



enabling people with disabilities

## Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Monday, 14 June 2021, at 7:00p.m.

**PRESENT:** Mr. Kevin Newell, Chairperson, presiding  
Ms. Audrey Pidgeon, Chief Executive  
Mr. Dermot O'Neill, Company Secretary  
Mr. John McHugo, Director of Finance  
Mr. Mick Finnerty, Board Member  
Mr. Declan Noone, ICT Manager  
Mr. Dermot Callanan, FCC Chartered Accountant & Auditor  
Attendees, Approx. 41

**APOLOGIES:** 5 apologies were received in advance of the meeting

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Ms. Carol A. Browne, Recording Secretary

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Mr. Kevin Newell, Chairperson, welcomed everyone to the Annual General Meeting of Ability West and advised in relation to housekeeping rules. Mr. Newell handed over to Deputy Mayor of Galway City, Cllr. Colette Connolly.

### **1. ADDRESS BY DEPUTY MAYOR OF GALWAY CITY, CLLR. COLETTE CONNOLLY**

The Deputy Mayor thanked Ability West for the invitation to attend the meeting, noting the welcome opportunity she had to acknowledge the very significant and outstanding services provided to both children and adults throughout Galway City and County. She acknowledged the impact COVID-19 has had on service users and their families particularly with the closure of day services. The Deputy Mayor noted that Ability West is a grass roots organisation, and while its roots are in the community it faces many challenges to harness the local supports needed to ensure that people with an intellectual disability are no longer marginalised and are very much included in their communities. She advised that in her role as a Councillor and any future role she might hold, she will continue to offer any supports she can to Ability West.

The Deputy Mayor also acknowledged the devastating effect on Ability West's capacity to fundraise during the pandemic. She hoped that it will recover with the support of the local community, the city and county councils and the national government.

Next year's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ability West will no doubt be a great opportunity to celebrate and reflect on the success of the organisation and the Deputy Mayor wished the organisation every success into the future.

### **2. ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF STATE FOR DISABILITY, ANNE RABBITTE**

Minister Rabbitte thanked Ability West for the opportunity to address everyone at the 2021 AGM. Minister Rabbitte advised that she recognises and supports the incredible work that Ability West does in providing services for people with disabilities across Galway City and County. Minister Rabbitte concurred with the Deputy Mayor's comments about the impact of COVID-19 on the organisation's fundraising efforts. She acknowledged the work of service providers during this time, noting how they have adapted to support the service users and their families. Minister Rabbitte said that Ability West is a flagship organisation and should be

supported into the future. The Minister advised that she has been fortunate over the past few months to work closely with Chairperson and the Chief Executive looking at new ambitious plans in relation to New Directions. Ability West is a very progressive organisation that is looking to the future and Minister Rabbitte advised that she is committed to supporting the organisation to look at funding that is available and to seek new horizons going forward. Minister Rabbitte wished Ability West all the best for the future.

### **3. ADOPTION OF MINUTES OF AGM 2020**

Mr. Newell asked that the minutes of the AGM held on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020, as provided at the meeting, be taken as read. The minutes were accepted on the proposition of Mr. Dermot O'Neill and seconded by Mr. Mick Finnerty.

There were no matters arising.

### **4. ADDRESS BY CHAIRPERSON OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS, MR. KEVIN NEWELL**

Mr. Newell welcomed Deputy Mayor of Galway City, Cllr. Colette Connolly, Minister of State for Disability, Anne Rabbitte, Board Members, Service Users, Parents, Family Members, Chief Executive, Staff, Invited Guests and Friends to the meeting.

Mr. Newell advised that the AGM provided an opportunity to look back on performance over the past year and look at how the current year is shaping up. In a year that saw unprecedented changes to the world we live in due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Newell advised that Ability West, as an 'essential service', continued to provide services to the children and adults we support, albeit at reduced levels in some cases.

When the pandemic was declared in Ireland in mid-March 2020, Ability West responded promptly by activating our Critical Incident Response Team, developing a service continuity plan and contingency plans in order to keep services running as smoothly and productively as possible during this time of emergency. The Board of Directors continued to meet in a virtual environment throughout 2020. Mr. Newell acknowledged how difficult the past year has been for service users and their families. He noted that service delivery was far from normal levels and it is hoped that we will return to normal operations with the continued vaccination roll-out.

