

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

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS HELD ON SATURDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2024**

BLVNZ Wellington office, Oppenheim Meeting Room, 121 Adelaide Road, Mount Cook.

**Present:** Mr C Lansink (Chair),Ms J Small (Deputy Chair), Ms Abel-Williamson, Mr J Billings, Ms D McCaskill, Mr C Orr, Mr R Patete, Mr R Scott.

By Invitation: Ms A Midgen.

Observers: Allan Jones (in person), Bryan Thomas (in person), Mary Schnackenburg, David Allen, George Taggart, Geraldine Glanville, Raeleen Smith, Benny Foar.

In Attendance: Ms C Simanu (presented item G7.4).

Mr S Keeling (presented item G7.5).

Ms S Emirali (presented item J10.1).

Apologies: Ms AM Taggart.

*Note: The minutes reflect the order of items on the agenda, not necessarily the order in which items were discussed during the meeting.*

At 9:01am the Chair, Mr Lansink, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Mr Patete opened the meeting with a Karakia.

A round robin on introductions were carried out.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the meeting accept the apologies from Ms AM Taggart.

Moved by Ms Small. Seconded by Ms McCaskill. Motion Carried.

All present stood in silence as a mark of respect to members who had passed away since the last meeting on 6 July.

Ms Midgen provided a health and safety overview of exits.

The Chair mentioned that Ms Emirali would be joining the meeting at 11:00am to speak on behalf of Site Support Trust.

The Chair opened the floor for any other business to be raised at the meeting. There were no comments.

# A1. STANDING ITEMS

## A1.1 Directors’ Interests Register, Declaration of Interests.

The Chair asked for any updates to the interests register and for any conflicts that may arise during the meeting to be raised.

**Action:** Update the interest register to reflect Mr Keeling’s role change from Acting to CFO.

# B2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

## B2.1 Minutes of the full Board Meeting of 6 July 2024

The Chair opened the floor for any comments about the accuracy of the minutes. There were no comments.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the minutes of the full Board meeting held on 6 July 2024, be accepted as a true and accurate record.

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

## B2.2 Status Report of actions arising from the last meetings

The Chair opened the floor for discussion. There were no comments.

## B2.3 Any other matters arising from the minutes

There were no other matters raised.

# C3. CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S REPORTING

## C3.1 Report from the Chief Executive for July and August 2024

The report was taken as read. The Chair invited Ms Midgen to highlight key points.

#### **Data Sharing**

Ms Midgen reported strong engagement with Consumer organisations and partners, noting improved relationships and progress on resolving long-standing issues, such as the upcoming restart of data sharing.

#### **Vision Ireland**

Ms Midgen mentioned productive discussions with Vision Ireland, highlighting their informative and helpful insights, that provide valuable ideas for the organisation's journey.

#### **Dog Food**

Ms Abel-Williamson noted that many clients expressed their appreciation for receiving the dog food.

Mr Billings mentioned a member whose dog requires hypoallergenic food, which was not included in the free distribution, making it unfair that she has to purchase it herself despite her dog's allergy.

**Action:** Ms Midgen to follow up on the free dog food contract to determine if it specifies only a certain type of dog food or if a range is included.

Ms Abel-Williamson suggested reminding clients about Work and Income disability support, noting that dog food is included if they receive a letter from guide dog services detailing their dog's needs. The Chair also mentioned the hardship fund for those facing financial struggles who may be eligible to apply.

#### **Kennel Project**

Mr Patete asked about the status of the kennel project, seeking an update as it nears completion, and referred to a report regarding a pending bequest of $1.7m.

Ms Midgen reported that the main kennel build is now operational, with a small blessing planned for next week. A larger celebration will occur once all buildings are completed. The team is excited to move in, and the dog centre is settling in well, making life easier for both animals and humans. The project is on schedule and within budget.

#### **Graduate Programme**

Ms Simanu reported that the graduate programme has been refreshed this year to provide more structure and support for the three graduates being recruited. The advertising process has begun, with 23 applications received so far for roles in Client Services, Engagement and Marketing, and Data or Technology. She is collaborating with various agencies and tapping into the BLVNZ community to reach the appropriate demographic. Recruitment will start in October, with appointments expected by November. This year, there is a strong focus on transitioning the graduates into permanent positions, supported by a mentoring programme that offers exposure to different areas of the organisation.

