

**Minutes of the 168th Meeting of the**

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

**on Thursday 29 June 2023 at 0930**

**Castle Lounge, North West Castle Hotel, Port Rodie, Stranraer DG9 8EH**

**Present:** Dominic Fry Chair of Trustees

Elise Cartmell Trustee

Sarah Cathcart Trustee

Sarah Gurr Trustee and Chair of the Science Advisory Committee

David Hamilton Trustee and Chair of the Investment Committee

Ian Jardine Trustee and Chair of the Audit Committee

Stella Morse Trustee

Liz Trevor Trustee

**In Attendance:** Kari Coghill Director of Innovation Projects

Raoul Curtis-Machin Director of Horticulture and Visitor Experience

Lorna Ewan Head of Public Engagement (attended virtually Presentation)

Rachel Gibbins Finance Partner – Operations and Reporting

(attended virtually Items 15.0 and 16.0)

Joanne Hannah Director of Resources and Planning and Board Secretary

Ian Hardman Head of People and Organisational Development (Item 12.0)

Pete Hollingsworth Director of Science and Deputy Keeper

Emma Lacroix Director of Development and Communications

Jennifer Martin PA to the Regius Keeper (Minutes)

Simon Milne Regius Keeper

**Apologies:** Cara Aitchison Trustee

| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Private Meeting**  The Trustees held a private meeting. |  |
|  | **Presentation**  The Head of Public Engagement gave a presentation updating the Board of Trustees on interpretation and design at RBGE. Three key objectives had been identified:   * Develop an RBGE Interpretation Framework   This would be applied to all four Gardens, benchmarking would be undertaken along with a review of the printed literature. This work would inform the interpretation approach.   * Undertake the Most Important Upgrades   Some of the achievements were highlighted including the delivery of 1000+ interpretation panels and signs (a new panel suite had been installed at the Edinburgh Garden and were being rolled out to the other Gardens during 2023), updating of the Edinburgh Garden map to make it more accessible and address the impact of Edinburgh Biomes as a priority. Other Garden maps will follow as required.   * Progress Edinburgh Biomes Visitor Experience Development   The development of a flexible and adjustable visitor offer, using inhouse resources.  The Board of Trustees suggested that a process to purchase some plants seen in the Garden from the shop could be possible - the Digital Transformation Project would consider future proofing of the online retail technology and this was a longer-term ambition. It was noted that the interpretation work would be aligned with the new RBGE brand guidelines. Digital route recommendations would be included on the map available on the RBGE website. The Chair, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, thanked the Head of Public Engagement and her Team for all their hard work in this area. |  |
|  | **OPENING ITEMS** |  |
| **1.0** | **Welcome and Introduction to New Trustees**  The Chair welcomed the new Trustees to their first meeting. |  |
| **2.0** | **Apologies**  Apologies were received from Cara Aitchison. |  |
| **3.0** | **Trustees’ Conflicts of Interest**  No conflicts of interest related to the meeting were declared. |  |
| **4.0** | **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on Wednesday 29 March 2023**  The Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 29 March 2023 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 and Executive Team. | **PA to the**  **Regius Keeper** |
| **5.0**  5.1  5.2 | **Matters Arising**  The Chair reported that the actions from the previous meeting had been completed.  RBGE Risk Exception Report - Spring 2023  The Director of Resources and Planning had been asked to consider whether it would be possible to split the red risks into those in or out of the RBGE’s control. This information was already available in that format and would be shown in the Risk Report which was on the Agenda.  Key Results Dashboard - March 2023  The Director of Resources and Planning had been asked to clarify the information in the self-generated income trends and the self-generated income position and consider splitting them into the two funding streams to make it easier to view. Further information was provided in the Key Results Indicator Report which highlighted the income trends across several self-generated income streams. |  |
| **6.0**  6.1 | **Chair’s Update**  The Chair reported that:   * He had met individually with the Directors and advised that the Executive Team were working well together, and supported and were committed to the Mission and Purpose of the organisation. * The Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee had visited the refurbishment works being undertaken in the Palm Houses. * He had attended the Regius Keeper’s Summer Garden Party which included a tour of the exhibition Shipping Routes in Inverleith House. * He had attended the People’s Postcode Lottery Gala with the Director of Development and Communications where he had met the Chief Executive and updated key influencers on the work of the RBGE. * Following an introduction from Liz Trevor, the Chair and Director of Innovation Projects had met the Managing Director of The Gleneagles Hotel and discussed how their members could benefit from a closer association with RBGE. * Had attended a Botanics Foundation Board meeting where there were positive steps being taken with a new Chair in position.   Allocation of Board Members to Committees  The following vacancies were highlighted:   * The Board of Trustees’ representative at the RBGE Health and Safety Committee Meetings (met twice a year) - David Hamilton volunteered to take on this role. * A member of the Remuneration Committee (met annually). * A member of the Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee (met monthly). * A member of the Audit Committee (met quarterly) - Stella Morse volunteered to take on this role.   **ACTION:** Trustees who were interested in taking on the role of a member of the Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee or the Remuneration Committee should advise the Chair. | **Trustees** |