Mr. Newell thanked all the frontline staff and back office teams who worked incredibly hard during the year, often under significant pressures. Mr. Newell acknowledged the significant assistance received from the Health Service Executive, particularly the local Public Health and Disability Services teams, the Health Protection and Surveillance Centre, and the Department of Health.

Mr. Newell advised that the Board of Directors began reviewing the Constitution in late 2019 to ensure that it would be fit for purpose into the future. He reported that it had been increasingly difficult in recent years to encourage new volunteers to get involved with the branch and regional structure, and as a result, the Constitution was revised to remove these structures and apply an already existing structure which provides a new conduit to the Board of Directors, i.e. the Family Forum. The revised Constitution was accepted by the Charities Regulator in March 2020 and the Constitution was ratified at the 2020 AGM. Mr. Newell acknowledged and thanked all branch and regional members for their many years of volunteerism with this organisation. He advised that Ability West was built on a grassroots structure and had survived and thrived for nearly 60 years because of the efforts of so many in our local branches and regions. The organisation would not be here without the persistent and tireless work of these volunteers and we are very grateful to them for their support through the years.

Mr. Newell advised that Ability West had prepared its financial statements in accordance with generally accepted accounting practice and the Companies Act 2014. The audited accounts for 2020 were available on our website: [www.abilitywest.ie](http://www.abilitywest.ie). The Directors' Report in the Annual Report also provides details about the structure, governance and management.

Mr. Newell reported that due to COVID-19 restrictions, the annual board visits to services were paused in March 2020. These visits happen annually in residential and respite services and biennially in day services. Mr.

Newell reported that the Directors are looking forward to the resumption of visits which will happen when revised public health guidelines permit.

Mr. Newell advised that the Board of Directors reviewed its compliance with the Charities Governance Code during 2020 and a Compliance Report was completed which outlines how the organisation complies with the six principles and 49 standards within the code.

Mr. Newell thanked Mr. Kevin Flavin and Mr. Ray Kelly who retired as Directors in July 2020. Both Mr. Flavin and Mr. Kelly continue to be involved with Ability West in various capacities and we are grateful to them for their continued support. Mr. Newell also acknowledged and thanked Mr. Frank O'Connell who resigned as a Director in August 2020. Frank served for over two years on the Board and we are grateful to him for his expertise, input and volunteerism.

Mr. Newell reported one retirement in April 2021, Mr. Anthony O'Connor, and Mr. Newell thanked Mr. O'Connor for his many years serving as a Director on the Board. Mr. O'Connor showed great commitment and dedication to this organisation over the years, and his support is very much appreciated.

Mr. Newell advised that Ability West's fundraising efforts were hugely impacted by the pandemic. The organisation took the time to strategically review the role and future of fundraising in the organisation and work to rebuild our fundraising programme in the years ahead. We are very grateful to everyone who continued to support us during the year. In particular Mr. Newell acknowledged our appreciation for the generous donations of PPE from communities and businesses across Galway City and County in 2020, at a time when PPE was a limited resource. These donations were critical to the continuity of safe service delivery. As usual, we work closely with our funders, the Health Service Executive, the Departments of Education and Skills, and Social Protection, and we are very appreciative of their ongoing support and assistance.

Mr. Newell sincerely thanked all the Directors for their commitment and contributions during the year. On behalf of the Board of Directors, Mr. Newell thanked Audrey Pidgeon who was Interim Chief Executive from January 2020 until her appointment as Chief Executive in September 2020. Mr. Newell congratulated Audrey on her stewardship of the organisation through what had been a very challenging and incomparable year. Mr. Newell also thanked the Senior Management Team, all managers and staff for their dedication to the children and adults availing of our services.

## **5. ADDRESS BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE, MS. AUDREY PIDGEON**

The Chief Executive advised that at last year's AGM we were three months into the COVID-19 pandemic and noted how difficult the past 15 months have been for the people we support and their families. This proved more challenging than expected, as Ability West balanced sustained service provision within public health guidelines, compromised staffing capacity due to the pandemic and the escalating needs of people we support whose lives had been so greatly disrupted. Through careful planning and risk management, collaboration with local public health teams, and the support of the HSE Community Healthcare West Disability Team, Ability West managed to safely provide continued access to a limited quantum of alternative day services, respite and community support to those most impacted by the pandemic. Like other disability services, it was not possible to maintain full-service continuity to all supported by Ability West, however all efforts were made to ensure some element of contact and support was maintained for everyone.

