



**MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON FRIDAY 21 APRIL 2023 @ 10:00 am**

NI Committee	
Paul Sweeney	<i>NI Chair</i>
Cara Cash-Marley	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Kate Clifford	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Nick Garbutt	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Anne-Marie McClure	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Staff	
Kate Beggs	<i>NI Director</i>
Alison Fraser	<i>Senior Head of Funding</i>
Amanda Doherty	<i>Senior Head of Comms & Engagement</i>
Michael Liggett	<i>Head of Knowledge & Learning</i>
John Rose	<i>Director for Wales</i>
Mark Creaney	<i>Funding Manager (for item 9 from 12:30)</i>
Jacqui Maxwell	<i>Governance Officer</i>

1. OPENING REMARKS:

1.1 Chair's Welcome & Updates

- The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and especially welcomed John Rose, Director for Wales. Introductions were made.
- Blondel Cluff, UK Chair will be visiting Northern Ireland on 2 and 3 May and colleagues were putting together a programme for her visit.
- Dormant Accounts had received nearly two hundred applications in the last two weeks prior to the closing date (762 received in total) and will take time for staff to process.
- 150 applications were also received for the King's Coronation celebration funding, delivered through the Awards for All programme and a number of cost-of-living grant uplifts had been administered. Committee noted the current busy period for the Funding Team and thanked them for their hard work.
- Regarding public expenditure in the social policy context, we are currently operating in, this was heavily impacting on the community and voluntary sector and making it difficult for organisations to strategically plan. It was also another layer of complexity for NI staff to navigate.

1.2 NI Director Updates

- The 2023/24 grant budget had been committed at 4.4% over budget, which is within the +/-5% tolerance in Fund-wide KPIs.
- Strategy Renewal: implementation was being planned and internal/external launch events will take place in May and June.
- Employment Engagement Annual Survey Results: the NI Directorate scores were improved by 18% from last year. There is still work to be done around some specific issues, but open conversations have been established, which was encouraging. More results data will be shared with committee at a later date. **ACTION: K. Beggs**
- Customer Satisfaction Analysis: NI had the highest score across the UK (92%), in the 6-month period for Qtrs. 2 & 3.
- Committee was also updated on the NI Knowledge & Learning team's current set-up.

1.2.1 There followed a brief discussion regarding the King's Coronation and Lottery funding being made available for celebratory events. Kate Beggs confirmed that the funding was being used to bring communities together for a 'UK moment', and that successful applications still had to meet the priorities and criteria of the National Lottery Awards for All programme. Committee also thought that conversations should be happening earlier in the process. It was also recognised that these types of programmes are no longer stand-alone, but delivered through National Lottery Awards for All.

2. GOVERNANCE:

2.1 Apologies

These had been received from:

- Norman McKinley, NI committee member
- Hannah Sankannawar, Boardroom Apprentice
- Ajuma Safina, Youth Voice Team
- Norrie Breslin, Head of Knowledge & Learning

2.2 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

2.3 Previous Minutes

The minutes from the 10 February 2023 business meeting were formally agreed.

2.4 Actions List

The updated actions list was noted.

2.4.1 In relation to action item 6.5, the Chair confirmed that Nick Garbutt had agreed to be the lead committee member for Dormant Assets.

2.5 NIC Meetings Timetable 2023/24

Members noted the updated timetable.

3. PROJECT VISITS REFLECTIONS:

3.1 Amanda Doherty confirmed that Joanie Arthurs was progressing the visits with committee members to take place before the June away day. Work was on-going to align visits and to have more than one committee member visiting specific projects.

3.2 Kate Clifford gave feedback on her visits from December to February. She had been impressed with how the projects were making a difference. They were a testament of the Fund's work and very uplifting to witness. Committee recognised the level of support given by Funding Officers to projects and staff.

3.3 Kate Beggs, reported on a celebration event that she had attended for a Reaching Out Supporting Families project. This was Step-Up Step-Down run by the Fostering Network, delivering wrap around family support, which was coming to the end of their seven-year funding. They had clear outcomes and an economic assessment on how children and parents were positively impacted by the project and the cost savings of not putting children into care. This project was designed with partnerships, including the Trust from the very beginning, and had seven years for relationships to grow and embed. Lottery funding also enabled health practitioners to try something new and provide a robust evidence base. The project was now fully embedded by the South-Eastern Trust and was being piloted in two local authority areas in Wales.

3.3.1 Kate Beggs will share the outcomes document with committee. It will be beneficial to look at what made this such a successful project and review the relationships and connectedness.

