**RNZFB Chair’s Report September 2016**

Hello All

Here is Rick Hoskin’s Chair’s report for the months of July and August 2016.

This report provides some detail of the matters that the Board has been involved with over the last two months. It also contains information about the items discussed at the recent Board meeting. As always I remind people that if you want a full account of what occurred at the Board meeting, then the draft minutes of that meeting held on 10 September 2016 will be available through the telephone information service, on library CD, email on request, or by contacting the Board Secretary on 09 355 6894. Please ask for a copy of these minutes and keep up-to-date with the matters that we are looking at on your behalf.

To make it a little easier to find your way around this document, I begin the report with a list of numbered headings that are then covered in greater detail further on in the report. This way I hope you can find the appropriate detailed passage by its corresponding number. If you are using the telephone information service to read this, you can jump to the next section by pressing 3 or jump back by pressing 1 on your telephone key pad.

The headings are:

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# Engagement Road Show Meetings 2016

As I’ve said in my previous report, this year we are carrying out Engagement Road Shows in more than 20 locations throughout the country. However, this year there is a difference in the timing for the meetings. Board Directors, Judy Small and Carolyn Weston went with me to the South Island and the Wellington, Kapiti Coast area in May, and we’ll be visiting the rest of the North Island during September and October. It will be good to create the opportunity for folk in the North Island to meet with some members of the Board, the Chief Executive and senior staff, and, of course, share a light meal and a cup of tea. From the 10 road shows that were held throughout the South Island and Wellington earlier in the year, we have received helpful information about services and our governance and constitution. In this second round, coming up now, we will ask you questions about the challenges that face you in regards to losing your sight, how the services we provide have or haven’t met your needs, how our support people fit into what we do, and how you get to read the information that you need to read. We always provide the opportunity for you to raise any other points of interest that might impact the Blind Foundation or your day-to-day life.

I do encourage you to find out when there is a meeting close to you and come along and join us. You can give your local branch a call and find out when and where the nearest meeting to you will be.

# RNZFB Constitutional Review Committee

From my previous reports you’ll already know that this Board Committee has work well under way. We are continually sending out messages through the mail and by email to all our clients, members and others who have shown an interest in being involved. In the last little while we have looked at the powers of the Board and the rules around membership. We are having a close look at how we might support the interests of the people who are the support people for our organisation. By this I mean our whānau or families, our staff, our volunteers and our friends, all of whom provide magnificent support to our organisation. To-date, feedback has been dominated by a mere handful of people. We want to get a much wider perspective than this small number, so please think about it and give us your thoughts. Please remember that all the feedback gets read by all on the Committee and then we formulate a position that will be put to members to discuss before they are asked to vote on it.

The current constitution was developed around thinking, beliefs and rules that existed in the 1990s. Now a generation on, we are looking for new and up-to-date thinking that will serve our people for the next couple of decades. If we can, we want to make it shorter, less prescriptive and easier to use. It’s not too late. Please get involved and give us your thoughts.

# Property Update

The Board is thrilled to let members know that after a lot of evaluation and crunching numbers, the Blind Foundation is to begin a programme to role services out from satellite centres around Auckland. The first will be in Albany and we have given the go-ahead for Management to find the right building in the right spot. For decades we have provided services for a third of the country’s population from Parnell and a small centre at Homai in South Auckland. Everything going well, starting next year, our 1,000 or more North Shore clients will start to benefit from having a place nearby without having to cross the Harbour Bridge. A move such as this will also have a positive benefit for staff and those support folk that we rely on so much.

Foundation Properties Limited finished the year on a high note. Having the Parnell site fully tenanted on market rents and having negotiated a satisfactory long term market lease with the Academic College group, there has been a 19% uplift in the valuation of the property. With the Board having got on top of the outstanding seismic or earthquake-proofing works for our historical buildings, scheduled all maintenance requirements, we are now able to continue with the master-planning exercise for the future of the Parnell site. We can now look forward to a much brighter future.

# Getting Young People involved

At our September meeting the Board was treated to an hour’s presentation from four of our younger members. By younger, I mean in their early twenties.