Different models of service provision at the heightened stages of public health restrictions were required and day service staff were redeployed to work in our residential and respite services, while others were provided with additional supports in the form of regular contact with service users at home and the family members via phone or online calls or sessions. Alternative supports were offered to those community-based or living with families across the city and county. Multi-Disciplinary supports continued to be provided, albeit in a different format to what service users and families would usually expect. Clinicians maintained contact with people and families through regular phone calls and video calls and some home sharing/shared living placements continued.

The Chief Executive advised that after five long months of closures, the day services reopened in August and September 2020, exceeding national averages and providing one of the highest quantum of service nationally for that period. The HSE report '*Resumption of Adult Disability Day Services National Report on Quantum of Service due to COVID-19 as of 30<sup>th</sup> September*' detailed the *national* quantum of day services provided at the end of September was 39% and the *local* quantum of services provided in Community Healthcare West was 48%. She reported that for this period Ability West provided 53% quantum of day services. By November 2020 Ability West was providing 61% of our quantum. This was possible through the hard work and commitment of staff teams, our communities and availing of the welcomed COVID-19 related funds for disability services to recruit additional staff and to secure additional premises.

The Chief Executive reported that Ability West had five outbreaks in residential services since the start of the pandemic, three of which occurred in January 2021. Each outbreak was managed as efficiently as possible, with all people impacted remaining safe and making a good recovery. This can be attributed to the well-coordinated systems of reporting and responding in Ability West, made possible by excellent team work, collaboration and prompt communication between frontline teams and families, the Critical Incident Response Team, and the local HSE Disability and Public Health teams.

The Chief Executive advised that the roll-out of the vaccination programme commenced in Ability West in January 2021.

The Chief Executive acknowledged and thanked the individuals and businesses who responded to our appeal for PPE in April 2020. At that time there was a global shortage of PPE and the overwhelming support we received from communities, businesses and individuals was incredible. The Chief Executive advised that PPE donations were critical to the continuity of safe services at that time.

The Chief Executive reported that at the start of 2020, a 1% efficiency target had been identified by the HSE to be applied to disability service budgets. This would have amounted to €264,380; in service provision terms, it would have resulted in further cuts to our already stretched respite services for children and adults. Ability West advocated very strongly against these cuts both locally and nationally and in collaboration with other service providers and the National Federation for Voluntary Service Providers, detailing the impact this would have on service delivery and more importantly on the people we support and their families. Thankfully, the HSE reversed the announced 1% cut in July 2020, which welcomed.

The final core funding allocation from the HSE for 2020 was €27,820,160, which included: the full year effect of new funding provided in 2019, pay restoration, the provision of services for 2020 school leavers and sundry other funding adjustments. The Chief Executive gratefully acknowledged the HSE's support for providing specific funding to alleviate the effects of the pandemic under the headings of technology, home supports and staff repatriation to day services.

The Chief Executive confirmed that Ability West received funding of €200,000 under the Strengthening Disability Services Grant Funding through the Department of Health and Health Service Executive. Ability West was successful under two proposals; Strand 1: 'Improving person-centred delivery in line with Transforming Lives' and Strand 3: 'Initiatives towards building sustainable organisations'.

The Chief Executive reported that existing frontline services were protected in 2020, with many staff being redeployed within services to provide supports in new and alternative ways. The Chief Executive acknowledged and commended all staff; at frontline and back-office levels. She noted that this was an unparalleled year for service provision and she was incredibly proud of the staff teams who went above and beyond with innovative and creative solutions to barriers to service provision.

Ability West continued to be challenged to meet the full range of needs of people we support. In 2020, we supported individuals and families in crisis for which funding had not been secured. The Chief Executive

reported that Ability West continues to advocate for additional funding through the submission of business cases and at regular review meetings with the HSE.

The Chief Executive advised that these challenges and emerging needs are taken seriously by Ability West and inform future planning and the development of our services. Examples of actions being taken to address these challenges include; ongoing advocacy and escalating needs and emergencies in services to our funders, local representatives and the Minister for Disability. Active engagement with service providers nationally through the National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers who highlight needs on a national level. Engagement with families, peer service providers and representatives to seek alternative solutions to challenges that cannot be addressed through current funding models. An example of this is the ongoing collaboration of Ability West with the Proactive Carers Group and Brothers of Charity Services Ireland – West Region, and engagement with Minister Rabbitte and the NUI Galway Centre for Disability Law and Policy.

