



**MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON FRIDAY 13 AUGUST 2021 @ 10:00 am
(VIA TEAMS)**

NI Committee/Boardroom Apprentice	
Paul Sweeney	<i>NI Chair</i>
Sandra McNamee	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Eileen Mullan	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Charles Mack	<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 Comms & Engagement</i>
Norrie Breslin	<i>Head of Knowledge & Learning</i>
Jacqui Maxwell	<i>Business Support Officer - Governance</i>

Guest	
Koulla Yiassouma	<i>NICCY (for item 8)</i>

1. Opening Remarks

1.1 Chair's Welcome & Update

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

He opened the meeting by acknowledging the excellent work of the NI staff team over the summer months, whilst dealing with the pandemic and the very unusual circumstances.

The Chair updated the meeting as follows:

UK Board Meeting - 29 June

- Board members had commended the work of the Interim NI Chair, Sandra McNamee.
- Other items covered at the Board meeting were - the ongoing recruitment process for the new CEO; progress of the DCMS commissioned review with an update due at the next meeting on 28 September; the impact analysis work commissioned by the Fund and that the first stage of three had been completed; NI Board report was delivered by Kate Beggs, which was received very positively; Kate also delivered a UK-wide Safeguarding report on the work that she leads.

Other updates

- UK Chair Blondel Cluff's visit to NI was postponed because of the rising COVID figures at the time and will be re-arranged for later in the year.
- The NI Chair had made contact with the new Wales Chair and they had a very constructive discussion.

- The recent Dormant Accounts announcement on 6/7 July had been a great success, which also involved a visit to a funded organisation by Finance Minister, Conor Murphy MLA.
- The Chair's recent blog reinforced that we are in a transitional year; the portfolio remains as is, but that we will be looking at our strategy going forward.
- A data breach had been discovered by the Fund on the 8 July. The Chair was very impressed by the way this was being professionally handled and managed primarily by the Fund's Audit & Risk Committee.

1.1.2 The Chair also confirmed that this was Shannon Russell's last meeting as the Fund's 2020/21 Boardroom Apprentice. Sandra McNamee (the Boardroom Apprentice buddy) acknowledged the excellent impact Shannon had made to the NI committee. Shannon commented that she would be walking away from the experience with a lot of learning and knowledge to take forward in her future endeavours and thanked committee and staff for all their support. She had really enjoyed her very positive year with the Fund.

1.2 NI Director's Update - (see Annex A)

Committee members noted the report. Kate Beggs further updated as follows:

- England and UK-wide staff appointments and on-going recruitment.
- NI committee member new appointments using the January recruitment appointable reserve list.
- There will be a NIC Strategy day in late October to hopefully include the two new committee appointees and before Eileen Mullan and Tony Doherty finish their terms on 31 October.
- Supporting UK programmes, which means a very busy Autumn alongside Dormant A/Cs and the current NI application pipeline.

Discussions points:

- Relationships and discussions with the devolved departments and stakeholders.
- Support for on-going conversations around staff returning to the office using a hybrid model.
- The Chair confirmed that the strategy day will be used to review the previous year and to also plan forward for the next number of years. Committee member's suggestions on how to facilitate this meeting would be welcomed and if any members wanted to lead on a specific topic. **ACTION: NIC**

1.3 Kate Clifford updated the meeting on a UK-wide roundtable meeting she had attended the day before with DCMS and sectoral representatives across the UK on the development of the UK Shared Prosperity Funds.

2. **Governance**

2.1 Apologies

These had been received from Tony Doherty, Northern Ireland Committee member and Michael Liggett, Head of Knowledge & Learning.

2.2 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

2.3 Previous Minutes

The minutes from the 14 May 2021 meeting were agreed as accurate and will be signed by the Chair.

2.4 Matters Arising

Eileen Mullan reported that there had been no progress regarding her previously suggested UK Funding summit. She also reminded the Chair that she would need to be replaced on the UK Funding committee by another NIC member from 1 November onwards. **ACTION: Chair**

2.5 NIC Meetings Timetable 2021/22

The new 2022 dates were noted by attendees and calendar appointments will be sent out next week for members to confirm their availability. A date will also be suggested for the October strategic day as soon as possible. The new Boardroom Apprentice, Shaun Kennedy will also be sent the timetable.

ACTION: NIC/J. Maxwell

3. **NI Portfolio Stats/Programmes Pipeline Data**

3.1 NI Portfolio & Pipeline Reports

Committee noted the report. Alison Fraser updated committee on the key points contained in the two reports.

She also reported that there was quite a high number of applications for the 1 October decision meeting. The number will be kept under review and committee will be consulted on how they would like the papers sent out.

