that the appropriate portfolio structure is in place.

The committee reviewed the Delegated Authorities policy, which undergoes an annual review. Proposed changes to certain elements of the delegations authorities matrix were discussed, and it was agreed to have further discussions with Mr Hurn and Mr Mulka to determine the best way forward.

Ms Green presented a fundraising report covering the period until the end of March. The report highlighted positive activities in the fundraising domain, but also identified challenges, particularly in the area of regular giving, which were attributed to labour shortages.

The endowed capital funds report until the end of March was presented and discussed, revealing a continuation of slow activities. The report also outlined various initiatives that are either underway or planned to enhance the level of activity. Of particular note was the advertising for the Pearson fund and the launch of the BLV Australia webshop, which were seen as promising opportunities in that area.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the report from the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee be received.

Moved by Mr Patete. Seconded by Ms Abel-Williamson. Motion Carried.

## Update from the Governance Committee

The Chair of the Governance Committee, Mr Alexander, provided an update from the last Governance Committee meeting on Monday 24 April. He mentioned that the Committee’s composition has remained unchanged since 2022, with all members continuing in their roles.

Mr Alexander noted that during the meeting, the actions list and items arising from the previous minutes were reviewed. He further mentioned that these items will undergo another review before the upcoming June meeting.

**Item 2: Governance Committee matters**

Mr Alexander highlighted the importance of the self-assessment process, which includes 42 questions focusing on the board’s function, role, and related aspects. He mentioned that this assessment is conducted annually, particularly in the years when an external review is not performed. This indicates that the Directors are familiar with and participate in the evaluation process regularly.

During the meeting, Mr Alexander mentioned that there was a discussion regarding the utilisation of the information obtained from the survey and how the survey itself is constructed. It was acknowledged that responses often fell into the partially positive or neutral categories. Traditionally, the focus had been on results that were close to neutral or slightly negative, rather than considering all received results. As a result, the committee agreed to dedicate a separate meeting in the upcoming weeks to discuss how to effectively utilise this information. They recognised the need to address specific areas that the Board should consider, especially in light of changes that occurred in 2023 regarding meeting frequency and information presentation. To ensure a comprehensive approach, a dedicated committee was established to generate effective ideas for leveraging the self-assessment data. One outcome of this effort was the identification of redundant questions, leading to modifications being made in that regard.

**Item 3: Governance matters**

The first agenda item focused on the workplan and upcoming tasks for the governance committee. It was observed that several policies had not been reviewed since 2017. It was acknowledged that many of these policies were included in the board policy manual, but their relevance and context might have changed over time. As a result, a decision was made to establish a process whereby each governance committee member, along with other Directors, would contribute to rewriting and drafting policies. The revised drafts would then be reviewed by the full Board. This approach aims to ensure that policies are updated and reflect the current needs and circumstances of the organisation.

**Item 4: Board Policy Manual Review**

Mr Alexander informed the committee that 15 policies were included on the agenda for review. These policies had been discussed in previous meetings, and Ms Small was assigned the task of assessing the range of policies, considering the interest and skills of the Directors, and determining the next steps for their review.

Additionally, the committee deliberated on the management of Board information, such as papers and minutes, and explored the possibility of utilising an external provider to facilitate access to this information. He expressed the need to move away from individual filing and storage systems. As an action item, the Board Secretary was tasked with exploring available software systems and potential options for efficient information management.

**Item 5: General Items**

During this discussion, three different papers were examined. The first paper centred around consumer funding and the information received from the five consumer groups last year. The committee assessed whether the existing policy was suitable for its intended purpose and whether it sufficiently described the process. Mr Alexander, Ms Small and Mr Lansink were assigned to evaluate how the information was being processed and to determine if any amendments to the Board policy were necessary. Additionally, they were tasked with ensuring that consumer group funding is integrated into the organisations plans for 2025. It was noted that conversations between the CE, Ms Small, and the Chair had taken place with groups regarding the 2023/2024 activity plans, and there was an understanding that the activities planned for FY23 were likely to continue into FY24.

The Committee also addressed two topics: Board professional development and Te Tiriti training. The Te Tiritiri training was highlighted as an important area of focus, and it was mentioned that some Directors had already enrolled in the BLVNZ programme, which is being conducted in collaboration with staff. The committee encouraged Directors to participate in relevant Te Tiritiri training programmes. It was noted that there had been a limited number of applications received by the Governance Committee for professional development opportunities. Considering the recent assessment of the Board’s function and the Director’s capabilities and skills, it was suggested that now would be an appropriate time for Directors to actively explore professional development options.

