

A meeting of Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board was held on Monday 30 March 2020 at 4:30 pm at the LOETB Administrative Offices, Tullamore. The Standing Orders for LOETB meetings (including Committees) only provide for the physical attendance of members at meetings. Due to the current Coronavirus pandemic the Chairperson of the Board, Cllr. Neil Feighery, agreed to suspend indefinitely the requirement for physical attendance at meetings and to allow other communication channels (e.g. telephone/video conferencing) to be used for meetings. A telephone conference facility was set up for the Board Meeting.

PRESENT

Cllr. Neil Feighery (Chairperson)

Cllr. Willie Aird

Ms. Molly Buckley

Cllr. John Carroll

Cllr. Clare Claffey

Ms. Mary Cotter Bracken

Mr. Dave Cullen

Ms. Evelyn Dunne

Cllr. Caroline Dwane-Stanley

Cllr. Catherine Fitzgerald

Cllr. Eddie Fitzpatrick

Cllr. Pdraig Fleming

Mr. Shane Flesk

Cllr. Robert McDermott

Mr. John Mollin

Mr. Frank Smith

Cllr. Mary Sweeney

Mr. Niall Tully

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr. Joe Cunningham, Chief Executive

Ms. Emily McAuley, APO Finance

Ms. Jean Keating, Corporate Governance

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Ms. Maura Brophy.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS LOETB MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting, which took place 24 February 2020 were circulated to members. Members approved the minutes and they were signed by the Chairperson.

Proposed: Caroline Dwane-Stanley

Seconded: Molly Buckley

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

A member asked for an update regarding LOETBs nominations to the Governing Body of Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT). The CE confirmed that no further correspondence had been received from AIT on the matter.

4. GOVERNANCE

Risk Management

The CE informed members that the Risk Register is currently being updated to reflect the goals, priorities and performance indicators set out in the Service Plan 2020.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic the CE updated members on the Business Continuity Plan that is in place for the ESBS-ETB payroll operations. He explained that since the initial measures were introduced by Government that staff had been working on a rota basis to ensure the number of staff was reduced on site at any one time. From 31 March staff will be working remotely from home and any key staff that need to enter the office will be issued with a letter of comfort.

Conflict of Interest

As per Schedule 3, Paragraph 10, Section 3 of the (ETB) Act 2013 and the Agenda Notice, no conflicts of interest were declared.

5. CHIEF EXECUTIVES REPORT

The CE presented the following report to members.

Schools

LOETB Arts Performance took place in Dunamais Arts Centre on Monday 9 March. Our schools nominated performers and visual artists to represent their schools at the event which has very much become a showcase of student achievement within the counties. The Music Teachers Community of Practice recently visited London to undertake some CPD in music and drama, at the London Music and Expo Show 2020, funding for same which was received through Léargas.

Schools are working on a new Admissions Policy in line with national requirements. Due to the unforeseen interruption to normal school activities caused by the Covid19 pandemic, a number of forthcoming events have had to be deferred until further notice; these include scheduled Assessment, Feedback and Reporting programme workshops, Active & Aspiring Leaders programme workshops, Board of Management Training and MLL/WSE Workshops.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation, schools have found themselves in the position of having to completely migrate their teaching and learning to online platforms. Whilst predominantly our schools utilise the Microsoft 365 suite, we have one school using Gsuite for Education as their chosen platform, but all of our schools are continuing their teaching and learning "online".

Further Education and Training

Infection Prevention and Control

Following consultation with Tullamore and Portlaoise Hospitals, LOETB is responding to this urgent need by providing online training in QQI Level 5 Infection Prevention and Control to current QQI Level 5 (minimum) major award holders, and learners that are currently on QQI Level 5 Healthcare Support/Health Service Skills/Nursing Studies programmes.

The proposed programme will be delivered online, with a minimum duration of five days of course delivery. Learners will have access to online lectures, notes and workshops, which can be accessed on a flexible basis, and will be supported on an ongoing basis by experienced, qualified tutors. Assessment will take place during and on completion of the course content. Over one hundred people have expressed an interest in participating in this online course so far.

