



MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 11 APRIL 2025 @ 10:00 am

IN ATTENDANCE	
Paul Sweeney	<i>NI Chair</i>
Kate Clifford	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Cara Cash-Marley	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Anne-Marie McClure	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Norman McKinley	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Nick Garbutt	<i>NI Committee member - (until 1pm)</i>
Caolan McKiernan	<i>Youth Voice NI Committee member</i>
Kate Beggs	<i>NI Director</i>
Alison Fraser	<i>Senior Head of Funding</i>
Amanda Doherty	<i>Senior Head of Communications & Engagement</i>
Stuart Fisher	<i>Chief Finance & Resources Officer - (until 1pm)</i>
Claire Meighan	<i>Evidence & Engagement Manager - (for item 3 onwards)</i>
Rob Roffe	<i>Head of Evidence Services - (virtually for items 3 & 4)</i>
Jess Hey	<i>Performance Data Analyst - (virtually for item 4)</i>
Jacqui Maxwell	<i>Governance Officer - minutes</i>

1. OPENING REMARKS:

1.1 Chair's Welcome & Verbal Updates

The Chair opened the meeting, welcomed all attendees and introductions were made.

Updates were reported as follows:

- UK Board meeting was held on Tuesday 25 March
- Recent NI Grant announcement
- Dormant Assets - Phase 1 Evaluation
- Feedback on the Leadership in the West event in Dungannon and the learning taken from it

1.2 NI Director Update Report

Committee noted the report covering the following points:

- Chair's visit in June
- COVID-19 Inquiry
- NIC Away Day - agenda will be circulated as soon as possible.
- Strategy implementation
- Grantholder Learning & Support contract
- The successful 30th Birthday Lottery distributor event in Stormont
- Priorities for the next 3-6 months.

ACTION: K. Beggs

2. GOVERNANCE: (Chair & J. Maxwell)

2.1 Apologies

There were none.

2.2 Conflicts of Interest

Kate Clifford had declarable (non-disqualifiable) interests for the following:

- Rural Community Network, of which Kate is Director, is a current recipient of a Sustainable Community Buildings Grant and also a Dormant Asset funded partner in two ATR awards.

2.3 Previous Minutes

The minutes from the 21 February 2025 business meeting were formally agreed.

2.4 Actions List

The actions list was noted.

- Further consideration to be given to the rationale for action 2 and whether to include a thematic discussion at the Away Day. **ACTION: K. Beggs/Chair**

2.5 NIC Meetings Timetable 2025/26

The timetable was noted and Away Day venue confirmed.

3. **STRATEGIC FINANCE BRIEFING - (S. Fisher)**

3.1 ***Stuart presented using the following headlines:***

- The National Lottery distributor ecosystem
- The Finance & Resources Directorate
- Income - highlights and headlines
- Allwyn income forecasts and income risk
- NLDF balance considerations
- Grant and overhead budget considerations

3.2 Committee thanked Stuart for his excellent presentation and suggested it should be included in future Board and Committee member inductions.

4. **KPIs UPDATE - (J. Hey; R. Roffe & C. Meighan joined the meeting)**

4.1 Committee noted the paper, which summarised the Fund's Key Performance Indicators and its performance to date. It provided detail on how each KPI is calculated, it's links to our strategic priorities and Northern Ireland's performance compared to that of the Fund as a whole.

4.2 ***Jess gave a brief overview of the paper's contents under the following headings:***

- Summaries
- Northern Ireland & UK-Wide KPI Table with Red-Amber-Green (RAG) ratings
- KPI Forecasting
- Fund wide progress towards KPIs will be published at the end of the first Corporate Plan year.

4.3 For clarification Kate Beggs highlighted certain definitions and confirmed that committee will receive KPI updates going forward. **ACTION: R. Roffe**

4.4 Claire Meighan will look at team-level figures to assist with local context and help bring KPIs more into our grant making considerations. Claire also confirmed that the new Evidence Services Team was working to deliver a consistent reporting approach to all portfolios.

5. **OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERSHIP & ADDITIONAL INVESTMENT - (K. Beggs & A. Fraser)**

5.1 Committee noted the current NI programme activity for Awards for All, Sustainable Community Buildings and Strengthening Communities.

