



**MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE MEETING  
HELD ON FRIDAY 14 MAY 2021 @ 10:00 am  
(VIA TEAMS)**

**Committee:**

Sandra McNamee	-	<i>Interim Chair</i>
Eileen Mullan	-	<i>NI committee member</i>
Charles Mack	-	<i>NI committee member</i>
Tony Doherty	-	<i>NI committee member</i>
Kate Clifford	-	<i>NI committee member</i>
Shannon Russell	-	<i>Boardroom Apprentice - Observer</i>

**Staff:**

Kate Beggs	-	<i>NI Director</i>
Alison Fraser	-	<i>Senior Head of Funding</i>
Amanda Doherty	-	<i>Senior Head of Communications &amp; Engagement</i>
Norrie Breslin	-	<i>Head of Knowledge &amp; Learning</i>
Michael Liggett	-	<i>Head of Knowledge &amp; Learning</i>
Jacqui Maxwell	-	<i>Business Support Officer - Governance</i>

**1. Welcome & Opening Remarks****1.1 Chair's Welcome**

Sandra McNamee welcomed all attendees to the business meeting. She commented that although the meetings were still being held virtually, hopefully in the not too distant future, meetings could be face to face around a table or through a hybrid model.

**1.2 UK Board Verbal Update**

Sandra briefed committee as follows:

- During her interim NI Chair role, attending UK Board meetings was one of the most interesting aspects and meant she was kept updated on Fund matters UK-wide.
- The Board meeting agenda included agreeing the Corporate Plan (2020/2023). There were a few minor changes to the plan, which had strengthened it.
- The Corporate Plan will be shared with committee when finalised/published.
- The Fund's Key Performance Indicators were also discussed. During a difficult year the results were very high across all indicators and the Northern Ireland Directorate had led the way on a number of them.
- Sandra had met with the new UK Chair last week, which had been very positive, and the Chair is keen for all the Country Chairs to have an active role on the UK Board.
- Recruitment for the new UK Chief Executive is ongoing, the last stage of the process is timed for August, after which the appointee will probably need to work a notice period. This may mean it will be late this year/early next year before they are in post. John Rose will continue as interim Chief Executive.

### 1.3 UK Funding Portfolio Committee

Committee noted the paper circulated earlier this morning. Eileen Mullan briefed committee on the previous meeting as follows:

- The meeting made decisions on 10 applications, the majority of which were England based, with some connection with the other countries.
- There was one project funded from Wales, which will be shared with committee as soon as possible for learning on what other regions are doing.
- Eileen shared her reflections around the development of some proposals that were presented for decision.
- She has requested more connectivity and communication between UK portfolio colleagues and the countries which would be preferable to needing to feedback after each meeting.
- The next meeting is in June.
- Sandra confirmed that the UK Chair will be chairing these meetings going forward.

- 1.3.1 Committee noted Eileen's comments and agreed that there needed to be closer co-ordination with the countries. Committee asked for clarification on how they can influence the UK portfolio and the test and learn piece of work and how to better highlight the portfolio to the broader NI sector. Eileen has suggested a UK funding summit to bring the regions together, to share some of the funded projects and help ignite interest and motivate a connection. This matter will also be kept on the NI committee meeting agendas going forward and Eileen will keep members updated.

**ACTION: E. Mullan**

### 1.4 NI Director's Feedback on Key Corporate Matters

Kate Beggs updated committee as follows:

- The NI Chair appointment announcement should be confirmed in the next couple of weeks.
- Some recruitment had taken place for additional Funding Officers. Resourcing is being kept under very close review in light of the challenges of implementing the Dormant Accounts Fund for the first time.
- The very positive KPIs in Northern Ireland were again acknowledged and how teams have worked together during a very difficult time.
- The NI Directorate Business Plan will be circulated to committee when finalised.

**ACTION: K. Beggs**

- Working arrangements are being reviewed over the next few months regarding working from home, in the office or through a hybrid option and we need to manage expectations to ensure we deliver our business priorities.
- Committee suggested that it might be helpful to reach out to organisations who have already got their house in order regarding more flexible working practices and consider the possible pitfalls as well as the positives.
- We also need to get back out to the community to engage with our grant holders and stakeholders, develop relationships and amplify their voices. Another priority is to increase our public affairs work with the Executive Departments and ensure that our relationships with sectoral stakeholders are as strong as possible to understand the emerging issues.
- We are currently in an uncertain environment with a comprehensive spending review on the horizon.