Mr Alexander drew attention to the final item on the Governance Committee agenda, which pertained to the recommendations from the independent inquiry. He emphasised that it was the responsibility of the Governance Committee to ensure that all subcommittees actively engage in the ongoing process of addressing these recommendations. The committee would play a crucial role in overseeing the implementation and progress of the inquiry’s recommendations across various subcommittees.

The committee engaged in a discussion regarding the constitution review and the search for an individual to lead that review. It was mentioned that suggestions for potential candidates were still being sought. The committee acknowledged the importance of seeking input from various stakeholders, including consumer groups and other audiences and that discussions would also be taking place with Bell Gully. To facilitate this, Mr Lansink, the Chair, would be reaching out to consumer groups, requesting their input and suggestions on the constitution review.

Mr Mulka raised a significant matter for the Board’s consideration during the meeting. He emphasised that one of the primary responsibilities of the Governance Committee is the strategic plan, which is approaching its final year. He referred to comments made by the Chair at the Deafblind conference, highlighting the Board’s focus on establishing consultation for the new strategic plan as a key priority for the year. Ms Small expressed her concerns regarding the strategic plan, specifically mentioning the need for a clear process, timeline, and planning stage for engaging with organisations and key stakeholders during the consultation phase of the strategic plan development.

**Action:** Governance Committee agreed to incorporate the strategic plan into their work plan and initiate the planning process for its development and recognise the need to set clear milestones and objectives for the creation of the next strategic plan and the importance of establishing timeframes and considering various factors during the planning process, to ensure a well-defined and structured approach to developing the upcoming strategic plan.

The Chair emphasised that the adoption of the new strategic plan should take place no later than 30 June 2024. This deadline was highlighted as an importance milestone for the committee to work towards in the planning and development process of the strategic plan.

Ms Small highlighted the importance of the Board reviewing the draft strategic plan during the March 2024 meeting, emphasising the need for timely progress and ensuring that the draft plan is thoroughly examined by the Board by that specific meeting.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the report from the Chair of the Governance Committee be received.

Moved by Mr Alexander. Seconded by Mr Billings. Motion Carried.

## Update from the People Committee

The Chair advised there had been no sitting of the People Committee since the last Board meeting.

The Chair mentioned that he had received a late apology from Ms Taggart for her absence to attend today’s meeting, but he overlooked this at the start of the meeting.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the late apology from Ms Taggart is received.

Moved by Mr Lansink. Seconded by Ms Small. Motion Carried.

## Update from the Client Services Committee

Mr Lansink, the Chair of the Client Services Committee, provided an update to the Board, stating that the committee had not convened since the previous Board meeting, and had not met for some time. However, he reported that the Services Review had commenced, and various communications had been sent out to staff, clients and consumer organisations earlier in the month. Mr Lansink mentioned that clients interested in participating in the review had expressed their willingness to be interviewed. The review is being conducted by an independent group called Synergia, and they will determine which clients will be interviewed, aiming for a diverse range of perspectives. The purpose of this high-level thematic review is to provide the Client Services Committee with valuable insights and indicators for focusing their attention as they commence their work.

*The meeting paused at 11:20am.*

*The meeting resumed at 11:40am.*

# PROPERTY AND TRUSTS

## Property Update

There were no updates provided, as this item was covered in the CE’s report.

# GOVERNANCE MATTERS

## Report from Chair on his formal activities for the period

The report was received and noted as read. The Chair noted that it was a brief report and mentioned that the Governance Committee had not received any feedback regarding its contents.

Ms Abel-Williamson requested an update on the consumer organisation meeting that took place on the 27 March with Mr Lansink, Ms McCaskill and Mr Mulka. In response, Mr Lansink explained that no formal decisions had been made during the meeting. He clarified that it was an exploratory discussion, and as a result of that meeting, certain matters were being investigated. He emphasised that the process is ongoing and further actions are being considered based on the outcomes of the meeting.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the Board receives the Chair’s report.

Moved by Mr Lansink. Seconded by Ms Abel-Williamson. Motion Carried.

## Governance Annual Work Plan 2023

The Board noted the Governance Annual Work Plan 2023.

## Register of Board Resolutions

The Board duly noted the Register of Board Resolutions.

## Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report

Ms Painter welcomed Ms Randell to the meeting and was introduced as the individual who will be responsible for presenting the health and safety report in future meetings.

Ms Randell provided an overview of the health and safety meetings that have taken place, highlighting the participation of Ms Small and Mr Patete in the committee meetings. She expressed satisfaction with their involvement and described it as fantastic. Ms Randell then opened the floor for questions, and Ms Small praised the quality of the report, expressing her positive feedback.

