

Developing the board

So a number of years ago the board tended to focus on day-to-day issues whenever we had board meetings.

The meetings themselves were a little bit unstructured at times.

The agendas maybe weren't as detailed as they should have been and there wasn't enough attention really given at times to more strategic issues that the board should be focussing on.

So a number of years ago we identified that we needed to make the improvements that we've achieved around our board make-up and also the board meetings themselves.

One of the biggest changes that we introduced around about two, two and a half years ago, was to try and make sure that the board meetings were more structured.

One of the other changes that we made was around the make-up of the board and that was very, very significant because if you look back around about three years ago, our board was made up of individuals who had been on it for a long period of time.

But after 15 years on the board, I mean I realised that my main passion was the archive, and I felt it, rather than waste my time on the board, I would be much more effective getting in, starting from scratch, taking it book by book and just going through the whole system again. Aye, so, sometimes, you can get lost on the board.

So we did a review and we identified that we needed to strengthen our board membership, in terms of individuals with experience of the commercial sector,

individuals with experience
of the community and voluntary sector
and, very simply; as some individual board members
decided they wanted to leave.
through natural attrition
and changes in their circumstances,
we took those events as opportunities
to go outside and look for other individuals
who would actually supplement the skills pool
and the experience pool on the board.
So to attract new board members
we not only advertised in the local press
but we also put out a word of mouth communication.
We did almost a pre-assessment process with them.
Whereby Chrissie and I met them,
decided that we felt
that they were suitable for the board
and then we put all of the short-listed candidates
through a formal interview process,
the formal assessment process
to choose our short-listed candidates for the board.
So shortly after starting our new board members
we actually carried out
an induction programme with them
which ran a number of training courses.
The first was around the roles
and responsibilities for a board member.
We also ran another training course
around policies, procedures,
governance, health and safety
insurance and also financial due diligence and fiduciary practices.
And we exposed them to what Belfast Exposed does
within the communities and also within its gallery area.
We also ensure that on an ongoing basis
the individuals are kept fully up to speed
in all of our community programmes

led by the manager, and in turn,
that he does all the community work.
So community involvement is effectively,
a really core part of our business,
if you want to call it that.
As such, the board recognises it,
and the board actively gets involved
whenever we're planning and thinking through
the new initiatives that are delivered by Belfast Exposed.
The board then will keep a watchful eye
on the execution of those activities.
And at the end of each of the initiatives
we, effectively, do what we call
a closed loop evaluation whereby we monitor
and we evaluate within the board;
a report on the outcomes of the initiatives themselves
and also the lessons learned from each of those activities
and the feedback from the community.
I think it's important to bear in mind
that the board has always got
to be fit for purpose and while we refreshed
a number of the people and refreshed the skills
that were on our board over the last number of years,
we never lost sight of one of the main elements of rationale,
that raising debt for Belfast Exposed,
and that was really to bring photography
out into the community.
So we have maintained that
as an ethos of the organisation,
an ethos the board works under
and also we've ensured
that we still have good representation
all on the board from individuals who are representatives
and voices of that group of stakeholders in our organisation.
And we've made sure we haven't lost sight of it
and we need to make sure that we continue to keep sight

of that really valuable aspect of our business going forward.