- 1.4.1 Sandra thanked Kate for her update and agreed that it was good to take time today to take stock of where the organisation is within the current landscape. It was acknowledged that in terms of the Northern Ireland directorate, our structures and processes, both current and historically were strong. Sandra commented that one of our greatest strengths is our staff and that we should be acknowledging them. Kate and Sandra to discuss how best to do this in a more formal way.

**ACTION: S. McNamee/K. Beggs**

## 2. Governance

### 2.1 Apologies

There were none.

### 2.2 Declarations of Interest

Kate Clifford declared that in relation to the Great Ideas agenda item, the Rural Community Network, of which she is Director is a partner in the Community Leadership in the West project funded under the programme. This was not a disqualifiable interest and Kate remained in the room during discussions and decisions.

### 2.3 Previous Minutes

The minutes from the 19 February meeting were agreed as accurate and will be signed by the Interim Chair at a later date.

### 2.4 NIC Meetings Timetable 2021

Dates were noted.

## 3. Communications & Engagement

### 3.1 Committee noted the report for Feb-Apr, which covered the following headings:

- Press highlights and social media engagement
- Dormant Accounts Fund
- NLPU
- Internal communications
- Public affairs
- Digital and social media
- Customer engagement

### 3.2 Amanda highlighted the following:

- The first Dormant accounts announcement helped get the message out regarding the type of proposals that could be supported in the programme.
- Engagement with the Communities Can conference and being able to hear key NI people speak via the virtual event and having a diverse range of community voices and people was a very positive experience.
- Recruitment happening next week for a Communications & Engagement Manager both internally and externally.
- The Funders Forum for NI is developing a web presence and we will be joining other Forum members in a policy horizon scanning exercise in June.

### 3.3. Main discussion points were as follows:

- i) Sandra commented that the Dormant Accounts coverage and messaging was brilliantly executed and hit the right spot.
- ii) Committee also agreed that we should not lose the way we now work with technology and what it brings in helping us engage with more people.
- iii) Kate Clifford fed back on the blogs and that personal stories/customer journeys linked to policies is what people want to hear and they should have a bigger reach and be shared around the sector. They will also help in getting the difficult stories out through a human-interest story.

## 4. NI Portfolio Stats/Programmes Pipeline Data/COVID-19/Dormant Accounts Reports

### 4.1 NI Portfolio & Pipeline Reports

Alison Fraser updated committee on the key points contained in the NI Portfolio Overview and the Pipeline reports as follows:

- Awards for All reduced budget (i.e. 5m to 4.5m), will be kept under review.
- Demand is healthy for People & Communities and Empowering Young People when they are looked at together.
- The 18 June meeting will have 18 applications for decision, which is one of the biggest meetings we will have had and will mean some difficult decisions for committee. This is in relation to the available budget and the fact that the programmes have been extended to March 2022, thus needing to spread the budget to meet this timeline.
- The September meeting currently has 11 applications, which again will mean about a 50-60% success rate.
- We will be sending a list of the projects going to decision meetings in advance, so that members can declare any conflicts of interest to help manage the process effectively.
- We are also going to review the format of the pipeline document to make it easier to digest.

#### 4.1.1 The main discussion points were as follows:

- i) Committee commented that the pipeline report was a really useful document and that the information was all there.
- ii) It was for committee to look through this document and declare their interests in good time but receiving a list in advance with a short blurb about the projects would be very useful to safeguard that conflicts of interest are caught. It was acknowledged however that members may not notice them all until they receive the full assessment reports and that training was being planned around conflicts of interest for both committee and relevant staff.
- iii) Committee noted the numbers for the June meeting and agreed that it was doable over one day and although they are two separate meetings, they fall under one budget.