Ability West services are consistently challenged to meet ever-increasing non-pay costs, most notably the rising cost of insurance. Ability West is currently not delegated to the State Claims Agency's General Indemnity Scheme and as such only report service user related incidents. However, Ability West would welcome inclusion under the General Indemnity Scheme, as managing continuously increasing insurance costs is unsustainable. Other rising non-pay costs include motor fuel, heating, and the ongoing maintenance of our buildings/vehicles.

The Chief Executive advised that during 2020 Ability West invested in capital projects and transport, funded from efficiencies achieved and ring-fenced fundraised monies. Essential maintenance and renovations were carried out in a number of buildings, and seven new vehicles were added or replaced old vehicles on our fleet. Ability West was also successful in securing Clár Funding for a much-needed replacement bus for our Clifden services.

A Capital Projects Priorities Group was set up by the Board of Directors in late 2019 and comprises members of the executive and non-executive, with the purpose of reviewing priority areas for the development of services over the coming years in terms of service growth needs, geographic locations, renovations to existing buildings and upgrading our transport fleet. Meetings continued in 2020 and work is ongoing in this regard.

Ability West has a Quality Management System and an audit by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) was completed in May 2021, and accreditation is maintained. The Chief Executive thanked Eileen Costello-Conneely, Quality and Compliance Manager, and the Quality and Compliance Department who supported the audit and guide the ongoing quality of services.

We maintained registration in our 29 HIQA designated centres (residential and respite services), and we are going through re-registration for a large number of these services this year.

The Chief Executive advised that the organisation was audited by NSAI in March 2020 and the Gold Standard award under this framework was awarded. A further audit was completed in March 2021 and registration has been maintained. The Chief Executive thanked everyone involved, particularly Cathal Esler, Director of Human Resources, and his team who assisted with the audits.

The Chief Executive reported that the Service User Council celebrated their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020. They changed their name to the 'Advocacy Council', which is more reflective of their role in Ability West. The Chief Executive thanked John Farragher who chaired the Council for the past six years and congratulated Stephen Joyce who was elected as the new Chairperson. The Chief Executive thanked all Advocacy Council Members for their continued work in promoting choice for individuals availing of our services. The Chief Executive also thanked facilitator, John Howard, for his commitment to improving the lives of the people we support.

2020 was the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Home Sharing in Galway. The service developed from a few committed families in 1985 to offering thousands of respite nights to numerous children and adults with an intellectual disability. 'Home Share Galway' is a joint partnership between Ability West and the Brothers of Charity Services Ireland –West Region, and it currently has 110 home sharing families across the city and county.

With regard to the COVID-19 vaccination programme, the Chief Executive reported that everyone supported by Ability West, over 16 years old, was offered a COVID-19 vaccine in 2021. In January 2021, the roll-out of vaccinations commenced for people we support over the age of 65 years, followed by with the vaccination programme for both staff and all persons supported by Ability West. The second vaccination for all residents in Ability West services were rolled out, as have second vaccinations for staff. Second vaccinations for all service users across day, respite and other services are due to commence. There was significant uptake of the vaccine programme and the Chief Executive advised that no significant adverse reactions have been reported. We are looking forward to the recovery of lost capacity in our service provision, particularly in day and respite services in the months ahead. The HSE has published guidelines and we will be working with the HSE and Public Health for the safe return of all individuals to our services.

The Chief Executive advised that Progressing Disability Services will commence in 2021, which will be a change to current multi-disciplinary therapy (MDT) supports to children who attend our services and schools. It will also impact the MDT staff who will be moving to new teams as part of this transition. When implemented, MDT supports to children will be provided by 'Progressing Disability Services', and no longer provided by Ability West. We will continue to work with our colleagues in the HSE, with staff, children and families in our services to support as successful a transition as possible. This change in MDT supports to children has no impact on Ability West's role as Patron of our four Special Schools, or on provision of children's respite and short breaks services.

The Chief Executive reported that Garbally Oaks, our residential service in Ballinasloe, will transfer to the Brothers of Charity Services Ireland this year. Residential services will continue to those who reside in Garbally Oaks, with management and governance transferring from Ability West to the Brothers of Charity.