| **7.0**  7.1 | **Regius Keeper**  Update  The Regius Keeper gave an overview and advised:   * Edinburgh Biomes. Further discussions with the Scottish Government were scheduled in July to discuss funding for the Project beyond the current five-year capital “round”, cash flow, and the impact of inflation. Resolving these issues remained a very high priority and were following direction provided by the Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee. * Fundraising – The Development Team were achieving some very good results, which was a reflection of the quality of the fundraising strategy as well as much hard work. * Recruitment – RBGE continued to attract some high-quality job applications, and it was noted that there had been an usually high volume of posts to fill, many of which were new (externally funded) posts) in Science, that in turn were significantly increasing the volume and impact of biodiversity research. Overall, staff turnover remained low. * The management of the Volunteers’ programme was being professionalised and was progressing well. |  |
| 7.2 | Directors’ Highlights |  |
| 7.2.1 | *Development and Communications*  The Director of Development and Communications advised that there had been a range of events held in relation to the Botanics Foundation, to increase reach, networks and income. The Chair of the Botanics Foundation had hosted a fundraising event with a focus on the Palm Houses appeal and a follow up event would be scheduled in August. Work was progressing very well with the development of the American Friends of The Botanics Foundation (AFBF) and registration for 501(c)3 tax exemption had been successful. The Regius Keeper would undertake an engagement trip with lectures and fundraising events in the USA in the autumn and the Chair of the AFBF would visit RBGE in September. Appeals would focus on making donor journeys more effective, and the Development Team were collaborating with the Marketing and Communications Team to improve messaging. The Patrons’ programme had been redeveloped with the ‘Regius Keeper’s Circle’ (a higher level of support) introduced. In Membership the Friends groups were being redeveloped into Volunteer groups. In communications and marketing there had been good international coverage on all areas of the RBGE. Work was ongoing to refresh RBGE branding, and consideration was being given to the use of images and the creation of a core image list for the RBGE. The Development Team would be in touch with the Board of Trustees to consider how their networks could further support RBGE. |  |
| 7.2.2 | *Horticulture and Visitor Experience*  The Director of Horticulture and Visitor Experience’s role had changed and now included Public Engagement (Community Engagement, Interpretation and Visitor Welcome) and he would take on the commercial area following a transition from the Director of Innovation Projects later in the year. There was now an improved synergy with these areas being together under one Directorship. The Collections Policy and Garden Masterplans would be completed by the end of the year. There had been a relaunch of the Scottish Government’s Cross-Party Group on Gardening and Horticulture. The Director of Horticulture and Visitor Experience had been providing advice on other sites and assisting groups to look at challenges and opportunities in tackling climate change. |  |
| 7.2.3 | *Director of Innovation Projects*  The Director of Innovation Projects had been working with a brand consultant to reconsider the RBGE’s Values, Vision and Mission statements. The next stage would be to work with a design agency to build a Brand Guide with a launch in 2024. As part of the Digital Transformation Project a consultant had led workshops and a Report was awaited which would provide a roadmap and timeline for investment. Innovation income streams were being diversified through the Botanics Trading Company, the catering contract in Edinburgh was due to be renewed and the tendering process was being implemented to select the catering partner for the next 7 years. |  |
| 7.2.4 | *Resources and Planning*  The Director of Resources and Planning advised that her focus had been on financial sustainability which included supporting income generation (the restructuring of the Botanics Trading Company with new heads of roles being recruited), reviewing the Education business model to grow the programme in the future with an ambition to increase income. The Centre for Middle Eastern Plants would revisit the resourcing model to drive forwards projects. Edinburgh Biomes funding discussions were ongoing with the Scottish Government. Green Finance was being considered. Consideration was being given on how to maximise value from the estate (ie the usage of buildings for future commercial and charitable activities). In relation to supporting people a Pay and Grading Review would be undertaken (as part of the equality, diversity and inclusion work) and work was underway to build on attracting and retaining top talent. RBGE had applied to become a host on the UK Government’s pilot Board Room Apprentice programme for 2024. |  |
| 7.2.5 | Science  The Director of Science and Deputy Keeper advised that the Science Team had been restructured to increase resilience and a new Deputy Director of Science (with responsibility for the preserved collections) had been appointed. An update on some current, high impact, science projects would be given later in the meeting. |  |
