**RNZFB Chair’s Report April 2018**

Hello All

Here is my Chair’s report for April 2018.

This report provides some detail of the matters that the Board has been involved with over the last few months. It also contains information about the items discussed at the recent April meetings of the RNZFB Board. 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 28 April will be available through the telephone information service, on library CD, e-mail on request, or by calling the National Contact Centre on 0800 243333. Please ask for a copy of these minutes and keep up-to-date with the matters that we are looking at on your behalf.

I should remind you that if you are a member then you are fully entitled to attend the meetings in person or by telephone. Just let the Board Secretary know if you are interested.

1. **Engaging with our clients and wider family**

The Engagement Road Show meetings are held annually in different locations around the country. These meetings provide clients, their support people and our volunteers and interested others with the opportunity to talk, in an informal setting, with the Board Chair, members of the Board, the Chief Executive, Leadership team members and staff.

The meetings are a chance for two-way conversations about the services that the Blind Foundation offers, the developments being undertaken, what the future holds and, at the same time, hearing from those attending about what is important for them.

The meetings will also include the chance to catch up with the Blind Foundation team and others attending, over a cuppa and a bite to eat - something that we know, from our previous meetings that people really appreciate.

This year we will be asking you to think of any special topics that you would like us to cover. So if you are thinking of attending a meeting, then get your thinking caps on and let us know.

We look forward to meeting you again soon.

For more information please contact Noreen Parker by phone on 09 355 6920 or by email at nparker@blindfoundation.org.nz.

**2 Creating a company to look at new initiatives**

The Board has wanted for some time to set up a separate company which will have the job of looking at special projects. Some may know such a company as an incubator company, others as a start-up venture company. It is called Blind Foundation Ventures Limited and it will look at a wide variety of activities. It may look to set up trial or demonstration projects to create different types of services for our clients. It may look at small commercial activities that will bring additional sources of income to help pay for our services. It may take on ventures where we partner with other organisations to develop pieces of technology that will improve the quality of life for our clients. This is a very exciting addition to what we have done in the past and knowing that technology and our service environment is changing so quickly, the Board looks forward to seeing how this progresses. We will be looking to employ a small number of independent directors who have the ability to develop novel business initiatives, understand modern market trends and have experience in high growth start-up businesses.

1. **Highlights from the Committee Meetings in April**

As I’ve reported before, the new RNZFB Constitution includes a raft of new Mandatory Policies. The Board is getting cracking on developing the drafts of these policies. As a part of the new rules, these Mandatory Policies will be sent out to members for their consultation and input before being finalised. They include such things as policies on volunteers, on communication and engagement, on consultation, ethnic minorities, children and more. You can find a full list under section 6.7.2 in the Constitution. We have completed several more of these now and they will soon be made available for you to look at and comment on.

The Plain English version of the new RNZFB constitution is now available. It is a shortened version of our rules which gives a quick guide to how we are governed. Of course one must refer to the full version of the constitution if they wish to be exact.

The Governance Committee has started to carry out an independent review of the Board’s function and ability. At our April meeting we had an assessor present to review our performance. The process is very detailed and some consumers, members, clients, volunteers and staff will be interviewed. There will also be a review of our papers and minutes and other documentation.

The Audit Committee is pleased to say that we are in a very healthy financial position for the first nine months of the year. Fundraising is well above targets and our investment portfolio under new management is also keeping up with our targets in a somewhat volatile financial market.

1. **From the Full Board Meeting**

The Board discussed how the engagement road shows will be run during 2018. As I’ve already said, it is our wish to encourage communities to come up with the topics that are dearest to them. So we will be asking well ahead of time for your thoughts. This year, we are going to try to piggy-back our road show meetings on other community events or on equipment display days. Please watch out for more information on this.

The Board reviewed the progress that has been made on the first nine months of the current Business Plan and is pleased to see that many of the initiatives are well on track to be completed in full and on time. It is too early to say for sure, but it appears that we might be procuring two extra Guide Dog Mobility Instructors which will really help get the backlog of applicants reduced.

The Board looked at a paper which gave a road map of how we might look to refresh our brand. This is a much wider project than just looking at the logo. We know that we have to create great awareness of our services so that we can ensure that all those who are eligible for our services know about them. There is a lot of preliminary work to be carried out and we will ensure that you are kept apprised of the progress.

1. **Property Update**

After many years of ups and downs caused by the financial conditions or by county consenting processes or even commercial operations changing their minds, our property in Royston which is near Cambridge in England has started to bear fruit for the RNZFB. Aldi and Marks and Spencer have taken long-term leases and are building on the site. So the first sizable cheque has been banked.

I reported last time that two major investigations are being carried out on the Parnell site. One is the possibility of building a commercial or commercial and residential block on the corner of Parnell and Maunsell roads and the other is looking at the possibility of building a retirement centre in the central pod of the site. Both these projects are undergoing in-depth feasibility studies. We are now negotiating with one operator to get some idea of the financial implications and the benefits that will come the Foundation’s way.

1. **Creating a People Committee of the Board**

The Board took advice on how it might better have oversight of human resources, organisational culture and remuneration. At the April meeting, the Board resolved to set up a People Committee.

The purpose of the committee is as follows: The People Committee will assist the Board in discharging its responsibilities with respect to overseeing all aspects of People and Culture, including human resources strategy and policy, employment conditions and remuneration.

Both Management and the Board believe that this committee will add value to our strategy, policy and practices.

1. **Submissions Summary**

Here is the Submissions Summary Report from November 2017 to March 2018

In the period three submissions were made to the following calls for public input:

* Wellington City Council Accessibility Plan
* Environment Canterbury Long Term Plan
* New Zealand Government’s Digital Service Standard

## Wellington City Council Accessibility Plan

The Wellington City Council has prioritised accessibility for some time. The Council’s second Accessibility Plan aims to guide Council activity over the next three years. The focus is on the concept of an "accessible journey". The plan specifies areas where accessibility changes will be required to achieve multiple benefits. If journeys (in the broadest sense) become more accessible, then people with disabilities will have much broader opportunities for economic and community participation. In our view, this approach to accessibility has merit. However, the Council’s plan is limited only to those areas where it has a specific responsibility; this is only approximately 40% of the Wellington economy. The plan does not cover what might be done to incentivise the rest of the stakeholders in the Wellington economy to adopt accessible practices. Our submission highlighted this point to the Wellington Council. We informed Council of the Access Alliance’s proposal for accessibility legislation and offered to provide further technical advice on the matter. We urged the Wellington Council to support the Access Matters Campaign.

## Environment Canterbury Long Term Plan

The Environment Canterbury Long Term Plan covers public transport in the region. The Blind Foundation did not support any of the three options presented in the consultation document, as none of the options included improving access to public transport.

As noted in the consultation document, regional transport “…improves social connectedness and wellbeing in communities; …” The options proposed would not achieve this for all people living within the Canterbury Region.

Our submission set out practical proposals and principles to guide the development of accessible transport services. We recommended improvements to accessible transport, including transport hubs and accessible footpaths, and accessible customer service, including ticketing.

## New Zealand Digital Standard

Last December, the New Zealand Government’s Digital Service Standard (DSS) was published on Digital.govt.nz. The Standard sets out the best practice principles for the design and delivery of government services. The document outlines ten general principles to guide the development and operation of government services that use digital technology. Even though Principle six (Be inclusive and provide equitable services) identified the need for an inclusive approach, it failed to specify the needs of people with disabilities.

We suggested an additional principle be included to address disability and accessibility specific requirements. The Blind Foundation offered to provide further technical advice on the matter.

Rick Hoskin

30 April 2018