Additional Learner Support

The Literacy Service is providing support to learners who may be struggling with learning from home or having difficulty using technology to access information from tutors or uploading assignments. This service is advertised on the LOETB Facebook page and learners can contact us via email on learnersupport@loetb.ie. It is planned to push this out further to parents who require support helping children at home with schoolwork in Irish, Maths, and to help for those parents whose first language is not English with strategies for homeschooling.

The Community Education Service remain in contact with all the Community Groups who have submitted applications. The tutors have created some excellent video tutorials which are on the Community Education Facebook page.

The Adult Guidance Service continue to provide information and support to students/clients via email and phone. The Adult Guidance Facebook page is updated daily with new information and clients also contact directly through this page. Students who are experiencing difficulties or where a concern may arise are also being contacted by a Guidance Counsellor.

eCollege Courses

LOETB is offering online programmes through eCollege, the SOLAS online learning service for the FET sector. Programmes are currently available free of charge to all learners as an additional support to those impacted by Covid-19 containment measures. These programmes may benefit those already on a FET course who would like to augment their learning, those who have recently become unemployed or had their hours reduced, and those wishing to upskill and reskill. LOETB is now offering these courses directly to FET staff. LOETB is focusing on four online courses initially; Digital Marketing, ECDL, Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS), and Project Management. In addition to the national eTutor delivering/coordinating each programme, LOETB is also assigning a local tutor to provide additional support to individual learners during the programme. Learners can register at www.loetb.ie/online-courses.

Maintaining Teaching and Learning

Whilst FET Centres across the region have closed to the public, LOETB staff are working hard to assist learners in continuing their studies through online and distance learning. In so far as is possible, it is business as usual, albeit in differing formats. For example, at Portlaoise Institute, teachers have distributed classwork for all learners through the Google Classroom platform, with the students working through this portal and engaging with their teachers daily. As well as continuing teaching, management is keeping in regular contact with teachers to assist and support with any issues that may arise. This combined effort is supporting the continued education of the learners, minimising the disruption and maximising available teaching and learning opportunities.

Many FET Centres, including Clara, Tullamore, and Banagher, are utilising Office 365, not only to communicate with learners, but also to collaborate as a staff team through SharePoint. They are using applications such as OneNote and Class Notebook as a virtual classroom to allow learners access resources and to track their progress. A forum for the sharing of best practice in online and distance learning has been setup where teachers contribute their examples from which others can benefit. This information is collated and distributed regularly.

Contingency Planning for Completion of Courses and Processing of Certification

The Quality Assurance Support Service has been consulting with FET teaching staff on certified programmes in order to ascertain what course content and assessments are remaining for completion by the end of academic year. Courses with learners who are making applications to CAO based on completion of their current programmes will be prioritised. The Director of FET is working with the QA Support Service to put contingency plans in place to ensure that courses can be completed, and certification can be processed as efficiently as possible.

Organisation Support and Development

Human Resources

Our offices are closed to the public since 18 March 2020.

Our offices currently remain open for staff. We have extended our flexi working hours and we have encouraged working from home on a rota basis where possible to reduce the number of contacts people have each day. This also helps with childcare commitments of the administrative staff. We have also provided laptops where necessary. We are encouraging everyone stays in their office/work area so there is little movement within the office. Staff are also encouraged to link in with each other for work support as would be the case if they were physically at work.

We have issued a set guideline for working from home. A briefing regarding COVID-19 national situation the Employee Assistance Programme Details were provided to all staff. Guidelines for staff and the self-declaration form for self-isolating were shared on our staff SharePoint. A 'Health is your Wealth' briefing has been issued all staff.

Human Resources has created a business continuity plan that in the event of an office closure and a situation whereby a significant number of staff are required to self-isolate in line with medical guidance. This plan can continue for an indeterminate period. Key staff have been identified on the Human Resources/Finance operations team in order to preserve business continuity and continue the ESBS-ETB payroll operations function as normal. This will ensure that staff continue to be paid and all financial obligations are met regarding same.

ICT

Equipment, training, and necessary software was provided and tested for all key staff requiring the ability to work from home.

As some users require direct access to their work computer, these machines have been placed on a shutdown and wakeup schedule. This means the computers will not be on continually should the buildings go into lock down and so the potential fire risk is reduced.

