

MEETING OF THE ENGLAND COMMITTEE

18th March 2025

Microsoft Teams

MINUTES

PRESENT:

John Mothersole	Chair
Ray Coyle	Member
Matthew Downie	Member
Daria Kuznetsova	Member
Kamran Rashid	Member
Karin Woodley	Member

IN ATTENDANCE:

Phil Chamberlain	Director, England
Emma Corrigan	Director, England
Jon Eastwood	Deputy Director, England
Mark Purvis	Deputy Director, England
Catherine Lindsey	Senior Governance Officer (Minutes)

APOLOGIES:

Halima Khan	Member
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FOR SPECIFIC ITEMS:

Mike Bates	Senior Head of Finance (<i>Item 3</i>)
Fiona Brice	Funding Officer (<i>Item 4</i>)
Craig Corbett	Funding Officer (<i>Items 4 & 5</i>)
Nicola Thurbon	Senior Head of Regional Funding (<i>Item 4</i>)
Steve Lowden	Funding Officer (<i>Item 5</i>)
Tony McCarthy	Funding Officer (<i>Item 5</i>)
Christopher Buckton	Funding Officer (<i>Item 5</i>)
Jodie Bray	Funding Officer (<i>Item 5</i>)
Sheena Wynne	Head of Regional Funding (South West) (<i>Item 5</i>)
Ruth Stephens	Senior Grant Making Manager (<i>Items 4 & 5</i>)

1. COMMITTEE INFORMAL CATCH UP

1.1. The Committee held a closed session for members only.

The England Senior Leadership Team (ESLT) and Catherine Lindsey joined the meeting.

2. WELCOME

2.1. The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all, in particular Millie Downes who was joining her first meeting as a Committee Member and Youth Voice Representative.

2.2. Apologies were received from Halima Khan.

2.3. Subject to some points of detail and clarification raised by Committee Members, the minutes of the meetings of January and February 2025 were APPROVED as an accurate record.

3. ENGLAND UPDATE

Business Planning

3.1. The England Directors confirmed that the Directorate's business plan for 2025/26 had been approved.

- 3.2. They and the Chair both reflected on a significant year of delivery for England in 24/25, particularly in terms of ensuring the continued delivery of grants alongside the development and launch of the New England Portfolio (NEP), and they extended their praise and congratulations to staff across the Directorate.
- 3.3. There was currently particular focus across the organisation on the Fund's target for funding environmentally focused projects under KPI4. Directors assured the Committee that, while the portfolio and wider Fund had plans in place to address the current deficit in relation to this KPI, the topic would be brought back to them after discussion with the Board, as they recognised that there might be impact on England's funding more broadly. Committee members indicated that examples or case studies of what 'good' funding looked like in this space would be helpful to ensure any actions or decisions taken were meaningful, and ESLT agreed that some time should be made at a future Strategic meeting to explore this further.

ACTION: ESLT

- 3.4. Reflecting on comments made by the Chair of the Board during the Committee's strategic meeting in February, Members encouraged ESLT to ensure they were in contact with individuals and organisations with relevant expertise and who were pioneering on environmental matters in order to inform the portfolio's priorities. They also emphasised that commitments around the environment and equity ran counter to the current climate, and there was an opportunity for the Fund to play a valuable leadership role on both agendas.
- 3.5. Directors also advised that work would be undertaken in the coming year to review Third Party funding criteria, to ensure they aligned with the ambitions of *It starts with community* and NEP, and the revised approach would be brought to Committee for consideration in due course. Until this work was undertaken, any new Third Party opportunities would still be weighed up against the current criteria.

New Portfolio Activity

- 3.6. Hannah Rignell updated the Committee regarding recent engagement on the Solidarity Fund. Kamran Rashid added that, having attended a consultation event, attendees had fed back to him how valuable they had found the session, and how valued they had felt in being able to contribute their thinking to the development of the programme.
- 3.7. Jon Eastwood provided an update on changes to Reaching Communities (RC), which were due to go live on April 1st. He advised that sessions with staff socialising the new criteria had been well attended, and that a Trainer Cohort team had been brought together to look at and understand the new pipeline. ESLT intended to bring an update and review to the next strategic meeting.
- 3.8. Committee Members, acknowledging the significant shift posed by changes to RC, queried whether the portfolio planned to record the data of failed applications in order to better understand ant trends and potentially provide advance notice if changes weren't working as intended. ESLT confirmed that this would form part of the Trainer Cohort's work, and an overview of Reaching Communities data over the last five years would be presented with the review in May.
- 3.9. The Committee discussed the organisation's role as 'more than a funder', and encouraged the portfolio to consider how it could support organisations who weren't applying for funding. They also indicated they would value more insight regarding the Fund's internal culture and behaviours, which may shed light on the

understanding and knowledge being used by colleagues to shift the status quo externally.

- 3.10. The Committee queried whether applications received were reflecting the impact of other funders freezing their grants. ESLT confirmed that there were signs of increasing volatility in all regions, and teams were observing this in the applications coming through. For instance, organisations who may have initially intended to apply for half of a project's funding were now seeking the full amount. This was expected to continue, and ESLT assured the Committee that they were working to ensure that, given the portfolio was not in a position to fund every project applied for, funding colleagues' time working with applicants was as meaningful as possible.

Latest Financial Position

Mike Bates joined the meeting.

- 3.11. The presentation provided at Annex A summarised the portfolio's financial position.

Sections 3.12 - 3.14 are Commercially Sensitive - S43(2)

Mike Bates left the meeting.

General Update Discussion

- 3.15. Noting that the majority of grant variations brought to the Committee for consideration related to projects which had initially been awarded at amounts just shy of the £500k threshold, the Chair observed this added weight to the upcoming paper reviewing responsive funding, which should give the Committee clarity regarding how clustering at this level might be avoided.

Section 3.16 is Commercially Sensitive - S43(2)

- 3.17. Noting that several applications related directly to withdrawn Local Authority funding, the Committee discussed the portfolio's position on this issue. The Chair advised that while the portfolio would not seek to grant awards which solely referred to the withdrawal of Local Authority funding, it could fund proposals wherein applicants clearly demonstrated that their projects would respond directly to the needs of communities impacted by the withdrawn funding.
- 3.18. ESLT noted that the Committee had discussed the portfolio's position on crisis funding and infrastructure at the April 2024 strategic meeting, and offered to recirculate the relevant papers and minutes, alongside the position articulated in *It starts with community*.

ACTION: ESLT, Governance

4. GRANT VARIATIONS & FUNDING DECISIONS

Section 4 is Commercially Sensitive - S43(2)

- 4.17. Grant Variations and Funding decisions are restricted and can be found in Annex A.

5. REFLECTIONS

- 5.17. Funding papers had been submitted in a revised template for this meeting, and Committee members responded positively to the change overall, noting that content was improved and more concise. They indicated that the financial detail could still be set out more clearly in order to better support decision-making, and that funding

colleagues should demonstrate more rigour regarding the top-line outcomes and impact of proposals.

- 5.18. ESLT thanked Members for their feedback and, in relation to the latter point, noted that the Fund's Impact Strategy was due to launch in coming weeks, and that Committee would be hearing a further update from the Evidence & Impact team around how the strategy would be embedded into the funding assessment process.
- 5.19. There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 2.46pm.