The Chief Executive reported that a number of service users passed away in 2020 and 2021: John Joe Doherty, Ciara Donnelly, Martin Joyce, Patrick (Parry) Moore, Martin Shaughnessy and Ethan Smyth and Michael Sullivan. Many service users, their families, staff, Board Members and volunteers also experienced bereavements and we extend our deepest sympathies to them. May they all rest in peace.

In conclusion, the Chief Executive thanked Chairperson, Kevin Newell, and Board Members for giving so generously of their time, for their leadership, support and expertise to Ability West.

The Chief Executive thanked the people we support, children and adults, their parents, carers and families for their ongoing co-operation and engagement. She thanked the Directors and Assistant Directors of Client Services, Finance and Human Resources, Department Heads, Managers, Unit Directors, Staff, Community Employment, TÚS and other scheme participants, and all volunteers for their contributions during 2020. The Chief Executive also thanked Orla Haddigan for taking on the interim role of Director of Client Services, and welcomed Pat Tyrrell to the post of Director of Client Services.

The Chief Executive also thanked the HSE, in particular Breda Crehan-Roche, Chief Officer, John Fitzmaurice, Head of Disability Services, and his team Alma Joyce, Mary O'Donnell, Breda Garvey Cecchetti, Laura Rochford and Aoife Donohue as well as Liam Fogarty, Head of Finance, and their respective teams for their ongoing support and assistance. She acknowledged the many statutory, non-statutory and voluntary service providers that Ability West works with, for their ongoing co-operation and assistance.

The Chief Executive noted that we will continue to be challenged but we will work with shareholders to enhance the initiatives supporting service delivery, towards bringing about a return to centre-based service delivery.

## **6. CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION OF ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2020**

Mr. McHugo, Director of Finance, reported that the Financial Statements for 2021 were reviewed in advance of their formal adoption, and the full Financial Statements for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 are available on our website ([www.abilitywest.ie](http://www.abilitywest.ie)).

The Financial Statements were prepared and audited in accordance with FRS 102 "*The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in Ireland*". Additionally, the Directors elected to have regard to the "*Statement of Recommended Practice for Charities*", better known as the "*Charities SORP*" in the preparation of the Financial Statements.

Mr. McHugo acknowledged the presence of Dermot Callanan from FCC Chartered Accountants and Registered Auditors at the meeting and said the ongoing help and assistance provided by FCC is much appreciated.

Mr. McHugo advised that prior to "*FRS 102*" and the "*Charities SORP*", Revenue Income/Expenditure and Capital Income/Expenditure were recorded separately in our annual financial statements, however in the new reporting format all income and expenditure excluding expenditure on *Fixed Assets* is now recorded in "*The Statement of Financial Activities*" (SOFA) of the Financial Statements. He said that this can be somewhat misleading to a reader as the inclusion of capital income without the corresponding expenditure can give the impression that a significant operating surplus had been recorded when in fact this is not the case. Mr. McHugo referred to the supplementary information, which provides comprehensive details of income and expenditure analysed under the headings of revenue and capital. Specifically, it can be noted that an operating Revenue surplus of €353,090 was recorded for the year which is a satisfactory result and represents just over 1% of total income for the year.

Mr. McHugo reported that under the heading of capital, a surplus of €4,708,381 is reported for the year. However, in understanding this surplus, Mr. McHugo said it is important to note that €3,564,068 was received from the Department of Education for building works carried out in St. Oliver's Special School, Tuam, during the year and a further net figure of €1,325,041 accrued from the transfer of assets to Ability West following the winding up of both Snipe Industries Limited and TEAM Leather Products Limited. Both companies were wholly owned subsidiaries of Ability West that provided sheltered work and as this was discontinued many years ago. The Board of Directors made the decision to wind up the companies and transfer the assets, mainly comprising of buildings, back to Ability West as the parent Company.

From a capital perspective, Mr. McHugo noted that the corresponding expenditure for both the building works carried out in St. Oliver's Special School and the buildings transferred from Snipe Industries Limited and TEAM Leather Products Limited have been charged to tangible assets in the Balance Sheet.

Mr. McHugo reported that in "*The Statement of Financial Activities*" on page 10, income and related expenditure is recorded under the headings of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds and Pension Reserve Funds. "*Restricted Funds*" refers to funds which we receive that must be expended as contracted, for example, the HSE provides funding on an annual basis which must be expended in accordance with the annual Service Arrangement in place. "*Unrestricted Funds*" refers to funds received which are spent or applied at the discretion of the organisation; fundraising/donations are an example of this, where the funds received are spent on the development of buildings and the purchase of motor vehicles and equipment. The "*Pension Reserve Funds*" refers to the required accounting treatment of our old Defined Benefit Pension Scheme.

