

# **Minutes of the Horticulture Forum Meeting**

**Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015, Rugby Club, Portadown**

**Chair:** Elaine Shaw

**Present:** Brian Hughes, Paul Mooney, Barbara Erwin, Sam MacNeice, Hamilton Loney, Robin McKee, Roy Lyttle, Eric Long, Elaine Chapman (minutes)

**Apologies:** Philip Gass, Peter Donnelly, Tim Hunniford, Barclay Bell, Shane Donnelly, Doug Thomson, Kieran Hughes, Jason Podris, Thomas Gilpin

## **1. Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

## **2. *Strategic Investment Support – Whole Farm Needs Assessment, Gavin McQuaid***

Gavin McQuaid from Pillar II Capital Investment Branch, DARD, provided members with a very comprehensive summary of the DARD Whole Farm Business Needs Assessment (WFNA) Survey. He stressed the need for all farm businesses, and especially specialised horticulture businesses, to complete the assessment and return it to DARD at [wfna@dardni.gov.uk](mailto:wfna@dardni.gov.uk) by **Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2015**.

Potentially £200m could be available, but the Business Investment Scheme will have to be approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel and the need for this support for on farm capital investment will have to be demonstrated by industry. The WFNA provides evidence from industry of farm businesses objective requirements for the next 5 years. The WFNA will also help DARD to profile spending over the 5 years of the scheme. Gavin explained that the biggest risk with the scheme is an under spend as money cannot be carried over from one year to the next. Consequently accurate profiling is essential.

If EU approval is obtained, the Business Investment Scheme is unlikely to open before 2016. Minimum grant paid will be £2,000 and maximum grant will be £250,000. Business plans will be required. The detail needed within the Business Plan will depend on expenditure. A template for the Business Plan is to be produced.

**Elaine to discuss the definition of ‘Amenity Horticulture’ with Gavin and send him details of the RoI Scheme of Investment Aid for the Commercial Horticulture Sector.**

## **3. *Skilled Workforce – Education and Training Review, Paul Mooney***

A review of Education and Training provision at CAFRE will be undertaken later this year. The Terms of reference for the review are likely to be agreed in April with the review likely to commence in autumn 2015.

Paul expressed thanks to ALCI who had a stand at the Growers NI Trolley Fair and Careers event in February at CAFRE Greenmount Campus. A number of CAFRE Horticulture students obtained summer employment with ALCI members at the event and ALCI seemed pleased that the event was worthwhile.

Forum members were asked to encourage young people who may be interested in horticulture to attend the CAFRE Greenmount Campus Open Day which will take place on 22<sup>nd</sup> April from 4 – 9pm

A new “Grow Careers” event will be held at Greenmount Campus on 23 and 24 June 2015. During the event potential students will be shown the various aspects of horticulture and encouraged to consider it as a possible career. NI schools have been invited to attend and some 500 children from 15 schools are planned to visit the campus over the two days.

Horticulture Forum members were also invited to attend the CAFRE Horticulture Awards Day at Greenmount Campus on 15<sup>th</sup> June. Maureen Evans-Olsen, Head of UK Worldskills will present the awards.

#### **4. Update of Industry Review Action Plan**

The Review and Strategic Priorities for the Development of the Horticulture Industry in Northern Ireland Action Plan is to be reviewed at the next meeting.  
**Elaine Chapman to send out a copy of the Action Plan to members before the next meeting.**

#### **5. AOB**

Elaine Shaw is progressing the establishment of the horticulture Forum bank account.

#### **6. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held before the CAFRE Horticulture Awards at Greenmount Campus on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2015.