The Chair expressed enthusiasm for the graduate internship programme, calling it a great new initiative and noting that there seems to be strong interest in the opportunities being offered.

#### **Eligibility Criteria**

The Chair noted that nearly 5,000 clients are partially eligible but fall outside the eligibility criteria defined in the constitution. He clarified that limited services can still be provided to this group, but emphasised the need for a clear understanding of the resources allocated to them. He requested a report for a future meeting outlining the services offered to these partially eligible clients.

Ms Midgen recommended that the report include forecasting for future growth in this area, as it is expected to expand significantly over the next 5 to 10 years.

The Chair acknowledged the Board's intention regarding services for partial clients, primarily to prepare individuals for when they become full clients. He requested a clear overview of what that looks like.

Ms Midgen mentioned research on functional blindness as another important consideration, suggesting that the report include this information and be reviewed by the Client Services Committee first.

**Action:** Ms Midgen to provide a report on clients outside the eligibility criteria, detailing the services available to these partially eligible clients, the related research, and the resources allocated to this group.

Mr Billings asked about how the organisation monitors individuals who do not meet full eligibility criteria, particularly regarding tracking those whose vision deteriorates. He asked how referrers are informed and how the organisation keeps track of these people.

Ms Midgen acknowledged that the organisation often does not receive updates from referrers as vision loss progresses. However, she noted that the team conducts visits to assess the situation directly.

Mr Billings suggested that BLVNZ inform clients to return to their optometrist or ophthalmologist for an updated prescription to facilitate their transition to full client status.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the report from the Chief Executive is received.

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

## C3.2 KPI Report

The Chair opened the floor for discussion regarding the report, highlighting that it represents the last quarter of the financial year and provides a comprehensive overview. He noted that some information is included in the report against the business plan and the community impact report. There was no further discussion.

**IT WAS AGREED** by agreement that the KPI report be received.

# D4. STRATEGIC ITEMS

## D4.1 Community Impact Report

The Chair opened the floor for discussion prior to finalising the report.

Ms Midgen noted an amendment on page 40 regarding the audit report, stating that the client base has expanded from 14,956 to 15,692.

Mr Scott mentioned the need to update the bios on the website. Ms Midgen added that the Chair requested a summary of funding provided to Consumer organisations and major outcomes achieved over the past year, which is currently being prepared. This will be presented to the Funding Committee for approval before being taken to the full Board and published.

**Action:** remove or update the square brackets from the "next generation" subheading and the Te Reo comments in the Community Impact Report.

The Chair thanked Ms Midgen for submitting the report on time and requested that staff be acknowledged for their efforts in completing it promptly.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the Community Impact Report is approved, with changes, for distribution.

Moved by Ms McCaskill. Seconded by Ms Small. Motion Carried.

## D4.2 BLVNZ Street Collection Report

The Chair opened the floor for discussion.

Ms Small questioned the tangible benefits of the street collection for the organisation, noting that aspects like publicity and community visibility are not easily measurable. She pointed out that while everyone sees and expects these collections, they are not financially viable.

Ms Midgen acknowledged that some people are committed to the street collection but highlighted the challenges, such as the decline in cash donations and the embarrassment felt by those unable to give. She mentioned that locations like outside the Warehouse and supermarkets no longer allow collections, and referred to safety concerns due to incidents of theft. She emphasised that organising these collections requires significant time and suggested exploring alternative methods for fundraising.

Mr Billings brought up the idea of cashless options, while Ms Midgen noted the associated costs of hiring and setting them up.

Mr Scott acknowledged the reasoning behind the changes and asked what would replace the street collection to maintain general visibility in the community, particularly among those who might not typically engage. Ms Midgen responded that they are exploring alternatives.

The Chair discussed the use of systems that facilitate automatic donations from credit cards as simple solutions that can encourage people to contribute easily. He noted the report's references to the changing nature of society and the limitations set by City Councils. He suggested a commitment to invest in new digital strategies, which could potentially lead to a future re-evaluation of street collections.

Mr Scott mentioned that many people are eager to volunteer and suggested considering what roles they can take on and pointed out the intangible benefits of volunteering.