After a rigorous selection process, the Blind Foundation sent four young people off to Camp Joe in Canada to take part in an American style summer camp, but with a difference. This camp had a major leadership building component to it. In good old fashioned Kiwi style, the four New Zealand participants quickly became enthusiastic leaders, to such an extent that their contribution will be programmed into future events at Camp Joe. The four involved have made a pledge to remain involved with the Blind Foundation, saying that they wish to set up a Youth Council led by youth. All in all, this has proved to be a very successful event.

The rest of the Blind Foundation’s Youth Engagement Strategy continues to build. For programmes of this nature to succeed and continue long term they must be led by the young people in a way that is relevant to them. Needless to say, for our organisation to have a healthy future, these people need to be involved.

# The Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind Act Repeal Bill

At last, after years of work the RNZFB Act has been repealed. This was always on the cards since we decided to take on the incorporated society model back in 2002. The Bill was passed unanimously at its third reading in Parliament on 24 August 2016 and the Governor General gave Royal Assent to the new law on 29 August. People should rest assured that our legal name remains the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind.

# Work of the Policy and Audit Committees

The Policy Committee has taken on the task to create a Board Governance Committee. Amongst other things, this committee will be responsible for looking at the Board’s accountability and performance, the Chief Executive’s employment performance and remuneration, the analysis of governance complaints and grievances, the Board conduct and development, and fostering expertise within the membership for on-going sustainability. In addition to this, the Policy Committee is systematically working through our governance documentation to simplify it, to make it less prescriptive, and to make it that people will want to use it rather than shy away from miles and miles of wordy rules.

The Audit Committee received Deloitte, our auditors, to receive the financial statements for the end of our financial year. In short, after a good year, the organisation has a clean bill of health. The Board has given the go ahead for Foundation Properties Limited to purchase a property adjacent to the Parnell site, based on the outcomes of a thorough due diligence process. The Audit Committee invited one of its fund managers to attend to update all Board directors on our accounts and to give a progress report on our investments. Needless to say, even though they have done particularly well over the last few years, the Board is vigilant in its scrutiny of the Foundation’s investments and, accordingly, has a risk programme in place at all times.

# Board Meetings on Teleconference

Though we had several observers attending the September Board Meeting in person, it was disappointing to have no members calling in through our conference call facility. I remind people that they are welcome to join us this way. Simply give the Board Secretary a call or send her an email and she will give you the details of how to listen in.

# Health and Safety

Most New Zealanders will know that new health and safety in the work place legislation was introduced into New Zealand at the beginning of April this year. The RNZFB Board is working to ensure that we not only comply but become a model of excellence. There is a network of committees throughout the organisation to ensure health and safety at every level and the Board has placed a director on the over-arching group to ensure that accountability starts at the top. If we are to comply with the new rules, then every person involved in our organisation must take responsibility to ensure safety for not only themselves but everyone whether it be in the work place or out and about.

# Ministry of Health Audit of Blind Foundation Services

In June and July, the Blind Foundation service was subjected to a rigorous audit by the Ministry of Health. The audit was described as a routine audit of our national rehabilitation services. In conjunction with the audit, as Chair of the RNZFB, I was interviewed in-depth about the Foundation’s compliance with the Ministry’s Business Viability Standards. I am pleased to report, quoting from the report that, “The Board has strong governance processes with clear aims and objective and procedures around the way the Board functions.” Management also needs to be congratulated on an excellent result. There were two or three very minor points to be actioned, all being related to updating documentation. One example of this is to ensure that all Board Directors have current police checks.

# Submissions

In June to August, five submissions were provided to the central government. These were:

* New Zealand Disability Strategy (Phase 2)
* Health Research Strategy
* Education Funding Review
* Optional Protocol to UNCRPD
* Health of Older People Strategy

If you would like any further detail on these submissions, please ask the Board Secretary or the National Contact Centre.

That concludes my report following the September Board Meeting. If anyone wants further details on any of the Board’s work, I am very happy to talk to them. You can get my mobile number from the Board Secretary.

**Rick Hoskin**

**Chair**