Ms Randell reported that the work groups have been established successfully. She announced that individuals have been nominated for all 12 work groups. These representatives from the health and safety committee will undergo a New Zealand qualification unit related to their roles and will complete it by June. This will enable individual committee meetings to be conducted alongside the regular health and safety committee meetings. Ms Randell emphasised that this addition will greatly enhance discussions on health and safety by addressing specific issues faced by each work group within their respective teams.

The site maintenance process, initiated by BLVNZ, is seen as a fantastic initiative that empowers staff to perform maintenance work up to $500 without the need for approval. However, for expenditures ranging from $500 to $2,000, Heidi Lee’s approval is required, and for amounts exceeding $2,000, approval from Greg Hurn is necessary. This multi-tiered approval system ensures a more efficient and timely resolution of maintenance issues while maintaining control over the repair process. The initiative enables greater autonomy in addressing maintenance needs and ensures prompt resolution of issues.

**Wellbeing initiatives**

The scheduling of lone worker training has been finalised, incorporating a combination of face-to-face sessions and Zoom workshops. This approach allows flexibility for staff who may need to travel while ensuring that the training is suitable and aligned with service delivery and individual staff requirements. The training will take place from 7 June to 14 July, and the associated costs will be covered within this financial year.

A provider for manual handling training has been identified and approved. This enables the team to proceed with booking staff training for high risk and high needs employees. It is worth noting that finding the appropriate provider took some time to ensure they were suitable for delivering high-quality training across different regions. The selected provider offers a combination of face to face and online training options, ensuring a streamlined and consistent training experience for all employees who require it. The emphasis was placed on finding a provider who could deliver the training of the same quality across various locations while also accommodating online training needs.

**Wellbeing calendar**

Staff have been providing fantastic feedback which is excellent progress, and it is encouraging to see team members actively involved and eagerly anticipating updates on initiatives. In addition, the Diabetes Foundation will be joining in July to discuss healthy food choices, provide education on food labelling, and address gut health.

**Events reports and KPI’s**

During the previous Board meeting, Ms Painter advised that the Board requested more contextual information in the presentation of measurements and KPI’s. She sought feedback from the Board regarding the new layout and whether it was easier to comprehend. Mr Patete was happy with the report, specifically referring to item 9, which provided useful context to the KPI data. He noted that there were no issues reported regarding total hours worked. Mr Patete acknowledged the potential for future enhancements and improvements to the report.

Ms Randell addressed a hazard report concerning the absence of a smoke detector in the south Auckland building during March. She informed the Board that she had contacted Heidi Lee, the property manager, to address the issue and is currently awaiting an estimated time of arrival regarding the prompt resolution of this matter.

Mr Scott raised concerns regarding the near misses report, specifically highlighting incidents involving PSP’s who experience physical strain while lifting objects in and out of cars, resulting in the need for physiotherapy. Mr Scott sought information on the actions being taken to address the issue, as well as the underlying cause of such incidents.

Ms Randell stated that the training for PSPs is currently being arranged. In response to the three near misses, Ms Painter addressed the Wellington incident, which involved roadworks. She mentioned that they have been in communication with local councils regarding the issue. Ms Painter acknowledged that they are currently in a reactive phase and unable to proactively put any steps in place to prevent such near misses. The focus now is on ensuring that staff are aware and cautious once the hazards are identified, although this is not an ideal situation at the moment.

Mr Patete discussed the difficulties faced in Wellington regarding the implementation of cycle lanes and the removal of parking spaces, particularly in the CBD. Ms Painter commented on the responsibility of Councils to inform local businesses about such changes. She mentioned that the communication and coordination process between the Councils and businesses seemed to have broken down, as no prior warning or notification was given in this instance.

Mr Scott acknowledged that similar situations might arise frequently due to Councils outsourcing a significant portion of their work. He emphasised the need for independent processes with the organisation that can proactively identify and address the potential impact on our premises. Mr Scott requested a proactive approach that can better identify and anticipate such situations, considering that many of our locations may be affected by these changes.

Ms Painter highlighted the importance of information sharing and discussed the methods of posting and providing information to both members and staff. She emphasised the need to revisit the hazard notification and communication processes to ensure effective dissemination of information. Additionally, Ms Painter suggested developing site-specific strategies to keep staff informed about relevant matters and enhance communication within the organisation.

Mr Scott raised a point that, as a PCBU there should be the ability to visit any of our premises and request access to the hazard register. He questioned whether this information is readily available for staff and if anyone can access the register and review the documented hazards present at each site.

