**Minutes of the 163rd Meeting of the**

**Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) Board of Trustees**

**on Wednesday 2 March 2022 at 1400**

**via Microsoft Teams**

**Present:** Dominic Fry Chair of Trustees

Sarah Cathcart Trustee

Raoul Curtis-Machin Trustee

Sarah Gurr Trustee

David Hamilton Trustee

Ian Jardine Trustee and Chair of the Audit Committee

Liz Trevor Trustee

Ian Wall Trustee and Chair of the Investment Committee

**In Attendance:** Simon Milne Regius Keeper

Ian Brown Head of Finance, Corporate Governance & Risk (Item 7)

Kari Coghill Director of Enterprise and Communication

Joanne Hannah Director of Resources and Planning and Board Secretary

Pete Hollingsworth Director of Science and Deputy Keeper

Emma Lacroix Director of Development

Jennifer Martin PA to the Regius Keeper (Minutes)

Steven Poliri Director of Estates and Facilities

Kevin Reid Director of Horticulture and Learning

**Apologies:** Beverley Glover Trustee and Chair of the Science Advisory Committee

Meena Jagait Board Shadow

| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Private Meeting**  The Board of Trustees held a private meeting prior to the Main Board Meeting. |  |
|  | **OPENING ITEMS** |  |
| **1.0** | **Apologies**  Apologies were received from Beverley Glover and Meena Jagait. |  |
| **2.0** | **Trustees’ Conflicts of Interest**  No conflicts of interest related to the meeting were declared. |  |
| **3.0** | **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on Wednesday 1 December 2021**  The Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 1 December 2021 were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.  **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper would place a copy of the approved Minutes in the Library, on the General Drive, RBGE Website and circulate by e-mail to the Trustees. | **PA to the**  **Regius Keeper** |
| **4.0** | **Matters Arising**  The Chair reported that the actions from the Meeting held on Wednesday 1 December 2021 had been completed except for 5.2 below. |  |
| **5.0**  5.1  5.2 | **Chair**  Outcome of Meeting with Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform Thursday 24 February 2022  The Chair, Regius Keeper and Director of Estates and Facilities hosted an introductory visit to the RBGE by the Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform, the Deputy Director – Rural & Environmental Science and Analytical Services and the Head of Environment & Forestry Sponsorship Hub. The Minister was impressed with the RBGE’s diversity of activities and the alignment of our strategy with the Scottish Government’s strategic ambitions. Due to difficult market conditions RBGE reiterated a request for flexibility of phasing of the Scottish Government’s funding for Edinburgh Biomes. The Minister met the Open Book reading group (an example of a community group that utilised the Botanic Cottage) and viewed the empty Glasshouses to understand the work underway to deliver Edinburgh Biomes.  Update on Vacancies for Health and Safety Committee and Whistleblowing Trustee  **ACTION:** The Board of Trustees were asked to let the Chair know if they would like to take up one of the vacant positions. Ian Wall volunteered via the Teams chat channel to assume the Trustee representative role on the Health & Safety Committee. An induction on to the RBGE Health and Safety Committee would be facilitated via the Chair of the H&S Committee (Director of R&P). Action in progress for the Whistleblowing Trustee | **Board of Trustees** |
| **6.0**  6.1 | **Regius Keeper**  Update  The Regius Keeper gave an overview. RBGE would continue to recover from the impact of COVID, with some major and innovative planning and action to take forward our corporate objectives. Priority areas and activities were:   * Revisiting the Edinburgh Biomes programme and scope in response to the increase in external costs with further engagement with the Scottish Government at Ministerial level to address the cash profile and extensive fundraising activity. * Work to balance the Budget for 2022/2023 was ongoing. Despite the uplift of Grant in Aid (excluding additional Covid related funding in 2021/2022) some reduction and careful focussing of resources was required which included the need to significantly develop income generation beyond our visitor and events related activities. New opportunities were being pursued, included expanding the export of skills overseas, building upon recent successes in the Middle East. In horticulture other commercial opportunities were being investigated. Additional expertise was required to assist with this step change and a new senior Innovation and Business Development role would be advertised to significantly increase income from commercial operations through acquiring and delivering profitable, environmentally and societally transformative projects. * Following the removal of COVID restrictions and the return to site strengthening of the workforce’s confidence was of importance with alternative ways of working in the future being introduced to support a permanent model of hybrid working. * As a result of the crisis in Ukraine the Consul General of Russia in Edinburgh had been informed that the RBGE would not be renewing its Memorandum of Collaboration with the Main Moscow Botanic Garden. The RBGE had no Ukrainian nationals but the welfare of other staff impacted by the invasion of Ukraine was being actively managed. * The Regius Keeper has received positive feedback from some senior Scottish Government ministers on the work, reach and profile of RBGE. * In Scotland there was development of partnerships to extend RBGE work on translocations and building on success in the Cairngorms which included further work in the Atlantic rain forests and new work in connection to woodland restoration work in the Borders. Work on urban biodiversity through our partnership with Strathclyde University on the “ultimate” window box design was developing well. * Community engagement and exhibitions and events had increased, and work continued addressing the recommendations in the Racial Justice Report ably supported by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager. * Acquiring research grants continued as a high priority. |  |