## 4.2 COVID-19 Report

### 4.2.1 Committee noted the infographic, which showcased the work over that period.

The main discussion points were as follows:

- i) Alison reported that customers have fed back on how agile we had been. We were able to make quick decisions with responsive funding and shift priorities as needed.
- i) Committee thought it was a really positive report with great figures and progress.
- ii) Committee really liked the report presentation, which made things very clear. The patterns should be widely publicised externally as learning for other funders and departments. Consider adding a short introductory paragraph and some quick key facts. Amanda confirmed that this data is used for stakeholder engagement.
- iii) COVID-19 Charities Fund report will also be shared with external stakeholders and there had also been very positive feedback on how we delivered the programme.

## 4.3 Dormant Accounts

### 4.3.1 Committee noted the infographic.

The main discussion points were as follows:

- i) Alison reported that we have received a large number of applications and enquiries.
- ii) It has been a steep learning curve for the Funding Team and assessments are taking longer to complete as we are learning along the way regarding the strategic impact and change the funding will make to the organisations versus project delivery.
- iii) The next delegated decision meeting is in June.
- iv) Committee reported that Dormant is still being viewed in some quarters as a programme for project funding and we need to hold our nerve as we did when People in the Lead was first introduced.

- v) Funding Officers are trying to be proactive as part of the assessments to help manage people's understanding on why they are unsuccessful.
- vi) Regarding the urban-v-rural split, it is still very early days. We will be monitoring the balance going forward and getting the right messages out around promoting the programme and the fact that it will be very competitive and that projects need to meet the programme aims. We are all still learning and will share our messaging through various events.
- vii) Regarding the name Dormant Accounts, it doesn't tell you about the programme and what it is there to do. Name suggestions are welcome from committee, especially if there's a future expansion to the scheme.
- viii) Committee noted the current strategic projects and that the first strategic decision is being held on Thursday 24 June. Committee attendees have been confirmed for both the pre-meet and the decision making but can be reviewed if we have a new Chair by that date.

## 5. Environmental Top-ups (*paper 01*)/Participatory Grant Making (*paper 02*)

### 5.1 Environmental Top-ups

*Further to the agreement to proceed with Environmental Top Ups for existing grant holders at the 16 October 2020 meeting, this paper provides an update on progress.*

5.1.1 Alison reported that Action Renewables had contacted the 20 groups and visited 11 sites. Some of the groups already have solar panels, which we weren't initially aware of, but there have been other opportunities to look for efficiencies. Progress is ongoing and it has been very well received by the grant holders.

5.1.2 The main discussion points were as follows:

- i) Members were very impressed that this had been initially discussed in October and how far the programme had come.
- ii) There will be learning from Wales and NI Funding Manager Mark Creaney has a keen interest and knowledge in the subject so is well placed to lead.
- iii) We are also increasing awareness on how environmental interventions can make a difference to community buildings and their sustainability.
- iv) We will also be able to measure the grant impact.

### 5.2 Participatory Grant Making

*Further to the agreement to proceed with a participatory grant making pilot with BAME communities at the 16 October 2020 meeting, this paper provides an update on progress.*

5.2.1 Alison reported that 47 participants have been invited to facilitated sessions in May and June to help build the relationships within the Northern Ireland BAME sector.

5.2.2 The main discussion points were as follows:

- i) Members thought it was a great achievement to get to this stage in such a short amount of time and was good that there are linkages with UK colleagues.
- ii) 47 was an excellent number to reach.
- iii) Committee were reassured that communication was landing the right way regarding any language barriers and Sara Houston, Knowledge & Learning Manager had done a lot of work on this matter.
- iv) We are not relying solely on blogs as a communication tool and this has mostly been off-line.
- v) Committee liked the proactive approach and ownership and it will be good to hear in the future how the sessions have been received.
- vi) It was a timely intervention and a good fit considering the EDI work taking place across the Fund.