- 5.2 In relation to the KPI under grant commitment, there was an opportunity to consider additional investments. If committee was open to this suggestion, a decision will be made to explore certain avenues - (e.g. partnerships with other funders/government departments; soliciting applications for certain strategic/policy issues etc).
- 5.3 ***The main discussion points were as follows:***
- We need to start the conversation; any investment needs to be evidence based and aligned to one of our missions and we should consider what will be left behind for the sector when the funding finishes.
 - Be creative but also consider the calibre of leadership within the sector.
 - Initial thoughts for areas to consider included:
 - Endowment fund; bursaries & apprenticeships to attract/keep the best people in the sector and to help make a real difference to leadership succession planning.
 - Community Transport - the inequalities and challenges. Report produced through Dormant Assets Funding will be circulated to NIC. ***ACTION: J. Maxwell***
 - Environment - small grants/AfA; transformative funding for community energy, which would be a great opportunity to become self-efficient - Social Farms. Need to consider what next after SCB. Family Support needs - building on our learning from Reaching Out Supporting Families and linked to the Reform Programme for Children's Social Care Services
- 5.4 **Committee endorsed the above** and noted there will be further conversations at the May Away Day to consider next steps . ***ACTION: NISMT***
- 5.5 The Chair thanked committee for their suggestions and ideas.
6. **PORTFOLIO UPDATE: (A. Fraser)**
- 6.1 **Strengthening Communities Applications**
- Alison reported on the following numbers:
- 94 ideas received to date
 - 34 unsuccessful
 - 13 withdrew
 - 10 applications in assessment for the 20 June decision meeting
- 6.2 The Funding Team was on a learning curve with regards to the Strengthening Communities programme and would welcome NIC feedback on assessment reports so that they can be refined to provide the information required to inform decision making.
- 6.3 **Strengthening Communities Assessment Reports**
- The main points of discussion were as follows:***
- Reducing the length of the reports was a challenge as Funding Officers try to cover all areas under consideration and anticipate committee questions.
 - The finance section needs to be clearer, but it was acknowledged that GMS has certain formatting restraints.
 - It would help if committee members sent questions in advance and replies circulated to everyone.
 - A question and answers page could be created in the meeting papers folder for all to see.
 - Paper deadlines and lead-in times would need to be reviewed to give adequate reading time.
 - It would also be useful for the Funding Managers to produce a summary highlighting the performance of each batch of applications as a whole including KPIs - (e.g. these applications are helping us achieve XYZ ambitions). This picture will be built up over time as decisions are made.
 - Claire reported that the above could also be included in the new evidence summary reports that committee will receive for both business and decision meetings. ***ACTION: C. Meighan***
- 6.4 It was agreed that the above will be taken forward into future decision-making meetings.

7. EVIDENCE & IMPACT: (Rob Roffe re-joined at 13:35)

Committee noted the paper, which introduced the Fund's new Evidence and Impact Strategy to Northern Ireland Committee ahead of its publication in May. It provided an overview of the engagement work to date, the feedback received from Board and the next steps to be taken. It invited the Committee to reflect on the implications of the strategy for the Northern Ireland portfolio.

7.1 Rob gave a brief overview of the paper's contents, under the following headings:

- Context
- Consultation & Engagement
- Board Feedback
- Next Steps
- Strategic Implications for Northern Ireland

7.2 Committee noted the Evidence & Impact Strategy for 2025-2030, and stated their support and endorsement. The strategy will be externally published in May through social media channels and a press release.**7.3 The main points of discussion were as follows:**

- a) In relation to paragraph 6.1 of the paper, how will Funding Teams in Northern Ireland make time to properly absorb the new strategy?
- b) It is a step change for the Fund as a whole and the Funding Team will be part of this and supported to engage.
- c) Northern Ireland Evidence Services colleagues will support the Funding Team to help navigate and consider the knowledge gaps.
- d) What are the levers that work for each of the devolved administrations and understanding the strength of knowledge? Lead with the evidence and share the knowledge, linking in with partners and Government.
- e) We need to secure our own approach first before working collaboratively.
- f) Consider and show what has worked well in NI and review the learning.
- g) It will be useful to share the strategy with grant applicants, but need to ensure it is accessible and understandable. Create a summary document on the Fund's website.

7.4 Committee thanked Rob for his excellent paper.**8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS:****8.1 Next Meetings:**

- Committee Away Day - Friday 16 May - Templemore Avenue Baths
- Decision Meeting - Friday 20 June - (UK Chair Dame Julia Cleverdon will be in attendance. Any arrangements for dinner the night before will be confirmed).

8.2 Evaluation Costs:

Committee noted the internal Evaluation Costs guidance, which they found useful and reassuring in terms of the considerations FOs give to evaluation costs.

The meeting finished @ 2pm.

Paul Sweeney .

Signed: _____
Paul Sweeney, NI Chair

Date: 16 May 2025