ACTION: K. Beggs

4. PORTFOLIO UPDATES:

4.1 NI Portfolio & Pipeline Reports

- 4.1.1 *Alison Fraser reported that the portfolio data compared the 2021/22 & 2022/23 results.*
- 4.1.2 *Awards for All* - significant annual award increase of £800K. Budget will be kept under review.
- 4.1.3 *People and Communities* - £5.3m annual increase. Figures included 49 cost of living uplift variations.
- 4.1.4 *Empowering Young People* - £100K annual decrease. Figures included 19 cost of living uplift variations.
- 4.1.5 *Programme Pipeline* - this continues to be healthy and will be kept under review. Alison Fraser reported that at a recent Funder's Forum meeting, it was reported that it was now the case that certain projects were turning down award offers, as they did not have the capacity or headspace to deliver a project in the current climate. Committee agreed that certain project volunteers do not even have the time to write applications and that for some projects, attendance numbers had decreased post Covid. It was acknowledged that this will make it even more critical to identify how we can make the most difference, target appropriately and consider programme design. **Declarations of Interest:** Committee members agreed that if they notice any declarations of interest in the pipeline, details of the interest should be emailed to Jacqui Maxwell as soon as possible. Members with disqualifiable interests will not receive the relevant papers.

ACTION: NIC

5. BALLYMENA ADDICTS HOPE CENTRE GRANT WITHDRAWAL:

- 5.1 Alison verbally updated committee as follows:
- The Fund's Legal team had sent a pre-action protocol letter.
 - An email was received from the main contact before the deadline, which outlined the challenges the new Board was facing in accessing financial information.
 - The NI Charity Commission had closed their enquiry.
 - The PSNI had closed their criminal investigation, but they had agreed to send the financial information they hold to the Fund's Head of Internal Audit.
 - The Fund will progress to next steps when the above has been reviewed.
- 5.2 Committee requested that as this was public money, Alison should re-visit the current situation with the group's bank account and the grant monies therein. A paper will be presented to committee at the June Away Day for final decision.

ACTION: A. Fraser

6. COMMUNICATIONS REPORT:

- 6.1 The report covered activity during December 2022-March 2023.
- 6.2 Committee noted the annual percentage increases in digital activity, that political engagement had increased and would continue to do so. Amanda reported on the impact of the media coverage, profiling the difference National Lottery funding was making.
- 6.3 The report covered the following:
- Media
 - Grant Announcements
 - Digital - (social media; blogs; newsletters; videos)
 - Programme updates
 - Public affairs & stakeholder engagement
 - Photoshoots
- 6.4 Committee member media training will be arranged for the end of the summer.

ACTION: A. Doherty

7. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK - (*Paper 01*):

7.1 **SUMMARY:** Paper included a copy of the final strategic framework approved by Board at the end of March 2023 and the CEO introduction to the strategy.

7.2 **Recommendation:**

The Committee is invited to:

- Note and discuss the contents of the paper.

7.3 **Kate Beggs set out the following:**

- The internal framework document signed off by Board and the CEO introduction were included to help frame discussions and for committee to see how the decisions were reached.
- Communications colleagues were working to produce an external version of the strategy and test the language to make sure it was relevant and accessible.
- The strategy will be explicit about the Fund's purpose.
- The four focus areas (environment, young people, health, and connected communities) were linked to the Fund's founding legislation. The biggest change would be the priority placed on environment. The Strategy would also see a return to more focus on need and explicit commitments on tackling inequalities.
- There will be high level shared outcomes under certain areas across the Fund, which will feed into portfolio discussions.
- There was a commitment to increase the maximum National Lottery Awards for All grant from £10,000 to £20,000, over 2 years, but the 50% success rate will still be the target. There was a lot of work to do on programme modelling and getting the right balance.

7.4 **The main points of discussion were as follows:**

- Increasing to £20,000 could impact on governance requirements and budget allocation.
- It was important to still be accessible to grass root communities and non-registered charities and needs to be well thought through to not stifle transient community activity.
- It was acknowledged that not all groups want extra funding or do more than they can reasonably manage.
- The strategy is evolution not revolution and will not fundamentally change the way we work and using a strength-based approach.
- There is now a separate set of values and operating principles detailing how we will interact with communities.
- Regarding the the One Fund concept, UK-wide we will have a common set of principles, values and approaches. Northern Ireland can implement at a local level, through the committee's delegated authority and consider how we can make the biggest difference.
- The internal launch will take place in Birmingham on 16 May and there will be a NI strategy event on 25 May. The external launch is planned for 7 June, a week before the NIC Away Day.
- We will externally consult over the next 6 months, but need to focus on how best to engage, to avoid consultation fatigue.
- From 2024 onwards, we will refresh/change programmes.
- In relation to NI committee's role in the implementation of the strategy, Kate Beggs confirmed committee has the task of translating the strategy into the NI portfolio.
- Consider - what should our programmes look like? How do we focus on the big areas? How can we target impact? Do we use thematic or open and responsive programmes? What has worked and not worked in the past? Get a sense of what we want to look like in 2024/25 and what are we going to/not going to fund, to align with what people perceive as their needs.
- The sector has experienced numerous redundancies, meaning skills and learning have been lost. There is money available from various bodies, but no one is connecting the dots. We need to consider where the gaps are and how to strategically fill them, amid sector uncertainty.