|  | **DECISION ITEM** |  |
| **8.0**  8.1.1  8.1.2 | **Investment Committee - Report of the Meeting held Tuesday 6 June 2023**  The Chair of the Investment Committee presented his Report. A strategic review had been undertaken to consider the terms of an historic bequest (used to fund suitable projects or research activities). It was proposed that the Executive Team should consider how to spend the funds on plant-based projects to the benefit of the Gardens. The Board of Trustees approved the identification of suitable projects by the Executive Team, the disbursement of the funds and the dissolution of the Investment Committee to fulfil the terms of the original bequest.  **ACTION:** The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk would consult with the Investment Managers and, to ensure good governance, would ensure that any sign off for the investments went to the Audit Committee or Board of Trustees for approval.  **ACTION:** The Executive Team would put together a plan of action for the application of the funds. | **Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk**  **Executive Team** |
|  | **DISCUSSION ITEMS** |  |
| **9.0** | **Major Science and Conservation Projects**  The Director of Science and Deputy Keeper gave a presentation on some major current biodiversity conservation projects. It was noted that the Science team was performing very well in terms of outputs, outcomes and income generation activity.   * Rubber – there had been a change in level of how rubber was treated in sustainable commodity regulations in part based on evidence on the large scale of rubber-related deforestation in SE Asia, and RBGE have submitted a paper to Nature on this work. * The team was working on evolutionary relationships and patterns of genomic diversity in potato wild relatives to support new approaches to potato breeding to reduce risks to potatoes from diseases. This work was recently published in the journal Cell. * RBGE was involved in multiple high profile biodiversity genomic collaborations including:   + the Darwin Tree of Life Project (sequencing complete genomes of wild species at a large scale in Britain and Ireland).   + Biodiversity Genomics Europe – a large Horizon Europe Project upscaling deployment of genomic technologies to understand and characterise biodiversity in Europe.   + A Centre for Middle Eastern Plants consultancy contract using DNA based identification of plants and vegetation mapping to establish the dietary preferences of reintroduced antelope species to inform revegetation efforts for habitat restoration and to support the establishment of viable herbivore populations in a heavily degraded landscape. * RBGE work on the species reintroductions has accelerated with funding from the Nature Restoration Fund – which involved reintroductions of 10 species in Scotland, and the project involved developing new conservation horticulture protocols and training early career horticulturists. * RBGE’s work on best-practice for species reintroductions and conservation translocations had included co-authorship of the global IUCN guidelines, the production of the Scottish Code and Best Practice Guidelines for Conservation Translocations (which has been modified and adopted to produce an equivalent English version by DEFRA), and a recent book entitled ‘Conservation Translocations’. * The Herbarium has 3 million preserved plants with 792,557 specimens digitised, with work on track to reach 1 million specimens by autumn 2024. Work was now underway to establish robust costs and a plan for completing the digitisation of Herbarium. * A recent collaborative paper was produced on the potential for ‘de-extinction’ by searching for viable seeds on herbarium specimens. This work has received recent media coverage. * A recent workshop was held bringing together people from schools, green infra-structure organisations and Scottish government to showcase the Good-city Project. This project explored how school children perceived and experienced biodiversity on their journeys to and from school, and their perspectives on what a good city should look like. * There were circa 45 post-grad science projects underway with a wide range of interesting and impactful projects delivered by the PhD students and students on the MSc in Biodiversity and Taxonomy of Plants.   The Board of Trustees congratulated the Science team on its achievements and the continuing and high impact collaborations with international partners. |  |
| **10.0** | **RBGE Risk Report - Summer 2023**  The Director of Resources and Planning presented the Risk Report and advised that an annual review of risks had been carried out in May 2023 and there were now 49 risks being managed in the RBGE Corporate Risk Register (down from 53), 6 risk scores had increased, 15 risk scores had decreased, the scores of 26 risks were unchanged, 6 risks had been closed, and two new had been risks added. The Board of Trustees received the full Risk Register annually as part of good governance. The Audit Committee reviewed the risks each quarter and had been impressed with the risk review carried out. The Board of Trustees asked if a separate Risk Committee should be considered - this was not required at this stage but could be kept under review. |  |
| **11.0** | **Key Results Dashboard: FY 2022/23**  The Director of Resources and Planning presented the Key Results Report for information. Highlights included successes across Learning and Engagement. A table which showed self-generated income had been included as suggested. Leading indicators were tracked in the Operational Delivery Plan which was circulated quarterly. The Board of Trustees asked about the reduction in the number of school visits and the effect on income and were advised that the programme was being reviewed. The Board of Trustees asked if there were opportunities for a net promotor score under internal indicators and this could be included in the Key Results Dashboard information. |  |