Mr Billings asked about the return on investment for the street appeal. Mr Keeling responded that it generated approximately $100,000 before costs, but after costs, it broke even.

Mr Patete expressed support for the change and emphasised the importance of communicating with community groups, highlighting the passion of local volunteers. He suggested developing a solid communication plan for this transition and asked about future opportunities, referencing the paper on the new community fundraising activity.

Ms McCaskill expressed initial concerns about smaller towns and their giving practices but noted that many local events provide opportunities for community contributions. She encouraged organising these events to coincide with appeals, which could enhance local giving while keeping volunteers safe.

Mr Orr highlighted the importance of maintaining visibility, not just income, and noted that the appeals were previously conducted over five days and questioned how this profile would be replaced.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** BLVNZ ceases street collections.

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

## D4.3 FY24 Report against the Business Plan

The Chair opened the floor for discussion.

The Chair suggested that the section on Educate and Equip should reference services like mobility, daily living, and adaptive technology. He felt the Zoom phone initiative was lengthy and should be categorised under organisational purpose rather than social inclusion. He also expressed interest in including policy and advice under the social inclusion section.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the FY24 Report against Business Plan is approved, with the amended changes.

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

## D4.4 The Board’s role in a crisis

The Chair mentioned that the Governance Committee is developing a policy on the role of a director and opened the floor for discussion.

Mr Patete expressed confusion regarding section 6, specifically about the areas where the Board should be involved in a crisis.

Ms Midgen clarified that the item was initially raised by Mr Scott regarding the organisation's and Board's considerations during a crisis. She mentioned that she is drafting a paper to outline all relevant factors for the Governance Committee to decide what falls under operational versus governance matters, and that this process has been submitted to the Governance Committee.

Mr Orr referenced the process used during the Christchurch earthquakes, noting that BLVNZ successfully called all resident members in Christchurch.

Ms Midgen confirmed that the organisation has a disaster preparedness plan and an emergency response plan. Mr Patete asked if these plans include a section on the Board's responsibilities, to which Ms Midgen replied that they do not.

The Chair expressed the need for clear distinctions regarding the Board's ultimate responsibilities, particularly in relation to the delegated authority given to the CEO. He noted that the paper includes expectations for both the collective Board and individual directors during a crisis. He suggested that the Governance Committee clarify what constitutes a policy matter for the Board as a whole versus individual obligations for directors.

It was agreed to develop the information as suggested in the paper and to allow the process to proceed, with the Governance Committee reviewing it before presenting it back to the Board.

**Action:** Governance Committee to update the Board’s role in a crisis and incorporate this information into the job description for directors.

# E5. COMMITTEE REPORTS

## E5.1 Update from the Audit and Risk Committee

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, Mr Patete, reported on the meeting held on 11 September.

Mr Patete reported that the committee met last Wednesday with a comprehensive agenda, the first meeting since April. He highlighted the significant item of the year-end audit, mentioning that Deloitte audit partner Mr Erasmus attended to discuss the audit report, which included the performance report. He noted the historical term "annual financial statements" has been updated to "performance report," which now includes non-financial performance indicators measuring performance against targets as part of the audit plan.

Mr Patete invited Mr Keeling to discuss the performance report and highlight key points from the Deloitte report concerning the year end audit.

Mr Keeling commented that the completed performance report shows that BLVNZ, as the operating entity, recorded a deficit of just over $5m, attributed to a tough fundraising environment and a significant drop in legacies. He noted that the organisation has managed costs to offset some of the income decline, with the entire company working together to achieve savings and minimise losses.

Mr Keeling reported that the return on investment has been positive despite market volatility, with some good gains in investments. BLVNZ received a dividend from FPL and, while the environment remains challenging, it delivered a dividend of $3m to RNZFB as shareholder, resulting in an overall surplus of $3m for the year.

Mr Keeling noted that at the group level, including the FPL property portfolio, there was a small deficit due to property revaluations that have decreased in line with the market. One notable decrease was related to Pearson House, which moved into a partnership as part of the retirement village. Despite this, there was a significant uplift from the first building, Nathan Residents, being completed and occupied by tenants, contributing a non-cash entry uplift of $19m. Overall, the group delivered a surplus of $11m.

