

Minutes of Meeting of the Authority of Broadcasting Authority of Ireland

Date 24/03/2020 **Time:** 10.00am **Venue:** Virtual Meeting

Attendance

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

Executive: Michael O’Keeffe, Andrew Robinson (Secretary), Celene Craig, Anne Louise O’Donovan, Richard Brennan

1. COVID Update

The Chief Executive updated the Members on developments in the BAI in respect of the management of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the work of the Business Continuity Planning Team. Although the BAI offices were currently open, the bulk of the BAI staff were working from home and the organisation was planning for the likelihood of a full shut-down in the days ahead. However, with only a minimum of staff attending in the office, the organisation had been applying strict social distancing measures since 12 March. In addition, the BAI was complying with all HSE and Government directions and recommendations.

2. Promoting Plurality and Diversity

2.1 Ministerial Request re Levy to Independent Radio Contractors

The Chief Executive briefed the Members in line with the correspondence received from the Minister and in the terms set out in the Executive Note to the Authority. In the event, that the Authority agreed to the request from the Minister, to waive the levy to independent radio contractors in Quarters 1 and 2/2020, the financial impact on the BAI would be in the region of €1m in the 2020 calendar year. The Executive was in the process of trying to achieve savings to match this amount. The Chief Executive pointed out that, while savings of this scale would be highly unlikely, some savings were achievable as a result of event cancellations etc. due to the COVID crisis. He noted the provisions of section 34(1) of the 2009 Act would allow the Minister to fund the BAI in such exceptional circumstances

The Authority expressed their concern regarding the impact on funding. However, the Authority also acknowledged the very crucial role that independent commercial and community radio services play in conveying important public service information. They were likely to play a very valuable role in the current unprecedented crisis. In agreeing to the Minister’s request, the Authority also indicated that it would inform the Department of the financial consequences for the BAI.

In summary and following discussion, the following was agreed:

- The Authority was satisfied to approve the request from the Minister to waive levy payments from the independent commercial radio sector for Quarters 1 and 2 2020;
- In so doing, the Authority also authorised the Executive to make any associated procedural changes to the BAI's levy management process in order to give effect to the decision;
- The Authority also approved the undertaking of a review of the financial impact of Covid-19 on the revenue of the sector and to evaluate the BAI's workplan and budgets for 2020 in order to establish what budgetary savings could realistically be achieved to meet the BAI's income deficit.

Members were informed that the budgetary exercise required to support its decision would commence very shortly and an update would be provided to the Authority at its regular monthly meeting to be held on 21 May.

The Authority also considered the request of the Minister to send a monthly report on the impact of the fall in commercial revenue being experienced by independent commercial radio services. Anne Louise O'Donovan informed the Members that work was underway in developing the format for the provision of information by the sector to inform the submission of such a report to the Minister.

On request from the Members, the Executive also agreed to consider whether the format for such a request could also be extended to RTÉ, TG4 and Virgin Media.

2.2 Broadcasting Funding Scheme: S&V Round – Potential Ministerial Direction

The Chief Executive reported to the Authority that the Minister may issue a policy direction to the BAI to run a scheme pursuant to Section 154(1) (c) of the 2009 Act, for the independent commercial radio sector. It is expected that if the Minister issues such a direction funding under such an ancillary measure would be competitive in nature. As there will be circa €2.5m of available funds in the Broadcasting Funding Scheme at the end of March, any direction or request would be likely to be linked to available funds. The Chief Executive informed the Members that the Executive would revert to the Board if or when such a direction or request of this nature was issued by the Minister.

3. Promoting Plurality & Diversity

3.1 Recommendations of Contract Awards Committee: Section 68

The Chief Executive reported that pursuant to the protocol for decision-making between meetings, he and the Chairperson had ratified the award of contracts by the Contract Awards Committee for the provision of a number of temporary sound broadcasting services, pursuant to Section 68 of the 2009 Act. These will be brought to the regular monthly meeting of the Authority in May, for formal ratification.

4. Other Business

On request from one of the members, it was agreed that the Executive would examine other options for video conferencing calls for future Board meetings.

**Professor Pauric Travers,
Chairperson**

21 May 2020