Under the heading of "*Unrestricted Funds*" the various sources of income (Incoming Resources) are detailed and in particular "*Fundraising and Donations*" income for 2020 amounted to €47,994 compared to €150,901 in 2019. This is a very significant reduction which is mainly attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Mr. McHugo expressed his gratitude to all those who fundraised or donated during a year that was so challenging for all. Without this continued support, Ability West would not be able to continue the development of

buildings and to purchase much needed motor vehicles and equipment given the lack of Government grants for such expenditure in recent years. Other income included under the heading of “*Unrestricted Funds*” includes various contributions, interest earned, and other sundry income received during the year.

Information reported in “*The Statement of Financial Activities*” (SOFA) under the heading of “*Pension Reserve*” refers to the accounting treatment of the Defined Benefit Pension Scheme. Mr. .McHugo advised that comprehensive details in relation to this can be found in Note 15 on pages 22 to 25 in the Financial Statements.

Mr. McHugo referred to the Balance Sheet, the overall financial position of Ability West is detailed as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 with comparison figures for 2019. Total Net Assets amount to €28,574,149 as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 compared to €22,982,078 a year earlier.

The layout of the Balance Sheet is similar to previous years however Mr. McHugo highlighted that Tangible Fixed Assets increased during the year and the various Funds/Reserves are detailed on page 20.

Mr. McHugo advised that there is a wealth of financial information contained in the various notes on pages 13 to 28. He said when these notes are read in conjunction with the Statement of Financial Activities, the Balance Sheet and the Cash Flow Statement, a comprehensive and transparent overview of the financial affairs of Ability West is provided.

Mr. McHugo advised that the Financial Statements are compliant with the reporting requirements of both the Companies Office and the Office of the Charity Regulator. They provide full transparency of the organisation’s financial affairs to any reader.

Mr. McHugo acknowledged the help and support of the Board of Directors and Finance Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr. Dermot O’Neill, the Audit and Risk Committee, the Chief Executive, his colleagues on the Senior Management Team and the various Managers and Unit Directors throughout the organisation. Their help and support in the ongoing management of Ability West finances is much appreciated.

Mr. McHugo thanked Breda Crehan-Roche, John Fitzmaurice, Alma Joyce, Mary O’Donnell, Laura Rochford, Liam Fogarty, Dermot Dawson, Gerry Burke and Michael Keady from the HSE for their ongoing support. He also thanked his colleagues in the Finance, Administration and Human Resources Departments for their ongoing commitment and hard work.

Mr. Dermot O’Neill proposed and Mr. Mick Finnerty seconded the adoption of the Annual Report and Audited Accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020.

## **7. APPOINTMENT AND REMUNERATION OF AUDITORS**

Mr. Kevin Newell informed the meeting that the organisation’s Auditors, FCC Chartered Accountants and Registered Auditors, have indicated their willingness to be reappointed and will be deemed to be reappointed in accordance with Section 383(2) of the Companies Act 2014 in the absence of any valid resolution to the contrary. The appointment and remuneration of the auditors was proposed by Mr. Páraic Lawless and this was seconded by Mr. Sean McGrath

## **8. RATIFICATION OF FAMILY REPRESENTATIVE NOMINEES**

Mr. Dermot O’Neill, Company Secretary, reported that the following pertains in relation to the election of Family Representatives in line with our current constitution which states that ‘*two (2) representatives nominated at the first of two family forum held in advance of the Annual General Meeting each year*’.

Mr. O’Neill reported that an information session was held on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021, in relation to the role of Family Representatives on the Board of Directors, following which expressions of interest were sought. Mr. O’Neill reported that seven expressions of interest were received and he thanked all those that put themselves



forward for selection. Mr. O'Neill advised that a postal ballot was held, with 134 votes received. The count being completed and verified by FCC Chartered Accountants on 4<sup>th</sup> May, in advance of the Family Forum held on the same date.

Mr. O'Neill advised that the two Family Representative nominees are Dr. Nikki de Taranto and Mr. James McNabb and the nominees were notified to him as Company Secretary 28 days in advance of the AGM, as required under the Constitution.