Ms Painter addressed Mr Scott’s query by stating that any staff member has the ability to access the hazard register located on the shared drive at any time.

Ms Small suggested that the BLVNZ advocacy team may have contacts within some Councils, indicating a potential avenue for assistance or collaboration. Additionally, she raised a question regarding the signoff process for property and maintenance expenses falling within the $500-$2,000 range. Ms Small proposed considering a higher threshold, such as a $3,000-$4,000, for fast approval and completion of small jobs. She recommended including a requirement for obtaining multiple quotes as a caveat. Ms Small believed that increasing the threshold would streamline the property manager’s ability to expedite necessary tasks.

Ms Painter responded by explaining that the figure of $2,000 was agreed upon by Heidi Lee and Greg Hurn, although she was unsure of the specific justification for that amount. She emphasised the importance of being mindful of the responsibilities of administration staff members, as they are not typically engaged in obtaining multiple quotes, as it falls outside their designated role.

Mr Patete proposed leaving the process and solution regarding the signoff thresholds and approvals to management. He suggested addressing issues as they arise and ensuring that there are sufficient resources available to tackle those issues. Ms Painter highlighted the importance of being aware of potential overlaps in roles and responsibilities within the organisation.

Mr Patete thanked Ms Randell for the report and commended the wide range of initiatives presented. He suggested including the 2023 initiatives plan in the next report to provide a comprehensive overview of the accomplishments and forthcoming plans for the next year.

Mr Patete drew attention to item C in the report, which described a near miss where a staff member encountered a threatening dog at a client’s property and had to take measures to contain the situation. He raised questions about the process leading up to the client visits and how potential risks involving animals are addressed beforehand.

Ms Randel provided a response, stating that there is a process in place for a risk call to raise general awareness. She emphasised the need to ensure that the presence of a dog is recorded in the client’s file as a live note, serving as an additional reminder. In addition, she mentioned that conducting a risk assessment by the staff members themselves is crucial. Unfortunately, in the incident mentioned, it appears that the information regarding the dog was not effectively communicated, and steps will be taken to rectify this oversight going forward.

Ms Painter highlighted the need to expand and improve the risk assessment document, particularly addressing the issue of the questions not being comprehensive enough. She mentioned that this would be a project undertaken after the completion of the lone worker training. The training would aim to increase staff awareness and understanding of risk assessments, emphasising the importance of conducting one’s own risk assessment and providing guidance on the types of questions to consider before going on a house visit.

Mr Patete proposed the idea of having a table that presents the historical numbers of reported events per financial year. This table would provide a clear understanding of the level of events by month over time.

**Action:** Ms Randell to provide additional clarification on the specific details and numbers to be included in a separate document.

Mr Patete drew attention to item 10 in the actions list and suggested that it would be beneficial to include timeframes for each action item in the health and safety report.

**Action:** Ms Randell to incorporate ETA and specific timeframes for each item in the health and safety report.

**Action:** Mr Patete to discuss and clarify the reporting requirements of the Board with Ms Painter.

Mr Scott sought confirmation regarding the presence of compliance qualified representatives in the workplace. Ms Painter responded that the organisation is in the process of achieving compliance, as the training is currently being undertaken. She emphasised that although full compliance has not yet been achieved, the organisation is still considered compliant because the process has been implemented, representatives have been identified, and the training has been initiated.

Mr Scott inquired about the process of site-specific emergency response plans. Ms Painter replied that she is currently working on this project in collaboration with the organisation at a national level. She described the document as very comprehensive and acknowledged that each site is unique, using south Auckland as an example of a location with many factors to consider and various moving parts. Ms Painter mentioned that the team leads are responsible for managing the tasks and identifying the necessary support. She expressed her willingness to share the progress of the plans with the Board and noted that the document is currently 40 pages long, making it the most substantial piece of work due to legislative requirements.

**Action:** Ms Painter to circulate the ERP plan to the Board at the 1 July Board meeting.

The Chair acknowledged the presentation yesterday delivered by BeSafe to the Board, expressing appreciation for its value and usefulness.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the Board receives the health, safety and wellbeing report.

Moved by Mr Scott. Seconded by Ms Small. Motion Carried.

## BLVNZ Financial Accounts as at 31 March 2023

The Chair mentioned that the financial accounts were a new item on the Board agenda and highlighted that they had been reviewed by the Audit and Risk Committee and Chair, Mr Patete. The Chair then invited Mr Patete to share any comments he had regarding the accounts. Mr Patete referred back to his earlier update, indicating that the organisation is currently tracking ahead of budget for the YTD, as stated in his report (item 5.1).