ACTION: A. Fraser

3.2 **Discussion points:**

- i) In relation to the number of possible applications in the pipeline, the Funding team were speaking to organisations to help manage expectations.
- ii) The team will also monitor what the requested funding was for against certain organisation's primary functions.
- iii) The pipeline looks very healthy, but applications do drop off for various reasons.
- iv) The Chair commended the team on the reports. They were very useful for committee intelligence and can take assurance that the team had the pipeline under control. He also acknowledged the great deal of work involved in taking applications forward to decision-making.
- (v) The Chair also requested that if committee members notice a possible conflict of interest in the pipeline, that they contact Jacqui as early as possible to ensure the correct governance processes are put in place.

ACTION: NIC

3.3 Alison and Amanda also updated committee on the current situation with Ballybeen Men's Motivational Group and the grant withdrawal.

4. **UK Funding Committee update**

4.1 Eileen Mullan reported as follows:

- There had been a UK Funding Committee meeting on 1 June, chaired by UK Chair Blondel Cluff.
- That the UK Portfolio will be supporting the Queen's Jubilee and Commonwealth Games projects in 2022.
- There will also be a refresh/renewed focus to the UK-wide portfolio; a better link with the private and public sector as well as supporting the aftermath of COVID.
- Extension funding for the SPRING social prescribing project led by Bogside and Brandywell Health Forum was supported at the meeting.

4.2 **Discussion points:**

- i) There could be sensitivities in NI regarding supporting programmes/projects linked to the Commonwealth/Platinum Jubilee.
- ii) Kate Beggs confirmed that the Fund was conscious of this and that she sits on the Steering Group representing the countries. We have experience of managing and navigating these types of programmes as part of the UK funding portfolio pot. As a UK-wide fund, we need to mark these national moments.
- iii) Members agreed that it was positive to hear that there would be changes to the UK portfolio to hopefully give more clarity to make it less confusing for everyone. It was important to keep this as a standing item on the NIC meeting agendas and to discuss further at the strategic day in late October.

5. Update of Our Commitment to Communities - Funding Principles - (*paper 06*)

Summary - It is an opportune moment to refresh the UK-wide commitment ahead of a deeper Fund-wide strategy refresh in 2022. A final version statement will replace the current principles on the front page of the Fund's website. The intended audience is UK-wide, both internal and external stakeholders.

5.1 Kate Beggs reported that there was a feeling from Board that we needed to refresh our funding principles and this was a first draft, with consultation throughout the Fund and to some extent externally.

5.2 Discussion points:

- i) Paul requested that if committee have some specific drafting points they should submit these to Kate Beggs after today's meeting.
- ii) Annex 1 Point 2 - (We are committed to making a difference) - this seems quite weak as the Fund has immense knowledge of what works and is a missed opportunity on the importance of knowledge sharing.
- iii) It is a strong and positive report especially around EDI and the overall messaging.
- iv) Level opportunity wording - use fair or balanced instead.
- v) There is also no mention of how flexible and responsive the Fund has been regarding COVID and dealing with a crisis.
- vi) National moments should include the work we do with volunteers (e.g. Volunteers Week).
- vii) EDI section should have recognition and be sensitive to inequalities.
- viii) What does Insight & Foresight actually mean?
- ix) Paper has been written for a UK-wide audience, but who is its audience?
- x) Paper should be shorter, sharper and much clearer.

5.3 The Chair thanked members for their comments and will discuss further with Kate Beggs and feedback to relevant staff. It is a work in progress and there was more drafting to be done before going to Board in September.

6. Communications & Engagement

6.1 Committee noted the report for May-Jul, which covered the following headings:

- Media & digital highlights
- Grant announcements
- Social media
- Blogs
- Customer engagement
- Public affairs

6.2 Amanda Doherty highlighted the following:

- Very positive engagement with media partners and building those relationships through storytelling.
- Kyra Smith had now been made a permanent member of the NI staff team as Country Communications & Engagement Manager through an external recruitment campaign.
- Increased coverage with the BBC.
- Social media engagement year-on-year is all about putting out the right content. The Dormant blog coverage was an excellent example of this.

6.3. Discussion points:

- i) Committee acknowledge the great geographical coverage and impact the Communications team were achieving.
- ii) Committee liked the on-line focus on the people we fund and the resulting stories.
- iii) When grant announcements are made and stories make the local newspapers, these create a lot of interest and groups are keen to know how they can apply for funding.

- iv) The blogs are great to read with really interesting content.
- v) Committee were interested to hear more about the Customer Panel as it progresses.
- vi) Amanda reported that there had been increased requests for project launches and events and hopefully as we go into Autumn, invitations can be passed to committee. The Chair encouraged members to get involved in activity coming up in the future.