Email distribution groups have been set up as lines of communication for both staff and students and some schools are also setting up Microsoft Teams once the email addresses have been created.

Email communication for FET students has also been set up where required. Additional laptops have been provisioned to enable office administrative staff that do not own a windows-based computer the ability to work from home as required.

Finance

Youthreach and VTOS Learner payments have been processed up to 24 April.

Community Training Centre, Local Training Initiative, and Contracted Training learners have been set up on the ESI system to enable payments up to 24 April be processed as TAPS system does not allow forward processing of payment runs.

All payment runs have been dated weekly and learners will receive a weekly payment. Flexibility around staff working from home or outside of normal working hours, where work duties permit.

Setting up Finance Team Planner for staff working from home.
Setting up Finance Team Calendar for working from home rota.
List of work compiled that can be completed by staff working from home.
Assistance provided to schools and centres to ensure they continue to comply with proper procedure.

Buildings and Procurement

Schools and centres have been updated with any changes to service provision by suppliers. The evaluation process for the stationery tender has been deferred. Tender evaluation completed for Architectural services for the refurbishment of the Tower Hill buildings for Dunamase College.

Corporate Services

Conference call facility put in place for the March meeting of the Board and the Audit and Risk and Finance Committees.

Work has progressed on aligning our Risk Register with the Service Plan.

Members thanked the CE for his comprehensive report and complimented the FET section on setting up online courses so quickly. A discussion took place on the Leaving Certificate and the CE agreed to convey members concerns at an upcoming meeting with the DES.

A member asked if the dates for the submission of QQI assessments and examinations will be pushed back. The CE confirmed that the Director of FET has a meeting with QQI and ETBI this afternoon to determine how best to progress the matter.

6. ANNUAL REPORT AND ANNUAL REVIEW FROM THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee in accordance with Section 7.37 of the Code of Practice for the Governance of ETBs for year ending 31/12/2019.

The Audit Committee, at meetings on 4 March 2019 1 May 2019, 1 July 2019, 13 December 2019, examined and reviewed the following:

1. Minutes of the;
 - Audit and Risk Committee meetings from 01/01/2019 to 31/12/2019
 - Finance Committee meetings from 01/01/2019 to 31/12/2019
 - LOETB meetings from 01/01/2019 to 31/12/2019
2. Reviewed Corporate Risk Register and recommended same to the Board at each meeting in 2019
3. Reviewed all Building and Capital Works and Procurement in 2019
4. Reviewed C & AG Audits since Amalgamation
5. Conducted an annual review of Internal Controls in LOETB as at 25 February 2019
6. Received confirmation by the Chief Executive that LOETB is operating an adequate and appropriate system of internal control for financial period 1/1/2018 to 31/12/2018
7. Prepared an Annual Report of internal controls for presentation to the Board of LOETB for year ending 31/12/2018
8. Reviewed Compliance Assessment Tool
9. Adopted the following Procedures;
 - Disposal of Assets Procedure
 - Draft Conflict of Interest Procedures
 - Purchasing Payment Procedures
 - Financial Authority and Approval Levels
 - Procedure for Compassionate Leave
 - Procedure for Downloading DCS Files
 - Procedure for Force Majeure
 - HR New Employee Set up Procedures
 - Procedure for Checking Increments
 - Procedure for Maternity Leave
 - Procedure for Paternity Leave
 - Procedure for Payroll for New Employee Set up
 - Procedure for Payroll Run Process

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- Procedure for Unpaid Leave
 - Pensions Procedure
 - BTEI Conversion Procedure
 - Transfer of Service Procedure
 - Procedure for Marriage Leave
 - Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults
 - Procedures for Severe Weather
 - ETB Complaint Procedure and Guidance Notes
 - Procedures for Write-off Bad Debts and Irrecoverable Overpayments
 - Procedures for Setting up Staff Email Accounts and ePayslips
 - VTOS Run Procedures
 - Youthreach Run Procedures
 - FET Procedures Manual
 - Application Procedures for Professional Development
10. Reviewed Register of Lease and Licence Agreements
 11. Reviewed the Code of Practice for the Governance of LOETB
 12. Adopted Terms of Reference for new Audit and Risk Committee appointed in November 2019
 13. Adopted Charter of Internal Audit

Signed:



Martin Byrne
Chairperson of the Audit Committee

Annual Review of Effectiveness of Internal Controls in accordance with Section 7.8 of the Code of Practice for the Governance of ETBs as at 27 March 2020.