| **12.0** | **People Strategy**  The Head of People and Organisational Development presented a paper on the People Strategy 2023-2028 for the Board of Trustees’ review and comment and asked if there were any areas that needed to be strengthened or any areas that weren’t covered that should be included. The Board of Trustees suggested that succession planning could be made more explicit and consideration given to the wider societal change and how this could impact on the workforce of the future. The Scottish Government’s policy of no compulsory redundancies remained an issue although consideration could be given to retraining or reskilling Staff for roles in emerging areas. The next stage in the process would be to develop a Delivery Plan which would contain operational details.    **ACTION:** The Head of People and Organisational Development would consider what the future workforce could look like. | **Head of People and Organisational Development** |
|  | **INFORMATION ITEMS** |  |
| **13.0** | **New RBGE Friends Committee Arrangements**  The Director of Development and Communications presented the paper to keep the Board of Trustees informed of the new arrangements. The Friends Committees had been dissolved and were being reformed into Volunteer Groups, the Small Projects Fund income would be allocated and new Terms of Reference had been introduced. The RBGE recognised the contribution of the Friends to the Garden, whilst evolving their purpose to be more aligned with RBGE priorities for the future. |  |
| **14.0** | **Finance Report**  The Finance Partner – Operations and Reporting presented the Finance Report to 31 March 2023 for the Board of Trustees’ information. |  |
| **15.0** | **Botanics Trading Company (BTC) Letter of Support**  The Finance Partner – Operations and Reporting presented a draft letter of support which would go to the auditors of the Botanics Trading Company to ensure that it continued to be treated as a going concern with the support of the RBGE. The Chair confirmed that he would be content to sign it.  **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper would arrange for the Chair’s electronic signature be added to the letter of support and sent to the auditors of the Botanics Trading Company. | **PA to the Regius Keeper** |
| **16.0** | **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)**  The Director of Resources and Planning presented a Report prepared by the new EDI Manager and advised that an extension to 2025 for the Athena Swan bronze accreditation had been agreed. The Racial Justice Report had recommended several actions to promote race equality, including enhancing staff knowledge and understanding and work would continue to be coordinated in this area. |  |
| **17.0** | **Audit Committee - Report** **of Audit Committee Meeting held Wednesday 14 June 2023**  The Chair of the Audit Committee presented a paper reporting on the meeting held on Wednesday 14 June 2023 for the Board of Trustees’ information. It was noted that the Audit Committee had no issues to raise. |  |
| **18.0** | **Science Advisory Committee**    The Chair of the Science Advisory Committee presented the Minutes of the Meetings held on Tuesday 27 September 2022 and Tuesday 6 June 2023 and advised that the success of the Science Team was due to the excellent leadership of the Director of Science and Deputy Keeper and they were delighted with the creation of a new role of Deputy Director of Science (Collections)/Herbarium Curator. Future discussions should include the centralisation of laboratory facilities and all options were being considered for future research facilities. |  |
| **19.0** | **Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee – Key Discussions and Minutes of Previous Meetings**  The Director of Resources and Planning advised that the Head of Edinburgh Biomes had prepared a report of the discussions held at the Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee meetings with a summary of key discussions, events, and issues over the last quarter. David Hamilton summarised the programme for the benefit of the new Trustees. It was noted that the Scottish Government had annual funding restrictions and a request for re-profiling of this year’s underspend had been submitted. The Chair, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, noted that the Edinburgh Biomes and project Teams across RBGE were working very well together and doing an excellent job. |  |
| **20.0** | **Annual Health and Safety Report**  The Director of Resources and Planning presented the Report for information and advised that a procurement tender was being undertaken for a new external consultant for the health and safety audits. The Board of Trustees suggested that Health and Safety Reports be considered as the first paper under Information Items and this would be noted for future Agendas. |  |
| **21.0** | **Proposed Dates for 2024 Board Meetings**  The following dates were confirmed:   * Wednesday 27 March 2024 * Wednesday 19 and Thursday 20 June 2024 (to include a visit to Benmore Botanic Garden and an annual strategy session) * Wednesday 25 September 2024 * Wednesday 11 December 2024   **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper would implement the 2024 timetable for meetings. | **PA to the Regius Keeper** |
|  | **CLOSING ITEMS** |  |
| **22.0** | **Any Other Business**  There were no additional items to report. |  |
| **23.0** | **Arrangements for the Next Meeting**  The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 27 September 2023. |  |