Mr. Kevin Newell proposed and Mrs. Mary O'Mahony seconded the ratification of Dr. de Taranto and Mr. McNabb to the Board of Directors.

## **9. ELECTION/RATIFICATION OF DIRECTORS**

Mr. Dermot O'Neill, Company Secretary, reported that the following pertains in relation to the election of Officers in line with our current constitution:

Section 41, subsection (b) of the Articles of Association; In relation to the Officers the following is the position:

- |                                      |                           |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| - Kevin Newell, Chairperson          | available for re-election |
| - Vice Chairperson, Sean McGrath     | available for re-election |
| - Company Secretary, Dermot O'Neill  | available for re-election |
| - Honorary Treasurer, Dermot O'Neill | available for re-election |

Mr. Jack King proposed and Mr. Ray Kelly seconded the ratification of the Officers listed.

The Company Secretary informed the meeting that remaining Directors will be co-opted by the elected Directors at the first board meeting following the Annual General Meeting.

## **10. STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE 2019 - 2023**

The Chief Executive advised that two years had passed since the establishment of the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan and she reported that the strategic goals for Ability West for the current plan (2019-2023) are categorised as follows:

1. Organisation's Culture
2. Change Management
3. Effective Teams
4. Meaningful Outcomes
5. Community Inclusion
6. Secure Sustainable Resources
7. Continuous Quality Improvement, Monitoring and Evaluation
8. Communication

The Chief Executive advised that a detailed analysis was completed on how the pandemic immediately impacted on the operations and service continuity in Ability West over the past year. She reported that with the closure of day services we had to change how services and supports were provided overnight. The pandemic impacted all aspects of our management and operations including approach to risk assessment, resource management and strategic planning.

The Chief Executive advised that following a review of the Strategic Plan within this new context, it is no surprise that the vision and mission statement of Ability West still holds true, however the environment and context within which services are provided had changed. For example, the goal for community inclusion was significantly challenged by the National Framework for living with COVID-19, due to the restrictions of movement and the element of choice being taken away nationally in this respect.

The Chief Executive noted that this time last year there was an overwhelming uncertainty about what would be happening in the next week, month, and year ahead. In order to continue to work on our Strategic Plan, Ability West committed to working on quarterly targets, as opposed to annual targets, until such a time as predictability in resourcing, staffing and service delivery had resumed nationally and locally.

The Chief Executive advised on progress to date under the following headings:

### Organisation's Culture

Ability West undertook a cultural audit across all staff and although response rates were low, we have endeavoured to re-do the audit to encompass further engagement and feedback options such as focus groups. She advised that this will be completed before year end and in particular, we seek to assess how we implement our values which are:

- Independence
- Partnership
- Person Centredness
- Accountability and Transparency
- Participation in Community Life
- Openness
- Integrity
- Rights Based Approach

### Change Management

A working group was established to review the re-opening and reshaping of day services and how best to meet people's needs within our existing resources, incorporating organisational commitments and person-centredness.

A review was also undertaken of the structure of Ability West Respite, Short Breaks, Community Support and Home Sharing services and team structure. These supports have grown significantly in recent years and are now critical to families and people we support. The Chief Executive advised that additional funding was received from the HSE in 2020 to sustain a service called 'Realóg', which was previously piloted in 2019. Realog provides in-home and community support for periods of time to families in need of additional support due to complex support needs. The purpose of the support is to help families to implement support plans, by modelling same, and also to provide periods of respite.

In 2021 Ability West focused on national changes, such as the Assisted Decision Making Act and the UN Charter of Rights for Persons with a Disability (UNCPRD). These will be game-changers in enabling people we support to be front and centre of their own lives, life plans and service provision. In preparation for this current actions include;

- Establishment of a Steering Committee to inform implementation of the Assisted Decision Making Act, which will be implemented in June 2022
- Review of our existing Human Rights Committee and Restricted Practices Committee, and replacing same with a 'Rights Promotion Committee'. The Chief Executive thanked Dr. Aine Sperrin in the NUIG Centre for Disability Law and Policy for her expertise and support of this project.

### Effective Teams

A significant proportion of mandatory training requirements was moved online in 2020 in line with public health requirements. Work is ongoing to develop an online, on-demand Ability West 'General Introduction' induction course.