Mr Keeling stated that Deloitte found no major issues in their audit report, only some process-related matters for management to address. He noted that the Audit and Risk Committee endorsed the financial performance report at Wednesday's meeting. If the Board signs the performance report and representation letter, the auditors will issue an unqualified audit opinion.

Mr Patete mentioned a conversation with Mr Erasmus and Mr Keeling during the Audit and Risk Committee meeting on Wednesday, expressing comfort with the process. He acknowledged Mr Keeling's achievements, particularly his extra hours of work, and thanked him for his efforts and hard work over the past few months, which were supported by his team.

Mr Patete thanked Mr Keeling for providing the update.

Mr Patete discussed Deloitte's audit of the partnership, FPL, and RNZFB accounts, highlighting their comprehensive view and comfort with the service provided. He noted the complexity involved in testing valuation assumptions and different reporting standards for the Village partnership, as FPL operates as a not-for-profit. He mentioned that Deloitte is prepared to provide an unqualified opinion on the annual performance report, contingent on the Board signing the performance report and representation letter. This assures Deloitte that all audit obligations have been met and that the accounts present a true and fair view at the financial year-end. He confirmed that the management representation letter has been signed.

### E5.1.1 Engagement and Marketing Strategy 2025-28.

Mr Patete shared that the committee received the fundraising strategy from Ms Green during the Audit and Risk Committee meeting. He acknowledged the challenging year in fundraising, which is reflected in the revenue for the past 12 months, noting that fundraising accounts for 78% of BLVNZ's total revenue, making it crucial for financial sustainability. He emphasised Ms Green's strategy, which focuses on diversifying fundraising activities, increasing digital platform engagement, and moving away from street collections. The strategy also highlights the importance of donor stewardship to build relationships and encourage regular giving. It also aims to enhance public engagement, advocacy, and outreach to a wider potential client base, including Māori, Pasifika, and Asian groups. He noted that the Audit and Risk Committee endorsed the strategy for Board approval, emphasising its significance for the organisation.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** on the recommendation of the Audit and Risk Committee, the RNZFB Board approves the BLVNZ Engagement and Marketing Strategy FY25-28.

Moved by Mr Patete. Seconded by Mr Orr. Motion Carried.

### E5.1.2 SIPO

Mr Patete mentioned that the Audit and Risk Committee received the quarterly investment report ending June, noting that despite economic challenges, investments are performing well. He reported that the SIPO was reviewed and remains unchanged, which he is pleased about. The performance report reflects the effectiveness of spreading investment risk. Mr Scott added that adjustments have been made to keep investments aligned with the SIPO, as some cash was withdrawn, indicating active management to stay within the SIPO's ranges.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** on the recommendation of the Audit and Risk Committee, the RNZFB Board approves the Statement of Investment Policy and Objectives (SIPO) without change, dated September 2024.

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

### E5.1.3 Board Representation Letter to Deloitte

Recommendation THAT the Board Chair and Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee be authorised to sign the 2023-24 performance report and Directors Representation Letter.

Moved by Mr Patete. Seconded by Mr Scott. Motion Carried.

### E5.1.4 Confirmation of Auditor

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** on the recommendation of the FPL Board, the RNZFB Board as Shareholder resolves that a full audit of FPL is undertaken for the financial year ending 30 June 2025 engaging the same Auditor as for the RNZFB Group Audit.

Moved by Mr Patete. Seconded by Mr Orr. Motion Carried.

#### **Officers**

Mr Patete referred to the recommendation with Mr Keeling moving into the CFO role that he be appointed as an Officer of the RNZFB and that Mr Hurn remain as an officer of the RNZFB.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** Mr Keeling be appointed as an Officer of the RNZFB for noting on the Charities Register.

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

#### **Risk Register and Contracts Register**

Mr Patete reported that the committee received the risk register, which contains all high operational risks, noting no new risks identified and that all residual risks remain at previously reported levels. The committee also received the contracts register, which outlines BLVNZ's major contracts with various parties, providing a clear understanding of financial commitments and ensuring effective management of key contracts.

#### **ICT Update Report**

Mr Patete noted receiving the ICT update report as of June, which outlines a four-year roadmap for ICT, emphasising the key initiative of transitioning to cloud services while still maintaining some on-premise servers. A question was raised about data security and accessibility in the event of issues with the hosting provider. It was noted as an action item for Mr Waring to confirm that data remains secure and accessible in such potential future scenarios.