- 7.5 Kate Beggs outlined what would be discussed at the NIC Away Day. A transition period will be useful to give some breathing space, but there needs to be engagement starting points as people will want to know what we are going to deliver within the framework.
- 8. DORMANT ACCOUNTS CLOSURE & LEARNING:**
- 8.1 Alison verbally reported as follows:
- Demand and competition for funding was high - £19m requested against a £4.3m budget.
 - The Funding Team was focussing on the particularly strong and had implemented an early sift.
 - Expectations were being managed through applicant conversations to help people better understand the context of not being able to fund everyone.
 - The two learning events had been very successful. The next event is scheduled for 10 May.
- 8.2 A 'Theory of Change' one pager had been developed for Dormant to help us consider the inputs and outputs and better articulate to the sector. This analysis will also help us design the next phase for 2024/25. The document will be shared with committee and the concept can also be considered for other NI Lottery programmes, (exc. AfA). **ACTION: K. Beggs**
- 9. ENVIRONMENTAL FUNDING - (Paper 02):**
- Mark Creaney joined the meeting @ 12:30*
- 9.1 **SUMMARY:** This paper set out the approach to funding environmental activity in Northern Ireland to date and seeks committee's views on the proposed next steps.
- 9.2 **John Rose presented on the UK-wide environment context as follows:**
- Higher temperatures are the trend going forward, along with increased severe weather events (e.g. local flooding) impacting on people, communities and venues.
 - Even modest temperature increases will have major implications, and certain health conditions are made worse through the rising temperatures, and a massive air pollution problem.
 - Within the Fund there is a growing interest in environmental issues, and this is apparent in the new strategy, with a stronger and clearer commitment.
 - The Fund already has an environment strategy, with a climate action network made up of colleagues across the UK and a strategy delivery group. Lottery distributors also meet to discuss and share information.
 - The environment strategy developed in 2018, is a three-point plan: 1. How can we improve our own performance? 2. How can we support charities and community groups? 3. Committing grant funding to environmental projects. There will be a fourth element after a refresh, on how we can better communicate.
 - The Fund needs to understand what its environmental impacts are through the work it does, and how best to help reduce the impact - (e.g. no flights in the island of Britain; cycle to work scheme and cloud-based solutions).
 - Regarding grant making, do we move from inspiring to requiring? Wales are building this requirement into its main responsive programme this year and will help to inform practice across the Fund.
 - The Fund's flagship environmental programme, the UK-wide Climate Action Fund, has awarded half of its total funding pot.
 - Climate top-ups have been actioned both in Wales & Northern Ireland.
 - We are moving from a 'do no harm' to a 'leave places in a better state' strategy, to focus on improving our standards and understanding the challenges our customers face.
- 9.3 John commented that it was really encouraging to see to how Northern Ireland was building environment into its portfolio.
- 9.4 The Chair thanked John for his interesting presentation and environmental leadership over the last number of years.

9.5 **Mark Creaney presented to committee as follows:**

- Northern Ireland has built on the learning from Wales through the Top-Ups pilot.
- We have made significant improvements and established a NI Environment plan.
- The second round of the Living Spaces & Places programme has recently concluded.
- Committee noted Annex 1 - Environmental Top-Ups Pilot; Appendix A - list of the top-ups awarded and Annex 2 - Environmental Activity in our Funding.
- While we consider how to position ourselves to make the greatest impact in promoting community action on the environment, there is an opportunity for more immediate action to build on the top-ups and link energy efficiency with cost reductions.

9.6 Committee thanked Mark for his paper and were excited for the work ahead and the potential for the Fund to be an enabler with the potential to fund community organisations to generate revenue for their community. It was also important to make the changes accessible and to recognise that the more rural the community, the harder it will be. It will also be difficult for groups who rent buildings, to obtain permission to make the necessary changes.

9.7 **Proposal for Immediate Action: As stated in point 4.8 of the paper, Committee agreed that officers should scope out a new environment programme that will reduce carbon footprint through improvements to community buildings such as energy efficiency measures, improved insulation, better water management and energy generation and storage. A more detailed proposal will be brought to committee for discussions at the June away day.**

9.8 **Recommendation: As stated in point 5.1 of the paper, Committee agreed that we should begin to actively demonstrate our role as a funder of environmental action and commit to developing a new environment programme to help reduce the carbon footprint of key community buildings.**

10. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS:**

10.1 Next Meetings:

- Dormant Strategic Grants decision meeting - Fri 19 May
- NIC Away Day - 15/16 June
- P&C/EYP decision meeting - Fri 30 June

10.2 NIC June Away Day

- Kate Beggs confirmed that the Youth Voice Team will not be attending the Away Day because of the location, logistics and costs involved. The young people would prefer a separate session with committee and a date will be suggested as soon as possible.
ACTION: J. Maxwell
- Eileen Mullan (former NI committee member) will help to facilitate, and Boardroom Apprentice Hannah will be attending.
- Suggestions on the format/areas of discussion were very welcome from committee.

10.3 To finish the meeting, Amanda Doherty showed committee a short film, showcasing the work of the Culmore Community Hub project and the life changing impact Lottery funding had made.

The meeting finished @ 1:25pm

Paul Sweeney

Signed: _____
Paul Sweeney, NI Chair

Date: 11 August 2023