Ms Abel-Williamson raised a question regarding the sponsorship of the guide dog food, specifically inquiring whether it is limited to dogs in training and those boarded at BLVNZ. She further inquired whether the sponsorship extends to benefitting members once the dogs have completed their training.

Mr Mulka confirmed that the sponsorship of guide dog food is indeed available to everyone. He explained that while the dogs are in training and boarding, it is the organisation’s responsibility to ensure they are properly fed and cared for. He mentioned that there are two levels of access to food: a discounted basis and ongoing negotiations with a company, Royal Canin, to provide food at no cost to the handlers. This sponsorship would amount to $500,000 annually for the organisation. Mr Mulka expressed his aspiration to eventually reach a point where the food can be provided free of charge to everybody, thereby alleviating the financial burden on handlers.

Ms Abel-Williamson highlighted the financial burden associated with having a guide dog and raised the possibility of utilising the WINZ disability allowance or supported living to cover the costs associated with guide dogs.

Mr Scott inquired about the process of providing value back to sponsors. Mr Mulka mentioned that discussions regarding the progress are currently taking place and emphasised that for a significant contribution to the organisation, recognition would be sought in various aspects such as the guide dog facility, branding materials, vehicles, and other relevant areas. Mr Mulka confirmed that a finalised agreement had been reached.

Mr Scott inquired if there were any other sponsorship deals similar to the one discussed. Mr Mulka responded that there are currently no other sponsorships of that magnitude. He mentioned the potential for future opportunities to leverage sponsorships to generate returns that can assist with the costs associated with running the organisation.

Mr Scott expressed his belief that the organisation has a strong brand suggested that many organisations would be interested in associating themselves with it through sponsorship. Mr Mulka agreed with this assessment, highlighting the organisations brand as the catalyst for potential sponsorships. Mr Alexander mentioned that Ms Green would be the expert in this area and stated that spending time on corporate sponsorship is not productive. He noted that Ms Green has targeted larger corporations as part of her plan.

Ms Small raised the previous sponsorship of guide dogs by Bayley’s, noting that after ten years, Bayley’s withdrew their sponsorship to realign their sales with other community activities. She questioned whether there would be a timeframe on the new sponsorship arrangement or if it would be reviewed periodically to ensure mutual satisfaction. Ms Small also mentioned that some people adopt retired guide dogs with health conditions and inquired if these dogs would be covered and included in the sponsorship process.

Mr Mulka clarified that there was no formal agreement in place with Bayley’s, although they did partner with BLVNZ and sponsored the mobility centre at south Auckland. Regarding the coverage of costs for retired guide dogs with health problems, Mr Mulka acknowledged the need to include them in the sponsorship process but mentioned that the organisation is not currently at that stage. He also addressed the issue of guide dogs in training that don’t make it to graduation, indicating that they should also be considered in terms of cost coverage.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the Board receive the report of the financials as at 31 March 2023.

Moved by Mr Billings. Seconded by Ms Small. Motion Carried.

# BOARD CORRESPONDENCE

Copies of the inwards and outwards correspondence received since the last meeting were included in the agenda pack.

The Chair acknowledge the late correspondence received from the DeafBlind Association, informing the Board about the resignation and retirement of Vaughan Dodd as President. The Chair expressed gratitude for the relationship shared with Mr Dodd during his tenure as President and extended congratulations to the new President, Kevin Prince.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the correspondence be noted.

# ITEMS FOR RATIFICATION

The papers contained in this section have all been previously circulated to the Board.

The Chair acknowledged the comments made in Mr Billings paper (I9.4) regarding the quality of the sound system and its positive impact on communication during the event at the DeafBlind Association. The Chair emphasised that the seminar had set a commendable standard in ensuring inclusivity through effective communication.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the following papers are all ratified as being received and the contents noted:

I9.1 Pearson Fund Minutes, 21 February 2023

I9.2 Pearson Fund Minutes, 21 March 2023

19.3 FPL Board Minutes, 11 November 2022

I9.4 Report of the 2023 Seminar of the DeafBlind Association NZ

# ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

The Chair suggested that, due to the sensitivity of some items, that the Board should move into Committee to discuss these.

*Public meeting closed at 12:08pm.*

**Moved by Mr Scott and seconded by Mr Billings, it was unanimously agreed to move into Committee at 12:50pm to discuss items of commercial and personal sensitivity.**

*The in-committee meeting closed at 2:50pm.*

It was agreed there would be no statement in the full Board Minutes.

# DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 31 May via Zoom.

**Clive Lansink**

**Chair**