#### **Endowed Capitals Fund**

Mr Patete mentioned that the endowed capital funds report, covering activities until the end of June, was received.

#### **Bank Account Owners**

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** Stephen Keeling (Chief Financial Officer) and Andrea Midgen (Chief Executive Officer) be added as Account Owners on all Bank Accounts held by the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind and Foundation and subsidiaries.

Moved Mr Patete. Seconded by Mr Scott. Motion Carried.

The Chair expressed his thanks to those involved in the behind-the-scenes efforts, noting that the audit process has been smooth for the Board.

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

Move by Mr Patete. Seconded by Mr Orr. Motion Carried.

The next Audit and Risk Committee meeting is scheduled for 4 November 2024.

## E5.2 Update from the Governance Committee

The Chair of the Governance Committee, Ms Small, reported on the meetings held in August and September.

Key highlights from Ms Small:

* Risk in a crisis was discussed, and there was a clear direction to continue monitoring the outcomes in the report.
* Ms Midgen presented a paper on the evolution of the RNZFB constitution, discussing governance models, including enhancing the incorporated society model or possibly shifting to a charitable trust model. Ms Small emphasised the commitment to reviewing the constitution, highlighting the importance of self-determination within the membership model, but also the need to ensure diversity and necessary skills on the Board. This review is being planned, with a terms of reference being developed and a small group formed to create a comprehensive plan. Input from Consumer organisations will be prioritised.
* Ms Small, Mr Lansink, and Ms Midgen have met to discuss the review of Board policy 6.14, funding of consumer organisations, with a draft document scheduled for the November Board meeting.
* Candidate questions have been finalised, and Mr Lansink and Ms Small will meet with Nicola Owen, who is facilitating the "meet the candidates" session for this year's elections. The session will be held via Zoom, with recordings posted on TIS and the elections website.
* Minor grammatical changes were made to the constitution after the July Board meeting, and these will be included in the final package to go to Members for decision at the planned Special Meeting of Members.
* The Governance Committee workplan was updated.
* The delegation of the Board chair duties is still a work in progress and will be reported on at the November meeting.
* The Board policy manual is being simplified by separating guidelines and procedures, with some operational policies delegated back to staff for ownership. Ms Midgen is reviewing a revised version for the October Governance Committee meeting.
* The proposed mandatory policies paper will be discussed under item 7.6 on the Board agenda.
* During the general business discussion, the Board retreat was addressed. Ms McCaskill is exploring accommodation options in Auckland and suggested visiting the retirement village as part of the retreat. She emphasised the importance of keeping the Board updated and open to ideas, with the theme “Looking forward to look back to move forward,” which focuses on using the organisation's history to guide future governance. Ms Small recommended inviting speakers with historical knowledge of the organisation as well as forward thinking individuals. The retreat is scheduled for the last weekend in January, starting at 9:00 am on Friday and ending at 4:00 pm on Saturday.

The next Governance Committee meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 22 October 2024.

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

## E5.3 Update from the People Committee

The Chair of the People Committee, Ms Taggart, was absent from the meeting, and it was noted that the Committee hasn’t met since the last Board meeting.

The next People Committee meeting is scheduled for 24 September 2024.

## E5.4 Update from the Client Services Committee

The Chair of the Client Services Committee, Mr Lansink, reported on the meeting held on 3 September.

Highlights from the discussion include:

### Dangerous Dogs

The Committee raised a query about cases where clients have been denied a guide dog due to dangerous dogs in their area. Given the significant impact on affected clients, the Committee stressed the importance of closely monitoring this issue.

### Client Reference Group

A discussion took place on what can be learned from Vision Australia’s client reference group, as a similar approach is being considered. It was noted that a well-functioning, diverse, and representative group could help effectively implement co-design principles. The committee and management are working to develop a discussion paper for the Board's approval early next year, which will be circulated to clients and consumer organisations for feedback.

### Library Service

The Chair discussed the recent library survey results, noting that Booklink is no longer functional. Some clients have expressed frustration with the replacement, Easy Reader. Two approaches were proposed: improving Easy Reader or exploring alternative solutions, with a focus on identifying the core issues that need to be addressed.