Work has commenced on a strategic framework for the development of a talent pipeline, which aims to coach staff with career goals in management to train as Team Leaders and Managers in our day and residential services. A working group is being formed to lead on the initiative comprising of HR, Quality & Compliance and Client Services team members.

### Meaningful Outcomes

A review of Person-Centred Plans in all services in light of the COVID-19 pandemic was completed, to ensure that outcomes remained realistic and meaningful. Ability West was successful in securing funding under the Strengthening Disability Services Fund (DOH & HSE) to undertake a significant review and update of our Person Centred Processes and Practices across services. She added that this is a significant fund, which will support a 2-year project undertaking an audit of Person Centred Practice in our services, develop a renewed approach to same with accompanying tools for managers and monitoring, and for the roll-out of training across staff teams.

Ability West availed of funding from the HSE to provide technology to all frontline services and teams. The use of Zoom and Microsoft Teams became essential for effective communication and engagement across services.

### Community Inclusion

Community engagement was significantly challenged in 2020, due to the national public health restrictions on movement and interactions. Our strong volunteer force were creative in the use of technology to maintain essential friendships, events and connectedness during this very difficult time.

With regards the national community of disability service providers, the Chief Executive reported that Ability West continued its significant activity with the National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers at national and local (Western Area Committee) levels. Ability West continued the ongoing collaborations with other national groups, such as the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI).

Ability West engaged in early 2021 with a local service in Portumna who offered the use of their community building to extend the delivery of day services during the pandemic.

### Secure Sustainable Resources

Ability West undertook review and research with Kevin Delaney, Academy Street Workshop, during 2020 in order to develop a new organisational approach to community fundraising. Positive progress is ongoing and a Community Development Officer will be recruited this year with a renewed approach to diversification of incomes, particularly in light of the limitations on fundraising in this last year. Ability West continues to foster relationships with funding bodies and umbrella groups, and to keep informed of new initiatives and funding opportunities. A number of submissions for additional funds were made available in 2020 and have worked with the HSE to reinvest 2020 efficiencies back into our services through capital works and refurbishments.

The Senior Management Team (SMT) have highlighted the unfunded services provided by Ability West to the HSE in our Service Arrangement Reviews, and have submitted business cases for same.

### Continuous Quality Improvement, Monitoring and Evaluation

Ability West is a registered Approved Housing Body for a number of houses that have historically belonged to the organisation. The Housing (AHB Regulatory Authority) Act 2019 requires further regulatory and reporting duties of all Approved Housing Bodies. In 2020 we engaged with the Housing Agency and Department of Housing to look at how best to respond to these statutory requirements that assures compliance and protects Ability West's primary purpose, which is as a service provider to children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

### Communication

The Chief Executive advised that Ability West has focused on increasing effective and meaningful engagement with stakeholders with multi-directional communication in the following ways:

- Family Forum – 2 meetings per year with a focus on information sharing; also the platform for electing family representatives to the Board of Director.
- Advocacy Council – supports to the Advocacy Council has been re-energised with the appointment of two facilitators. Meetings between the Advocacy Council and Senior Management Team take place twice yearly, where themes and actions important to people we support are progressed.
- SMT and Frontline Meetings – bi-monthly meetings.
- Corporate Team Meetings – quarterly meetings with all Middle and Senior Management with a particular focus on strategic planning and preparing for the future delivery of services

- Next Steps (2021) - Focus Groups (Family Forum/Advocacy Council/Staff/Volunteers). Work is ongoing to identify an information sharing platform that could be accessed by all staff for 'instant' and critical messages and updates.

The Chief Executive advised that it was a great opportunity to reflect on the work that was achieved this year in relation to strategic development and to report on the work which continues in this regard. It is hoped to return to annual targets as service delivery is expected to return to pre-COVID arrangements.

#### **11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr. Mick Finnerty, Board Member proposed a vote of thanks on behalf of the Board of Directors, the Chief Executive and the Executive, to the Chairman, Kevin Newell. He acknowledged and thanked Kevin for his commitment and dedication to Ability West. He noted Kevin's professionalism and he always ensure the business of the Board is fair, equitable and transparent. This vote of thanks was proposed by Mr. Finnerty and seconded by Mr. Dermot O'Neill.

There were no questions arising. The Chairperson concluded the meeting and thanked everyone for attending and contributing to the meeting. He especially thanked Deputy Mayor, Cllr. Colette Connolly and Minister of State for Disability, Anne Rabbitte, for attending the meeting.

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