- vii) The only aspect committee thought was missing was socially housed refugees. They are a transient community who have no status and are under heard. Kate Beggs noted that this is likely to be covered in exploratory discussions and Sara Houston can attend the next committee meeting to give an update. **ACTION: N. Breslin**

6. **Portfolio Review/Transitional Approach (paper 03 enclosed)**

*This paper provides an update on portfolio review discussions to date and proposes a new, transitional approach to the review to allow us to better respond to new and emerging needs. This paper should be read in conjunction with NIC paper 04 (EYP) and NIC paper 05 (Great Ideas).*

*Kate Beggs set some context for discussions.*

- 6.1 Norrie Breslin reported that delivering our current portfolio has been a big change in the way we work, we have made changes gradually with a more considered and flexible approach from previous ways of working.
- 6.2 Committee noted the paper and were asked:
- To adopt a transitional approach to portfolio review and continue to fund through our existing standard programmes throughout financial year 2022/23.
  - To work towards a public announcement of this approach in May/June to ensure that it is effectively communicated to key audiences.
- 6.3 ***Committee agreed the transitional approach and the fact that stakeholders had been listened to with regards to what was needed at this point in time and considering the events of the previous year. It was a pragmatic approach to keep our options open to address any future needs that may arise in changing funding and organisational environments. Programmes will be phased out rather than closing on a certain date.***

7. **Funding for Young People (paper 04 enclosed)**

*This paper presents a summary of our learning from the Empowering Young People programme and proposes that we continue to provide a specific funding programme for children and young people as a transition to 2023. This paper should be read in conjunction with NIC paper 03 (transitional approach)*

- 7.1 Committee noted the paper and were asked to:
- Agree that we continue to fund through Empowering Young People through 2022, but move to a single decision-making forum from January 2022
  - Agree that the tenure of our current cohort of young people should come to an end in December 2021 as planned, but that we work to recruit a new youth advisory panel with a wider remit before the end of this year.
- 7.2 Main discussion points were as follows:
- i) Joe Rich, the Fund's Head of Youth Voice had spoken to committee members recently about the background of the NI young people panel and they were encouraged by her enthusiasm to take this work forward. She is recruiting an Engagement Officer to help support this work.
  - ii) How do we move to one decision making fora, not just for young people but to also include less heard and a diverse range of voices?
  - iii) ***Some suggestions were made:*** We should pause and be proud of EYP and what we have funded through the programme; fully consult with the young people about future plans; celebrate and thank the young people and staff who made it happen; we have put young people much more in the lead in their communities through the programme and they have grown and become much more confident; have a young person as Chair and include young people in all programme co-designing and decision making.

- iv) Consider localised decision making for young people, which allows them to come together and discuss issues that impact on their lives.
- v) There is a rural deficit and this needs to be considered on how we can address this imbalance and also look at the scoring mechanisms and project sustainability.
- vi) There are a number of young people who have benefitted from Lottery funding who want to give something back, how do we get them involved?
- vii) Need to look at what time commitment is required from the young people and how this will work practically. There's no fixed way on how we do this, decide on what suits us best and consider our communications, language and engagement.
- viii) Shannon's input will be useful as a young person and the committee's Boardroom apprentice and the current young people panel members will be asked to feed into the recruitment of a new youth advisory group, panels etc.

7.3 Sandra requested that committee give more thought to how we recruit and utilise future young people panels and to revisit this when there's time to discuss in more detail.

**ACTION: NIC**

7.4 ***Committee agreed to continue the Empowering Young People fund through 2022; that the current young people cohort finish in December 2021 and to recruit a new youth advisory panel.***

8. **Great Ideas (paper 05 enclosed)**

*NI committee agreed at their meeting on 17 April 2020 to pause the Great Ideas Fund to new applications and review in 6 months' time. Given the pandemic continued longer than first anticipated this paper is now reviewing this decision 12 months later.*

8.1 Committee noted the paper and were asked to:

- Agree the recommendation (para 2.5) that the Great Ideas Fund is closed to applications

8.2 It was agreed that the programme funded some good projects and there was a need to create a funding space for the gaps not addressed through our other programmes (e.g. succession planning). There is learning that we still need to capture from the Great Ideas fund to feed into Dormant Accounts.

8.3 ***Committee agreed to close the Great Ideas Fund.***

9. **Any Other Business**

9.1 Future Meetings

Kate Clifford confirmed that she was unavailable for the decision meetings on 24 September and a new date will be explored, possibly in early October.

**ACTION: J. Maxwell**

The next business meeting is in August, but we may need another business meeting before this to further discuss some of today's points and to introduce the new NI Chair.

9.2 Thank You

As this was Sandra's last meeting as NI Interim Chair, she thanked members and staff for the support she had received.

*The meeting finished @ 1:40pm*



Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 13 August 2021