

Minutes of Meeting of the Authority of **Broadcasting Authority of Ireland**

Date 31/03/2020 **Time:** 3.00pm **Venue:** Virtual

Attendance

Authority: Pauric Travers (Chairperson), Alan McDonnell, Grace Smith, Mary Curtis, Vivien McKechnie

Executive: Michael O’Keeffe, Andrew Robinson (Secretary), Celene Craig, Anne O’Brien

1. Sound & Vision 4 Scheme: Ancillary Measures for Independent Radio Sector

Members were presented with an Executive note which set out a request from the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Richard Bruton TD, for Authority consideration of a proposal to introduce initiatives in support of the independent commercial and community radio sectors under the Sound & Vision 4 Scheme. Members were also presented with a draft Covid-19 Funding Initiative document, developed by the Executive, for consideration should the Authority agree to the Minister’s request.

Members noted the Minister’s request to make funding of up to €2.5m available on an urgent basis for an Ancillary Measure to support public awareness in respect of Covid-19, which would be open exclusively to the commercial independent radio sector. A further request, that the Authority consider the implementation of a funding initiative for the community radio sector for a funding amount of €750,000 to assist the sector in meeting its social benefit obligations, was also considered.

In considering the request, the Authority noted that one of its key strategic objectives is to work with stakeholders to support the achievement of greater sustainability for the Irish audiovisual sector. It agreed that Ireland’s media landscape, consisting as it does of strong independent commercial and community radio stations complemented by Ireland’s commercial television service, Virgin Media, community television services and public service broadcasters RTÉ and TG4, will continue to play a key role in the communication of key messages concerning Covid-19 developments, and in keeping audiences informed and entertained more broadly.

The Authority then engaged in a detailed assessment of the request. In considering the proposal, the Authority had regard to the recently approved Sound & Vision 4 Scheme document, the relevant provisions of the Broadcasting Act 2009 and the urgency of the request which sought disbursement of funds with minimum delay. Following discussion, the Authority agreed on the following substantive issues:

(i) Covid-19 Funding Initiative for the independent radio sector

The Authority agreed that a strong independent radio sector is an essential component of Ireland’s media landscape, no more so than at this challenging time when local, regional and national radio stations are all playing a crucial role in keeping Irish citizens informed on Covid-19 related matters. In recognition of

the significant financial strain that the independent radio sector is currently experiencing as a result of the fall-off in advertising revenue arising, the Authority noted that it had recently acceded to the Minister's request to waive levy payments from the sector for the first six months of 2020.

The Authority was satisfied to agree to the request for the BAI to allocate €2.5m of the Sound & Vision 4 ("S&V4") funds to fulfil the objective of raising awareness and understanding of global issues, and in this particular instance Covid-19, and that the funds would be made available to the independent commercial radio sector only. In this regard, the Authority noted sub-Sections 154(1)(c) and 154(1)(f) of the Broadcasting Act 2009 which provide for the granting of funds for programmes which raise public awareness and understanding of global issues impacting on the State and countries other than the State, and the introduction of supporting ancillary measures as necessary. The Authority was satisfied that supporting public awareness in respect of Covid-19 and of measures required to safeguard public health was an appropriate use of these provisions.

In considering the proposed approach to the development and implementation of a funding scheme addressing Covid-19 matters, the Authority had regard to the urgency of the request and the need for the funds to be disbursed with minimum delay, while also ensuring a fair, objective and transparent process in ensuring accountability for the use of public funds and in keeping with good governance practice. It also noted the resources available to the BAI to implement any agreed approach.

The Authority was satisfied to approve the draft Covid-19 Funding Initiative ("Funding Initiative") as submitted by the Executive, subject to the following:

1. The Authority noted that the Funding Initiative would be implemented on a one-off basis and would be open to commercial radio stations only. It was satisfied that the Executive would develop a tiered system of funding allocation, with available funding dependent on the type of service, the audience to be served and its existing speech and information commitments as set out in its Programme Policy Statements. In view of the urgency in implementing the Funding Initiative, the Authority agreed that the Assessment process would be undertaken by members of the senior management team, to include the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive, and that no external assessors would be used on this occasion.
2. The Authority noted that successful applicants will be required to submit a Final Project Report as one of the final deliverables. The Authority agreed that it would be important for grantees to report on the achievement of the objectives of the Funding Initiative and information would be sought on the project(s) implemented, including quantitative details on programming outputs and audiences reached. Where practicable, it would also seek qualitative information on programme impact, audience engagement and local public interest.

At the end of the process, the Authority agreed it would undertake a review of the Funding Initiative to assess the effectiveness of the Initiative against its objectives, and to inform the development of any future initiatives should the need arise.

3. The Authority agreed to a proposed closing date of three weeks from the date the initiative is publicly launched.

(ii) Community Radio Sector

The Authority also considered the request for the BAI to make available up to €750k in funding under the S&V4 Scheme in support of the community radio sector in order to facilitate the sector in meeting their social benefit obligations.

The Authority noted that the impacts of these licensed community radio broadcasters are widespread within their respective communities, and include a contribution to skills development, greater social and cultural cohesion and promotion of local diversity.

The Authority was satisfied that the introduction of a funding initiative for the community sector was in line with the Authority's new S&V4 Scheme and agreed to prioritise this initiative. It noted that this initiative would be launched in the coming months, once sufficient funding becomes available.

(iii) Commercial television broadcasters and public service broadcasters (including RTÉ Radio)

In responding to the Minister's request, the Authority agreed to utilise S&V4 funds in support of all eligible broadcasters and producers over the course of 2020. It noted that the Covid-19 crisis had also had a significant effect on the commercial and public service broadcasting sectors in Ireland and was very mindful of the needs of the wider sector.

The Authority noted that in the most recent round of Sound & Vision, considered by the Authority in February 2020, it had allocated a total of €7.02m in funding, representing an increase of €1m compared to recent rounds. Of this, €6.41m was allocated to 36 television projects, an increase of €1.21m on the previous round.

In order to continue to provide support to independent producers, commercial and community television and public service broadcasters through the S&V4 Scheme, the Authority agreed to operate an open funding round later in 2020 - as soon as sufficient funding becomes available.

Applications will be accepted for a broad range of formats and genres as is normal in an open round. However, projects focusing on Covid-19 matters will be particularly welcomed. In view of the extensive funding commitments which are being provided to the independent commercial and community radio services in the initiatives outlined above, the Authority agreed that they will not be eligible to apply for programme production funding in this round.

The Authority noted that a press statement, communicating the decisions above, would be issued in the coming days.

2. Levy Update

The Chief Executive reported to the Board that, on foot of the Authority's decision at its meeting the previous week in respect of levy payments, a letter had issued to all commercial and community radio broadcasters, waiving payments for Quarters 1 and 2/2020. In addition, the framework for submission of information by the broadcasters, to facilitate reporting to the Minister, was being developed and it was likely that a request for information would be issued this week. The proposed review of the BAI's budget would also commence this week.

3. Other Business

On behalf of the Authority Members, the Chairperson expressed his thanks to the Executive for facilitating the various requests received in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and commended them for the speed and quality of their response.

4. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Authority will be held at **10.30pm on Thursday 21 May**, virtually.

**Professor Pauric Travers,
Chairperson**

21 May 2020