**Jennifer Martin**

PA to the Regius Keeper

29 June 2023

**Annex A** Summary of Actions

**ANNEX A**

**SUMMARY OF ACTIONS**

| **NO** | **ITEMS** | **ACTION** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **4.0** | **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on Wednesday 29 March 2023**  **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 and Executive Team. | **PA to the**  **Regius Keeper** |
| **6.0** | **Chair’s Update**  **ACTION:** Trustees who were interested in taking on the role of member of the Edinburgh Biomes Oversight Committee or the Remuneration Committee should advise the Chair. | **Trustees** |
| **8.0**  8.1.1  8.1.2 | **Investment Committee - Report of the Meeting held Tuesday 6 June 2023**  **ACTION:** The Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk would consult with the Investment Managers and, to ensure good governance, would ensure that any sign off for the investments went to the Audit Committee or Board of Trustees for approval.  **ACTION:** The Executive Team would put together a plan of action for the application of the funds. | **Head of Finance, Corporate Governance and Risk**  **Executive Team** |
| **12.0** | **People Strategy**  **ACTION:** The Head of People and Organisational Development would consider what the future workforce could look like. | **Head of People and Organisational Development** |
| **15.0** | **Botanics Trading Company (BTC) Letter of Support**  **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper would arrange for the Chair’s electronic signature be added to the letter of support and sent to the auditors of the Botanics Trading Company. | **PA to the Regius Keeper** |
| **21.0** | **Proposed Dates for 2024 Meetings**  **ACTION:** The PA to the Regius Keeper would implement the 2024 timetable for meetings. | **PA to the Regius Keeper** |