The Audit Committee, at meetings on 4 March 2019 1 May 2019, 1 July 2019, 13 December 2019, 20 February 2020 and 27 March 2020 examined and reviewed the following;

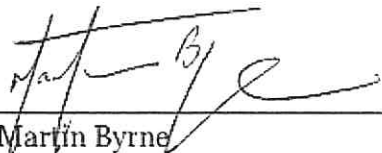
1. Minutes of the;
 - Audit Committee meetings from 01/01/2019 to 20/02/2020
 - Finance Committee meetings from 01/01/2019 20/02/2020
 - LOETB meetings from 01/01/2019 to 24/02/2020
2. Internal and External Audit Reports issued in 2019 and to date in 2020;

Internal Audit Report – Mr. Michael Mullarkey, Director, Internal Audit Unit-ETBs; On Specialist Training Providers in LOETB

The IAU’s opinion was that the LOETB has an adequate system of control pertaining to Specialist Training Providers by LOETB
3. C & AG Correspondence
 - Report from C&AG on the presentation of LOETB 2018 accounts to the Houses of the Oireachtas
 - C & AG letter re: Financial Statements Year Ended 31 December 2018
4. Risk Management; reviewed and monitored the Corporate Risk Register on a regular basis and recommended it to the Board
5. Reviewed the system of Internal Controls in place in 2019 and to date in 2020
6. Confirmation by the Chief Executive that LOETB is operating an adequate and appropriate system of internal control.

The Audit Committee wish to report that there are no inconsistencies in the above documents and it is the Audit and Risk Committee's understanding that the CE has operated an adequate and appropriate system of internal control.

Signed:


 Martin Byrne
 Chairperson of the Audit Committee

Members noted the Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee and the Annual Review of effectiveness of internal controls.

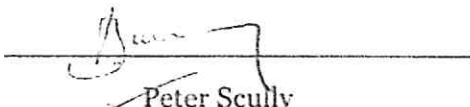
7. ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Finance Committee's Annual Report for year ending 31 December 2019

The Finance Committee, at meetings on 28 February 2019 26 March 2019, 27 May 2019, 13 December 2019, examined and reviewed the following:

- Reviewed and recommended the Service Plan 2019 to the Board
- Reviewed the Code of Practice for the Governance of LOETB
- Reviewed the Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee for 2018
- Reviewed and recommended the Annual Financial Statements 2018 to the Board
- Reviewed the Letter of Determination from the DES
- Reviewed SOLAS funding for 2019
- Proposed that the Board put an overdraft facility in place for one year
- Recommended Bank Overdraft
- Considered the monthly accounts and other financial reports in 2019
- Reviewed all Building and Capital Works and Procurement in 2019
- Reviewed all Leases in 2019
- Adopted the Terms of Reference of the new Finance Committee appointed in November 2019

Signed:


 Peter Scully
 Chairperson of the Finance Committee

Members noted the Annual Report of the Finance Committee.

8. FINANCE

8.1 Annual Financial Statements 2019

Emily McAuley, Head of Finance, presented the Annual Financial Statements (AFS) for the year ending 31 December 2019 to members. Emily informed members that the Finance Committee reviewed the AFS at a meeting on 27 March and recommended the adoption of same by the Board. Emily took members through the AFS in detail. A discussion took place on the notes to the financial statements and members were satisfied with the accounts as presented.

The Board adopted the AFS 2019.

Proposed: Molly Buckley
 Seconded: Evelyn Dunne

8.2 Statement on System of Internal Controls and Letter of Representation

The Audit and Risk Committee, at a meeting on 27 March, reviewed the draft Statement on System of Internal Controls and recommended that the Chairperson of the Board sign same. The Audit and Risk Committee also reviewed the Letter of Representation to the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) and recommended that the Chairperson of the Board and the CE sign same. The Finance Committee, at a meeting on 27 March, also reviewed both documents.