| 6.2  6.2.1  6.2.2  6.2.3  6.2.4  6.2.5  6.2.6 | Directors’ Highlights  The Regius Keeper invited the Directors to provide updates on key activities.  *Development*  The Director of Development highlighted:   * Recent successes included the full confirmation of a grant of £800K from People’s Postcode Lottery, which would fund two strategic posts this year (a new Taxonomy Research Leader and an International Conservation Fellow) and add key capacity in Science and allow RBGE to grow research income. The People’s Postcode Lottery grant would also add approx £200K in additional support for the core budget. * Good progress had been made with fundraising for the Heritage Glass Restoration and a pledge of £500K had been received from the Garfield Weston Foundation for the Palm House (which followed a very positive site visit from the Director of the Foundation at the end of last year). Final funding decisions were awaited from Historic Environment Scotland and National Lottery Heritage Fund. * The Team was also working closely with colleagues across the Garden to maximise the potential for fundraising aligned with the messaging of the recently aired BBC Green Planet programmes. RBGE’s appeal was ongoing and would run throughout the year and support the core budget (particularly in relation to science and the living collection) as well as further raising our profile as a charity. * RBGE had applied to be part of the Big Give Green Match Fund this year, which would allow us to secure match funding for our Appeal in April and a decision was awaited. Donations of £1,000+ would be made on The Big Give website which would then be matched by up to £10,000 from the Big Give Champions (an excellent opportunity to bring in funds to support our Science and conservation efforts, using the coverage of the Big Give Campaign). * Work was ongoing with the Communications and Marketing Team to advance the communications to our Members through the relaunch of the Botanics Magazine later this summer. Think Publishing would undertake a member survey over the next week to inform the content and the future direction of the magazine.   *Science*  The Director of Science and Deputy Keeper highlighted that as COVID restrictions eased international fieldwork and collaboration trips were now being undertaken. The Herbarium was now fully open, and the Library was partially open following the flood. The backlog on Laboratory training was being tackled. Grant proposals were being pursued as a high priority. The retirement of a Senior Researcher had presented an opportunity for the redeployment of funding for a strategic position. Publication output had been increased.  *Horticulture and Learning*  The Director of Horticulture and Learning reported that:   * Edinburgh Biomes enabling works were progressing well with the provision of weekend access to the Queen Mother’s Memorial Garden and the New Alpine House. Temporary access to the Garden for staff and students had been provided. * Over 9,300 plants had now been decanted and the programme remained on schedule. * There were challenges with damage caused by the winter storms which had impacted on all four Gardens with further revisions made to our resilience response. * Good progress had been made with sustainability work by utilising new electric equipment. Carbon emissions were being included as part of new business case submissions and a Business and Climate Change/Biodiversity course was under development * A revised vision for Education programmes was being considered with a review of our current offer and reflection on the changes across the sector. * The RBGE window box project with engagement from students at the University of Strathclyde was part of the green recovery to promote health and wellbeing and a final design would be trialled in the market under RBGE branding.   *Resources and Planning*  The Director of Resources and Planning was overseeing two strategic reviews.   * A Digital Review (critical for the success in the future) would provide improvements in the accessibility and personalisation of our digital offering (for customer facing, academic and business services); an understanding of the gap in our technology infrastructure and skills within our workforce to enable us to become digitally enabled, cyber secure and data driven; improvements in how to capture data for quality control, marketing and management purposes; future proofing options for our most pressing limiting factors e.g.  reducing manual transactions and duplication of effort; advice on the necessary governance structure to oversee our digital operations and transformation activities; suggestions on structural options for delivery of a modern digital, technology and information service; and a Digital Strategy and roadmap, including a high level costed option appraisal (this was being delivered by a Research Associate appointed on a short term contract). Trustees who would like to engage in the process should inform the Director of Resources and Planning. * A Strategic Workforce Review was being undertaken to consider what the RBGE needed to achieve and for whom, what staff skills and capacity were required and what staff behaviours and attitudes were needed for the future. There had already been engagement with the Board of Trustees and the results of the Review would be shared at the next meeting. A People Strategy would be developed post Review.   *Enterprise and Communication*  The Director of Enterprise and Communication was overseeing a review of the RBGE brand. RBGE’s profile was increasing (particularly internationally). The Christmas at the Botanics event had very successful. The commercial hospitality business was being developed to plan. The community programme was being expanded to the Regional Gardens. Three exhibitions a year would be held in Inverleith House and an exhibition Forth Lines had been installed in the John Hope Gateway (Restoration Forth Project).  *Estates and Facilities*  The Director of Estates and Facilities reported that capital works were being completed and an Options Appraisal and Space Study undertaken in the Library and Herbarium. An update on Edinburgh Biomes would be given later in the meeting. |  |
|  | **DECISION ITEMS** |  |
| **7.0**  7.1  7.2 | **Finance**  Budget Planning for 2022/2023  The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk advised that the RBGE had received an increase in the Scottish Government’s core Grant in Aid but there was no additional Scottish Government funding to mitigate the impact of the COVID pandemic. It was noted that some funding previously classed as core had transferred to restricted funding as funders were now attaching more restrictions with their support. The Scottish Government’s Pay Policy was forecast to increase staff costs with additional National Insurance contributions also scheduled. Operational costs had been analysed to keep increases to a minimum. Core capital Grant in Aid was £1.2m lower than 2021/22 and bids were being prioritised. It was noted that legacy funding was no longer included in the self generated income figures as it was transferred to the Botanics Foundation.  Finance Report  The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk highlighted a balanced forecast had been achieved for this financial year. The previous request from the Scottish Government for a 2% reduction in Grant in Aid had been withdrawn. The gift aid from the Botanics Trading Company (BTC) would be transferred to the RBGE during the next financial year. The financial forecast for BTC was close to original budget. The Board of Trustees asked if the capital expenditure would be spent by the year end – spending was being closely monitored to ensure it would be, although a few projects would be moved to next year due to supply chain issues while other investment priorities for 2022/2023 would be fast tracked to be spent in-year. The Board of Trustees asked if there was an overarching strategy in relation to income generation from the different divisions to ensure a strategic approach. It was confirmed that there is a strategic approach to investment decisions which leveraged revenue opportunities. The new role in Innovation and Business Development would further develop this work. |  |
|  | **DISCUSSION ITEMS** |  |
| **8.0** | **Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee – Key Discussions and Minutes of Previous Meetings**  The Director of Estates and Facilities reported that supply chain issues relating to COVID, Brexit and the crisis in Ukraine were all having an impact on the programme, and it was a challenging market. The original scope of the advanced works had now been completed. Balfour Beatty were undertaking stone sampling at the Palm House, asbestos survey/removal work was being undertaken. There were commercial challenges with procurement and the Scottish Government were being kept up to date. Reprofiling work had started with discussions on scenario planning and a retention/refurbishment option for some elements were being considered in response to the increased costs. Key priorities were the prevention of further deterioration to the Victorian Palm House, safeguarding the Living Collection and achieving carbon reduction targets. Fundraising activity was going well with an additional £5M expected which would assist with building momentum for the project. |  |
| **9.0** | **RBGE Risk Exception Report Spring 2022**  The Director of Resources and Planning advised that the information provided had been amended and reduced following feedback received from the Board of Trustees. There were 58 risks being managed, 4 risks had been de-escalated, no risk scores had increased, 7 new risks had been identified which related to Edinburgh Biomes and were now included as requested and the scores of 47 risks remained unchanged. Following work undertaken in the Library and Herbarium this risk had been reduced. The risk to the loss of generated income had been reduced as the Christmas at the Botanics event had been very successful. The risk of an unsustainable finance model had been reduced due to the modelling and cost control work that had been undertaken. The risk on reliance had been reduced due to increased safety measures and annual review of the Emergency Response Plan. Three new issues identified were a high priority for consideration; sustainability and carbon reduction, cyber essentials and, digital infrastructure fault. There was an ongoing issue with the capital resource in Estates and a maintenance backlog. The issue on cross organisation constraints and resources had been closed as a new group had been established and was operating as an effective decision-making body. The Risk Register would be amended due to the situation in Ukraine. |  |