A clear book selection policy is needed to ensure clients are aware of new books. Keeping the collection updated and allowing clients to easily access books preselected by library staff based on their preferences is essential.

It was discussed that BLVNZ should implement Daisy online protocols to allow clients to directly access library content using compatible players like the Victa Reader and certain Braille displays. Integrating content from the Accessible Books Consortium into the library experience would enhance accessibility. Additionally, the library should provide ephemeral materials, such as government announcements, in accessible formats, linking these resources for easier access.

The committee received a paper on library services from Blind Citizens NZ, referenced under item H8.1 in the agenda correspondence. It was agreed that management would respond to the points and recommendations in the paper at a future meeting.

The Committee briefly reviewed its terms of reference and recommended them to the Board for approval without changes, as noted in item G7.10 of the minutes.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the report from the Chair of the Client Services Committee is received.

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

*The meeting was adjourned at 10:30am and reconvened at 10:57am.*

# F6. PROPERTY AND TRUSTS

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the following reports are ratified as having been received and contents duly noted:

## F6.1 Henderson Trust Activity Report to 30 June 2024.

## F6.2 Oppenheim Trust Activity Report to 30 June 2024.

## F6.3 Forsyth Fund Activity Report 30 June 2024.

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

# G7. GOVERNANCE MATTERS

## G7.1 Report from the Chair on his formal activities for the period

The Chair opened the floor for discussion. There were no comments.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the Chair’s report is received.

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

## G7.2 Board Governance Annual Work Plan 2024

The paper was noted.

## G7.3 Register of Board Resolutions

The Board duly noted the Register of Board Resolutions.

## G7.4 Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report

The Chair extended a warm welcome to Ms Simanu, GM People and Performance. The report was taken as read. Ms Simanu thanked the Board members for attending recent health and safety meetings and requested feedback on the meetings and suggestions for improvement.

Mr Patete discussed the fiduciary duties of Board representatives. He noted that the health and safety committee meets monthly and emphasised the growing importance of health and safety and robust systems in the organisation. He suggested considering whether a Board member should attend every meeting or just quarterly.

Ms Simanu stated that health and safety is functioning well and does not require monthly Board oversight, agreeing that a quarterly presence and two monthly updates at Board meetings are sufficient. Mr Patete noted that while the organisation is generally low risk, there still are some field risks. He suggested that now, with the organisation's maturity in this area, it is appropriate for the Board to step back and check in every quarter.

Ms Small observed that the meetings have improved significantly over the past year, with better documentation processes in place. She recommended continuing to review the minutes of every meeting for monitoring purposes. She highlighted that certain areas, such as guide dogs, transport, and staff visiting clients alone, pose higher risks. She emphasised the importance of having processes to mitigate these risks and support staff in their roles with confidence.

Ms Simanu mentioned the recent review of the lone worker policy, highlighting that training is being rolled out alongside the policy. This training includes scenarios to help staff navigate specific situations effectively.

Ms Simanu highlighted the positive progress in hazard and incident reporting and the integration of health and safety across the organisation. She emphasised the goal of fostering a deeper relationship with Telus, the EAP provider, to enhance employee wellbeing. She noted the importance of balancing work and personal life and mentioned that Telus offers valuable resources, such as wellbeing webinars and an individual wellbeing app, at minimal cost, to support and enhance individual wellbeing.

Mr Billings noted that past reports included the number of hours employees utilised the EAP. Mr Patete expressed interest in analysing data on trends, specifically any increases in usage and the reasons behind them.

**Action:** Ms Simanu to report on EAP data.

Mr Patete raised questions about the volunteer policy and BLVNZ's commitment to health and safety for volunteers. Ms Simanu stated that the organisation has a duty to ensure the same health and safety standards for volunteers as for staff. Ms Midgen emphasised that the organisation holds the risk, especially if volunteers are on the premises, and it is essential to support them in meeting at least the minimum health and safety requirements.

The Chair emphasised that directors have a legal responsibility for health and safety, ensuring the organisation meets its obligations. He noted that in recent years, significant progress has been made in New Zealand regarding health and safety, with the organisation fostering a culture of risk awareness among staff and implementing effective frameworks. As the organisation's practices mature, the Board's involvement in details may decrease, but it remains crucial for the Board to determine the level of monitoring needed. He highlighted the importance of health and safety reports to the Board, as they provide an opportunity for directors to understand their obligations and rely on incoming information.