Members approved the Statement on System of Internal Controls and the Chairperson signed same. Members also approved the Letter to C&AG and the Chairperson and CE signed same.

8.3 Chairpersons Comprehensive Report to the Minister

Members reviewed the Chairpersons Comprehensive Report to the Minister for Education and Skills pursuant to Section 6.8 of the Code of Practice for the Governance of ETBs. Members accepted same and the Chairperson signed the Report.

8.4 Public Spending Code

In line with Section 8.23 of the Code of Practice for the Governance of ETBs, the following resolution was adopted by members;

‘LOETB is adhering to the relevant aspects of the Public Spending Code’.

Proposed: John Carroll
 Seconded: Eddie Fitzpatrick

8.5 Bank Overdraft

LOETB’s overdraft facility, per sanction received from the DES, is due to expire in June 2020. The current overdraft facility is €4 million, and this will need to be extended for a further year.

Members of the Finance Committee, at a meeting on 27 March, accepted the CE’s proposal that the Board should borrow an amount of up to €4 million for the purposes of carrying out the Board’s functions and for this overdraft facility to be put in place for one year.

Members agreed in principle that the proposal should be accepted.

Proposed: Willie Aird
 Seconded: Padraig Fleming

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9. CORRESPONDENCE

Item No	Correspondence From	Date / Ref No.	Details		
1.	NALA	12 March 2020	AGM Cancelled	Noted by members	
2.	Department of Education and Skills	CLO011/2020	Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022: Post-primary schools in Gaeltacht language-planning areas participating in the Gaeltacht school recognition scheme: Ongoing implementation of the Scheme (2020 - 2021)	Noted by members	Chairmans Initials

3.	Department of Education and Skills	CLO015/2020	Approved Allocation of Teaching Posts 2020/21 school year in Education and Training Boards	Noted by members
4.	Department of Education and Skills	CLO016/2020	Framework for Junior Cycle – History in Schools from September 2020 onwards	Noted by members
5.	Department of Education and Skills	CLO017/2020	Guidance on the Junior Cycle Subject Learning and Assessment Review Process	Noted by members
6.	Department of Education and Skills	CLO020/2020	Coronavirus (COVID-19) Arrangements for Teachers and Special Needs Assistants employed in recognised primary and post primary schools	Noted by members
7.	Department of Education and Skills	CLO021/2020	COVID-19 (Coronavirus) The following arrangements apply to all staff other than Teachers and SNAs employed by Education and Training Boards	Noted by members
8.	Department of Education and Skills	CLO023/2020	COVID-19 (Coronavirus) The following arrangements apply to learner payments in Education and Training Boards	Noted by members

10. DRAFT POLICIES FOR ADOPTION

The following policies were circulated to members prior to the meeting. Members approved the policies as follows:

LOETB Policies

- Internet Acceptable Use Policy
Proposed: Caroline Dwane-Stanley
Seconded: Clare Claffey
- Password Policy
Proposed: Caroline Dwane-Stanley
Seconded: Evelyn Dunne
- Technology Acceptable Use Policy
Proposed: Mary Sweeney
Seconded: Molly Buckley
- Email Policy
Proposed: Clare Claffey
Seconded: John Carroll
- Recruitment and Selection Policy
Proposed: Pdraig Fleming
Seconded: John Mollin

11. REGISTER OF GIFTS/DONATIONS 2019

In line with the Section 28.2 of the ETB Act 2013, LOETB is required to publish details of any gift received that exceed the amount specified by the Minister of Public Expenditure and Reform. Clonaslee College received a photocopier (estimated value €15,000) in December 2019 from an anonymous donor.

Chairmans
Initials

Members welcomed and accepted the donation.

Proposed: Padraig Fleming
 Seconded: Catherine Fitzgerald

12. SECTION 29 APPEALS

The CE informed members of the outcome of the following recent Section 29 Appeal Hearings which took place on 4 November 2019, 9 December 2019 and 8 January 2020. Members noted the outcome of same.

13. ANNUAL REPORT 2019

A copy of the draft Annual Report for 2019 was circulated to members. The CE explained that the Annual Report reflects the goals, actions and priorities of the Statement of Strategy 2018-2022 which were met during 2019. It also sets out the Financial Statements for 2019 and details of the membership of the Board, Audit and Risk and Finance Committee.