| **10.0** | **Key Results Dashboard – February 2022**  The Director of Resources and Planning presented the Key Results Dashboard for February 2022 with accompanying RBGE Key Results Report for the Board of Trustees’ Review and highlighted 3 areas: Christmas at the Botanics, income from the Regional Gardens Admissions and a pledge of £500k towards the conservation and restoration of the Victorian Palm House. The Board of Trustees asked if the increase in Regional Garden admissions could continue as the COVID restrictions on travel had been lifted. |  |
|  | **INFORMATION ITEMS** |  |
| **11.0** | **Centre for Middle Eastern Plants (CMEP)**  The Director of Science and Deputy Keeper advised that Centre for Middle Eastern Plants had been set up to deliver the Mission and generate revenue. The small Team had achieved a good balance between capacity building, biodiversity conservation work and income generation. The Head of CMEP gave a presentation with an overview of the current projects and plans for next year. Current projects included:   * A checklist of the Flora of Peninsula Arabia and Soqotra. * Sustainable plant use in Tajikistan “Know Your Onions” project (Darwin Initiative). * Frankincense project (Swiss FSVO). * Important plan areas. * King Salman Park project in Saudi Arabia. * Royal Commission of Alu-Ula projects in Saudi Arabia. * World Monuments Fund Watch 2022.   New opportunities and partnership for next year included:   * Partnerships with the Saudi Botanical Society, Halo Trust and the World Monuments Fund. * Consultancy with the Royal Garden in Riyadh, site service agreement for King Salman Park and vegetation mapping and restorations projects in Northern Saudi. * Grants with the Darwin Initiative, the British Council and Collaborative Research with.   CMEP had a turnover of around £600k per annum and provided a cash contribution to the Garden. The Board of Trustees asked if the Frankincense Project could dovetail with the Riyad Project to boost the bio economy. CMEP would need to be ambitious but within current resources/specialist expertise and consideration would be given on how to scale up the consultancy work. |  |
| **12.0** | **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)**  The EDI Manager had prepared a report for the Board of Trustees’ Information. The Director of Resources and Planning asked the Board of Trustees for feedback about their recent diversity training which was held to assist them in discharging their duties. The Board of Trustees advised that the training hadn’t been specific enough to RBGE as an organisation, the historical context of the organisation was missing, cultural awareness was not mentioned, it hadn’t provided any practical ways to address issues and there were no interactive elements. The Board of Trustees asked if the RBGE should consider attaining silver level in Athena Swan which was an ambition for the future. |  |
| **13.0** | **Audit Committee Report** **of Meeting held Wednesday 16 February 2022**  The Chair of the Audit Committee presented a paper reporting on the meeting held on Wednesday 16 February 2022 for the Board of Trustees’ information. |  |
| **14.0** | **Investment Committee Report of Meeting held Thursday 10 February 2022**  The Chair of the Investment Committee presented a paper reporting on the meeting held on Thursday 10 February 2022 for the Board of Trustees’ information. |  |
| **15.0** | **Science Advisory Committee**    Sarah Gurr reported on the meeting held on Tuesday 1 March 2022 where they had discussed the Terms of Reference and agreed that membership of the Committee should be for 4 years with a 4 year renewal. The Terms of Reference would be brought to the Board of Trustees for consideration. There were 3 vacancies for Committee Members and a couple of potential appointees had been discussed. It was noted that despite the COVID pandemic the Science Team had been very successful with the production of papers and grant income. The World Monuments Watch had accepted Soqotra as one of the most significant heritage sites in need of immediate attention and this would raise the profile on action for conservation. The Strategic Workforce Review would map skills/posts required to deliver against the Biodiversity Strategy. Additional support would be considered for the Director of Science and Deputy Keeper |  |
|  | **CLOSING ITEMS** |  |
| **16.0** | **Any Other Business**  No other business was raised. |  |
| **17.0** | **Arrangements for the Next Meeting**  The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 29 June 2022. |  |

**Jennifer Martin**

PA to the Regius Keeper

2 March 2022

Annex A Summary of Actions

**ANNEX A**

**Summary of Actions**

| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
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| **3.0** | **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on Wednesday 1 December 2021**  **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper would place a copy of the approved Minutes in the Library, on the General Drive, RBGE Website and circulate by e-mail to the Trustees. | **PA to the**  **Regius Keeper** |
| **5.0**  5.2 | **Chair**  Update on Vacancies for Health and Safety Committee and Whistleblowing Trustee  **ACTION:** The Board of Trustees were asked to let the Chair know if they would like to take up one of the vacant positions. Action in progress. | **Board of Trustees** |