

# **Minutes of the Horticulture Forum Meeting**

**Monday 21 November 2016, 7:30 pm, Portadown Rugby Club**

**Chair:** Keith Crawford

**Present:** Peter Donnelly, Barbara Erwin, Patricia Erwin, Hamilton Loney, Roy Lyttle, Paul Mooney, John Shannon, Patrick Taggart, Doug Thomson

## **1. Apologies**

Barclay Bell, Shane Donnelly

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

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted.

## **3. Action Plan**

The draft Action Plan was approved and appreciation of Ian Duff's facilitation role was recorded.

## **4. Stormont reception**

Keith explained that plans are progressing well. Leaflet design is at an advanced stage. Catering arrangements need further development. The guest list is being created.

## **5. Balmoral Show**

Patricia mooted the idea of the Forum having a marquee exhibiting all horticultural sectors at Balmoral Show 2017 (10-13 May). The cost would be ~£720 (inc. VAT). The suggestion was favourably received, although there was some apprehension about finding sufficient volunteers to adequately staff the exhibit. Patricia emphasized that it would be extremely beneficial to ensure the marquee was part of the kids' trail.

**Patricia to let David Laidlaw know that the Forum would like to meet with him on 12 January to explore the issues.**

**John to contact Neil Cummings to encourage his participation in Balmoral Show.**

## **6. Brexit**

Patrick gave a very brief outline of a draft report on the implications of Brexit for horticulture in Northern Ireland, prepared by Kieran Lavelle. Several concerns were identified, including: availability of labour; cost of imported inputs; access to export markets (including the EU); competition from imports; loss of support for

POs; and plant health. When completed the report will be forwarded to DAERA Policy.

**All members to draw up a list of their organisation's Brexit concerns in advance of the next meeting.**

**Patrick to circulate UFU's and Doug's documents outlining their Brexit concerns and Kieran's report when finalised.**

## **7. Farm Business Improvement Scheme – Capital (Tranche 1)**

Members expressed frustration and disappointment at the absence from the Tier 1 eligible items list of many of the items they would have been interested in. This was despite the best efforts of UFU to have such items included. Tier 2, while not constrained by a list of eligible items, is unattractive to many members because of the minimum project cost of £30,000. It was agreed that the Forum should campaign for Tier 1 Tranche 2 to be more useful to horticulture. This should include direct representation to the Minister and other influential people, as well as response to the consultation.

## **8. DAERA Knowledge Framework**

Keith and Doug attended the pre-consultation stakeholder meeting on DAERA's Knowledge Framework (education strategy) on 6 October. Various individuals and organisations involved in horticulture responded to the pre-consultation: Keith; Doug; UFU; and Landscape Institute NI. There was a general view that the draft document (dated 23 June 2016) was inadequate and vague in some respects. It was agreed that the Forum's response to the consultation should be robust and should state explicitly what it wants to see in the policy (even if the questions in the consultation document do not request such information).

**Patrick to let the Forum know the timescale of the review process.**

## **9. Packer codes**

Patrick explained that the Rural Payments Agency was thinking of introducing a standard format for packer codes; hitherto different formats have been used in different regions of the UK. This change will have greatest effect on the mushroom industry. No representatives of the mushroom sector were present but those who were present expressed no opposition to the proposal.

## **10. AOB**

### **Action Plan, 2 (b)**

Several Forum members had attended the Fruit and Vegetable Workshop on 25 October led by Dr Geoff Simmons (Queen's Management School, QUB, Tel: 02890974716, Mob: 07970940518, email: [g.simmons@qub.ac.uk](mailto:g.simmons@qub.ac.uk)). Those who

attended the workshop thought the project was generating much useful data but felt that more help in interpreting and making practical use of the data would be beneficial. Consideration will be given to inviting Dr Simmons to a meeting of the Forum, perhaps asking him to analyse market trends for one product.

**Patrick to try to obtain the Powerpoint presentation used by Dr Simmons on 25 October and circulate it to members.**

#### **Action Plan, 5**

Members discussed the future of producer organisations after the ending of EU support post-Brexit. While it was acknowledged that membership of POs may not suit all businesses, their demise would be a significant blow, particularly in the mushroom sector.

#### **Action Plan, 5 (b)**

Members discussed the benefits of AHDB-Horticulture membership.

**Members to explore AHDB-Horticulture materials with a view to encouraging members of their respective organisations to subscribe (full details available from Doug).**

### **11. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will be scheduled according to the timescale of the Knowledge Framework consultation.