The Finance Committee reviewed the draft Annual Report at a meeting on 27 March and recommended that the Board adopt same. Members reviewed and adopted the Annual Report for 2019.

Proposed: Frank Smith
 Seconded: Evelyn Dunne

14. MINUTES OF COMMITTEES OF THE BOARD

The following minutes of committees of the Board were circulated prior to the meeting. Members confirmed the minutes as follows;

- Oaklands Community College, Edenderry; 7 November 2019, 28 January 2020
 Proposed: Robert McDermott
 Seconded: Eddie Fitzpatrick
- Dunamase College; 19 November 2019
 Proposed: Caroline Dwane-Stanley
 Seconded: Dave Cullen
- St. Fergal's College, Rathdowney; 25 September 2018, 14 November 2018, 2 April 2019, 10 April 2019, 25 April 2019, 30 May 2019, 23 October 2019, 13 November 2019
 Proposed: John Carroll
 Seconded: Padraig Fleming
- Audit and Risk Committee 20 February 2020
 Proposed: Mary Sweeney
 Seconded: John Mollin
- Finance Committee 20 February 2020
 Proposed: Molly Buckley
 Seconded: Evelyn Dunne

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15. CONFIRMATION OF BOM MEMBERSHIPS

The Chief Executive received nominations for membership of the following boards of management;

Banagher College

LSU Nominees: Sr Goretti Sweeney, Ms Mary D'Alton, Mr Kevin Jordan

Teacher Nominees: Ms Laura McDowall, Mr Sean Duggan

Parent Nominees: Ms Miriam Mullery, Mr Adrian Staunton

Proposed: John Carroll

Seconded: Clare Claffey

Dunamase College

BOM's nominees: Mr Jim Enright and Mr Liam O'Neill

Proposed: Caroline Dwane-Stanley

Seconded: Catherine Fitzgerald

St. Fergal's College, Rathdowney

BOM's nominees: Ms Irene Murray, Rev Seymour Whiteley, Ms Eimear Delaney

Proposed: Evelyn Dunne

Seconded: Padraig Fleming

16. APPOINTMENT TO BOM AT ARD SCOIL CHIARAIN NAOFA, CLARA

Cllr. Neil Feighery has stepped down from the BOM at Ard Scoil Chiarain Naofa, Clara. The CE asked members for nominations to fill the vacancy on the BOM. As no nominations were received the CE suggested that we seek a nominee through the Principal for consideration by the Board. Members agreed with same.

17. VOTES OF SYMPATHY

A vote of sympathy was passed to:

- Vicky Murphy, teacher at St. Fergal's College, Rathdowney on the passing of her mother
- The family of John Kilmartin, past pupil at Coláiste Naomh Cormac, Kilcormac on his recent passing
- To the family of Aoife Doyle, student at Ard Scoil Chiaráin Naofa, Clara on her recent passing

18. VOTES OF CONGRATULATIONS

A vote of congratulations was passed to the following:

- To Portlaoise College and Tullamore College for donating equipment from their laboratories to front line staff during the Coronavirus pandemic
- To all the staff and students involved in the LOETB Arts Awards which was held in Dunamase Arts Centre on the 9 March
- To Birr Community School on winning the Leinster final
- To Niall Mahon, student at Coláiste Naomh Cormac, Kilcormac, who won a trip to the European Parliament with Graduate.ie

Chairman's
Initials

- To the five students at Coláiste Naomh Cormac, Kilcormac, who qualified for the semi-final of the Certified Irish Angus Beef Schools competition in Croke Park on 4 March

19. AOB

The CE thanked members for facilitating the meeting by conference call and informed members that the Annual Financial Statements for 2019 will be submitted to the Comptroller and Auditor General on the 31 March. The CE wished members the very best during the Coronavirus pandemic and hopes everyone stays safe and well.

20. DATE & VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic a provisional date of Monday 25 May 2020 was set for the next meeting of the Board of LOETB. The meeting will take place at 4.30pm in Portlaoise (venue to be confirmed).

Signed: Neil Keegan
Chairperson

Date: 25/3/20

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