7. Young People Group Update & Annex (*paper 07 enclosed*)

- 7.1 **Summary** - This paper presented recommendations on the recruitment of the next group of young people to support and influence decision making and development of future funding options for young people in Northern Ireland.
- 7.2 Committee noted the paper and were asked to:
1. Agree that we use the Fund's Youth Voice strategy as a framework for how we work with our next young people group.
 2. Agree that we recruit this group as set out in paragraphs 3.10 to 3.12.
- 7.3 **Discussion points:**
- i) Charles Mack and Sandra McNamee reported back on a recent positive meeting with three of the current young people and that they were keen to be involved in capturing their experience and the recruitment of the next youth panel. The young people fed back that they thought the young people should be more involved in project visits and public speaking.
 - ii) All the young people will be invited to attend the December decision meeting and this will be used as a celebration of their time with the Fund, before standing down.
 - iii) Committee suggested that future young people should be aligned at a regional level with the three local teams before stepping up to the full committee and introduce an apprentices award as an investment tool.
 - iv) Committee also commented on the fact that there had been previous discussions about future panels or cohorts of people and that these should not only be young people specific but across a range of diverse backgrounds to support decision making.
 - v) Committee requested that the young people recruitment process be as open as possible.
 - vi) Kate Clifford suggested that it would be great to do a reflective practice piece and mapping the young people's journey.
 - vii) Tik-Tok could be used to help reach out to young people for marketing/advertising purposes as a lot of young people much prefer visual content rather than the written word.
 - viii) Committee noted that the paper's recommendations will be resource intensive. Do we have the capacity to engage properly? Kate Beggs stated that we need to be realistic about what exactly we can support up-front. Committee support will be very important and using the buddy system when required.
 - ix) The two year tenure will be discussed further
 - x) The Chair confirmed that all the above points will be explored further.
 - xi) Norrie Breslin thanked committee for their very useful feedback.
- 7.4 **Committee agreed to the recommendations:**
1. Use the Fund's Youth Voice strategy as a framework for how we work with our next young people group.
 2. Recruit the group as set out in paragraphs 3.10 to 3.12 of the paper.
- 7.5 Kate Beggs confirmed that the safeguarding report including the lessons learnt around the Empowering Young People committee/YPIL group will be circulated to committee next week.
ACTION: K. Beggs
- ## 8. Bringing the Outside In
- Koulla Yiassouma Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People**
- 8.1 The Chair welcomed Koulla to the meeting and introductions were made.

8.2 Koulla's main briefing points:

- Her background.
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, there is no hierarchy.
- Children's lives at school, in the family unit, their health, abuse or exploitation.
- NICCY's New & Better Normal report, will give an overview of children's experiences during the pandemic and the issues therein:-
 - Not attending school had a very negative impact.
 - The non-response of certain services during the pandemic.
 - Mental health; wellbeing and social anxiety.
 - Impact of waiting lists and lives being put on hold at a young age.
 - Ensuring that all children are visible.
 - Play and things to occupy children.
 - The lack of, or bad quality of the information being given to young people
- Outside of COVID there is on-going work on homelessness/housing crisis/poverty and hidden children.
- Lottery funding is consistent for families and in turn children.

8.3 *Discussions points:*

- i) Committee agreed that the issues would have been more or less the same before COVID.
- ii) A regulatory framework for counselling mental health is very much needed.
- iii) There needs to be a strong evidence base with robust processes when making grant decisions for young people.
- iv) The information coming from government is only speaking to a certain level.
- v) Koulla commented that she would like the Fund to stop using the word poverty. The Fund is not alleviating poverty but mitigating some of the impacts by supporting communities.
- vi) Also consider how the Fund uses the word outcome and what it means.
- vii) Need to identify vulnerabilities and help children do their best in school and for them to actually enjoy the experience more.
- viii) Help to make poorer children happier.
- ix) Research successful global interventions to implement in NI - e.g. one community/one plan.
- x) Children are the largest section of the population living in poverty and benefit sanctions were harming them.
- xi) Excelling at school is not just about academics, but also the child's development and overall abilities, both physically and mentally as well as their self-esteem. It is brilliant to have high self-esteem and not comparing to others.
- xii) Parents don't always have the answers, ability or confidence to support and fight for their children and they need support.
- xiii) There is a lot to think about moving forward and we should try and do what we can with the resources we have.

8.4 The Chair thanked Koulla for her briefing and the very robust discussion it had generated. There was much food for thought and can be further discussed at the strategic day.

9. **Any Other Business**

9.1 Next Meetings

- Friday 1 Oct - P&C/EYP decision meeting
- Friday 8 Oct - Business meeting

9.2 The original item 8 in today's agenda (Place-Based Youth Work) will be discussed at the October business meeting.

ACTION: J. Maxwell

The meeting finished @ 1:10 pm

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul Sweeney." The signature is contained within a thin black rectangular border.

Signed: _____
Paul Sweeney, NI Chair

Date: 8 October 2021