The Chair opened the floor for any further discussion. There were no comments.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the Board receive the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report for the period ending 31 July 2024.

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

## G7.5 BLVNZ Financial Accounts as at 31 July 2024

The Chair noted these were discussed earlier under item E5.1.

Mr Keeling reported that, one month into the new financial year, the organisation is still tracking ahead of budget. While fundraising income, particularly from legacies, is below budget, donations are exceeding expectations. The shortfall in legacy notifications and cash is contributing to this month's deficit. On the cost side, expenses are below budget due to timing issues related to marketing and payments to community support groups, which are expected to catch up in August. Overall, the organisation remains ahead of budget.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the Board receive the BLVNZ financial accounts for the period ending 31 July 2024.

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

## G7.6 Mandatory Board Policies

The Chair noted that the Governance Committee has completed work on the policies, which are now ready to be circulated to members and clients for feedback. This is part of a mandatory policy and obligatory consultation process.

Mr Patete suggested adding "ensuring appropriate training and regular due diligence" to the health and safety section of the volunteer policy. He also noted the need for consistency in language, recommending the use of "RNZFB Board of Directors" instead of "Board members."

**Action:** ensure consistency is applied throughout all Board policies.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** on the recommendation of the Governance Committee, that the Board approves the policies 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, with the agreed amendments, AND THAT, as mandatory policies, these are approved for circulation to stakeholders.

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

## G7.7 FPL and BRT AGM Notices

The notices were noted.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** on the recommendation of the FPL Board, the RNZFB Board as Shareholder resolves that a full audit of FPL is undertaken for the financial year ending 30 June 2025 engaging the same Auditor as for the RNZFB Group Audit.

Moved by Mr Patete. Seconded by Mr Orr. Motion Carried.

## G7.8 Board statement to Royal Commission of Inquiry into abuse in state and faith based institutions

It was noted that a statement was issued following the publication of the report from the Royal Commission inquiry into abuse in state and faith based institutions.

**IT WAS AGREED** that the statement was noted.

The Chair asked if there were any comments to raise. There were no comments.

## G7.9 Nominee Director Appointment

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** on the recommendation of the Audit and Risk Committee, that the Board approves Greg Hurn as nominee for Stephen Keeling, on the Foundation Properties Ltd and Foundation Village Limited Boards.

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

## G7.10 Client Services Committee Terms of Reference

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** on the recommendation of the Client Services Committee, the Client Services Terms of Reference is approved, without change, for readoption by the Board.

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

# H8. BOARD CORRESPONDENCE

# H8.1 Email/letter from Blind Citizens NZ, 23 August.

The Chair noted that correspondence regarding library services from Blind Citizens NZ has been received and referred to the Client Services Committee. Management has been asked to provide comments, which will be reviewed by the Committee.

# H8.2-H8.5 Email to/from Rick Hoskin, July and August.

The Chair mentioned that questions arose from the recently adopted strategic plan and a question and answer session, with some questions addressed through correspondence. He noted that Mr Hoskin had asked about the delivery costs associated with providing free food for guide dog handlers, and the Chair clarified those costs with him.

# H8.6 Email from/to Dennis Smith, 8 August.

The Chair noted that the client expressed concerns regarding a proposed diversity clause to be added to the constitution and requested an explanation about the clause.

**IT WAS AGREED** **THAT** the inwards correspondence is received, and that the outwards correspondence is endorsed.

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

# I9. ITEMS FOR RATIFICATION

The following papers contained in this section have been previously circulated to the Board:

* I9.1 Pearson Fund Minutes, 18 June 2024.
* I9.2 Pearson Fund Minutes, 16 July 2024.
* I9.3 Notes of the Hamilton Meet and Greet Community Event, 5 July 2024.
* I9.4 BLENNZ Report from Ms Abel-Williamson, July 2024 and September 2024.
* I9.5 Report on Deafblind Association NZ AGM, 25 August 2024.

### Dangerous Dogs

Ms Midgen referred to item I9.4 and highlighted issues regarding roaming and potentially dangerous dogs in Manurewa, noting similarities with the experiences of guide dog handlers. She mentioned a meeting that Pete Hoskin has with the Council and suggested that she attend as a joint voice to raise awareness of the growing issue. She pointed out that the Council requires multiple witnesses before taking action on dog complaints, emphasising the need for a high-level systemic approach to address the problem.

**IT WAS AGREED THAT** the above items are ratified as having been received and contents duly noted.

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

# J10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

## J10.1 Presentation from Sue Emirali, Sight Support Trust.

*Ms Sue Emirali joined the meeting at 11:00am with Ms Deb Duncan.*

The Chair thanked Ms Emirali and Ms Duncan for the opportunity to meet in person while the Board was in Wellington.

Ms Emirali provided an overview of Sight Support Trust, mentioning that they receive calls related to daily living tasks and equipment for adapting to failing sight. She emphasised their focus on individuals with low vision and highlighted the importance of lived experience with adaptive technology. She explained that the organisation was formed to apply for funding and support for these initiatives.

Ms Emirali noted receiving an average of 10-15 unsolicited calls per month and mentioned a MOU with Macular Degeneration NZ to provide peer support and contribute articles for their magazines. She highlighted her participation in events like Women's Health Expos, CWI, and Age Concern, focusing on the significant needs of the older population.

Ms Emirali noted that she receives calls from people with family members visiting New Zealand from overseas, seeking guidance on how to assist visitors with low vision. She expressed concern about the availability of appropriate equipment. After her recent visit to Perth and the VisAbility shop, she referenced her experience at the Vision Australia shop, where she brought a headlight to demonstrate. She mentioned that seeing the equipment in person changed her perspective, and highlighted the helpfulness of the two staff members who provided demonstrations of the products.

Ms Emirali shared an experience of assisting a woman who struggled to measure ingredients for baking cakes, emphasising the importance of finding different ways to help individuals. She suggested that if there is someone at BLVNZ or the contact centre who can provide a contact number for assistance, it would be beneficial, rather than leaving individuals without support. She noted that this could serve as a helpful resource for those in need.

Ms Emirali noted that funding is not being spent much in Auckland, but efforts are being made to promote awareness of other Consumer organisations and provide support. She described how most funds are used for day trips to rural areas and large rest homes, such as Ryman, where they can engage with up to 100 people. She also mentioned fundraising for guide dogs and the purchase of canes, along with the costs associated with this work. Additionally, she referred to the importance of referrals and support for individuals with lived experience who simply want to have a conversation.

The Chair emphasised Ms Emirali's points about the importance of examining equipment before purchasing, referencing the impressive Vision Australia store in Melbourne. He noted her observation that individuals may believe they can no longer perform certain tasks, not realising they can be taught to do things differently as their sight fails. He highlighted the challenge of how individuals in this situation can gain that knowledge. The Chair mentioned that Ms Midgen has identified a lost group of clients who feel abandoned, a recurring theme during last year's review of services. He reiterated the commitment to reach out to these individuals to help them navigate their blindness journey more effectively.

Ms Midgen acknowledged that there is work to be done and referred to the recently approved operations plan. She highlighted the first outbound programme as a step towards contacting clients, noting uncertainty about how quickly they can progress due to expected demand. She committed to providing the Board with updates on responses and feedback. Ms Midgen also noted her focus on practices in Client Services, emphasising that while productivity metrics are important, there should also be an emphasis on quality.

Ms Midgen highlighted that equipment was a key topic at recent meet and greet events, with strong feedback from participants. She mentioned that Vision Australia is visiting New Zealand in October, covering Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch. She emphasised the opportunity to build on this and explore how to make this available in other parts of New Zealand.

## J10.2 In-Committee Meeting

The Chair stated that the Board held an in-committee meeting yesterday to discuss sensitive matters, and that there was no statement to be recorded in the minutes.

## J10.3 Thank you to Wellington staff

The Chair expressed appreciation for the staff support in Wellington, noting their efforts in making the Board feel welcome and looked after during their visit. The Chair emphasised the value of meeting and engaging with staff during meetings and requested that this be formally recognised.

**Action:** Ms Midgen to convey the Board's thanks to the Wellington staff for their support during the two day visit.

Ms McCaskill closed the meeting with a Karakia.

The open meeting closed at 12:14pm.

# K11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled on **Friday 15 November** in Auckland.

**Clive Lansink**

**Board Chair**