**MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON FRIDAY 11 AUGUST 2023 @ 10:00 am**

NI Committee	
Paul Sweeney	*NI Chair*
Kate Clifford	*NI Committee member - 10-11am & 12-12:30pm*
Nick Garbutt	*NI Committee member*
Anne-Marie McClure	*NI Committee member - until 1:45pm*
Staff	
Kate Beggs	*NI Director*
Alison Fraser	*Senior Head of Funding*
Amanda Doherty	*Senior Head of Comms & Engagement*
Michael Liggett	*Head of Knowledge & Learning*
Mark Creaney	*Funding Manager (for item 7)*
Mel Eaglesfield	*Deputy Director Funding Strategy, Design and Development (for item 8)*
Jacqui Maxwell	*Governance Officer*

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1. **OPENING REMARKS:**

1.1 <u>Chair's Welcome & Updates</u>

- The Chair reported that the Secretary of State had recently appointed him as Interim UK Chair for a period of up to 12 months, or as soon as the new Chair can be appointed through a public appointment competition. He also confirmed that he would continue as NI Chair and was fully committed to both posts.

1.2 <u>NI Director Updates</u>

- The Fund is going through a transitional period in terms of Governance. SMT is planning strategy implementation and sub-committees have been set-up to help manage SMT agendas and implement decision making at the right level.
- Work is also ongoing to create an over-arching Change Programme, bringing together strategy implementation and work on enabling workstreams, such as digital, employee framework, thematic missions strategy and impact and evidence. (Regarding NI impact, evidence and evaluation, a paper will be presented to committee at the October business meeting).   *ACTION: M. Liggett*
- Committee noted that the Dormant Accounts Theory of Change Framework had been included in today's papers for information.
- Regarding Fund offices, London will be re-locating from the Home Office to NCVO's offices in Kings Cross. Birmingham, being the largest office, will be the designated headquarters.
- Awards for All – we are implementing the strategy that will allow for the upper limit to be increased to £20K. Customers can apply for up to £20K over 2 years from 15 November .
- All NI Team Away Day – committee members attendance was confirmed for 22 August.

1.2.1 Kate Clifford commented that the Dormant Accounts Theory of Change framework should be made public. It was a clear way to communicate and demonstrate impact.

She also stated that in relation to new programmes, it would be good practice to agree on what the intended outcomes and impact were before launching and using the ToC framework would give valuable and clear guidance to organisations on where they fit and help communicate a logical model. It was confirmed that Michael is involved in the ToC for our four missions work that is being progressed across the UK.

2.   GOVERNANCE:

2.1   <u>Apologies</u>
These had been received from:
- Norman McKinley and Cara Cash-Marley, NI committee members.

2.2   <u>Declarations of Interest</u>
There were none.

2.3   <u>Previous Minutes</u>
The minutes from the 21 April 2023 business meeting were formally agreed.

2.4   <u>Actions List</u>
The updated actions list was noted.

2.5   <u>NIC Meetings Timetable 2023/24</u>
Members noted the updated timetable.

The NI Chair confirmed that because of a meeting clash, he may not be available to attend the 29 September decision making meeting and that an alternative date was being sought for week commencing 2 October. This will be followed up and confirmed as soon as possible.

ACTION: J. Maxwell

3.   PROJECT VISITS & EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT REFLECTIONS

3.1   Nick Garbutt and Anne-Marie McClure fed back on their recent visits to Lisburn Scouts; Cancer Fund for Children; VOYPIC; On the Street; Fermanagh Women's Aid and Learmount. They reflected on the various aspects of their visits including volunteer numbers; lived experience; the emotive stories they had heard and witnessing the excellent work undertaken by projects.

3.1.2   The value of committee members visiting projects was noted, it helps expand knowledge, visualise the impact and dismiss any misconceptions. It was a privilege to take time for the visits and to properly reflect. The visits will continue, but not as intensively as around the strategy launch. If committee are interested in certain themes or locations, please feed this through as it helps to identify projects.   *ACTION: NIC*

3.1.3   Regarding recording impact especially for repeat funding applications and being more than a funder, a paper will be presented at the October business meeting on how we can be more thorough in relation to customers' journeys from start to finish.

3.2   **REFLECTIONS ON MANAGEMENT TEAM AWAY DAY**

3.2.1   The Chair thought that the day was very well organised and excellently facilitated by Sarah Watson. Nick fed back that the interaction and cohesion with staff was excellent.

3.2.2   **Key Takeaways** – better sense of team and engagement on the subject matter, understanding community needs and missions, environment mission to have less community led approach, identified 6 work streams to action in the coming months – (i) what we will fund; (ii) our funding offer; (iii) more than a funder ; (iv) impact; (v) engagement; (vi) ways of working.

3.2.3   To ensure we all have the same understanding of terminology, a glossary will be produced and circulated to staff and committee in advance of the all team away day. *ACTION: K. Beggs*

4.   **PORTFOLIO UPDATES –** *(Alison Fraser)*

NI Portfolio & Pipeline Reports

4.1   *Awards for All –* increase in applications and awards. Budget will be kept under review when we move to the £20K offer as want to maintain a success rate of around 50%.

4.2   *People and Communities & Empowering Young People –* decreases in applications and awards.

4.3   *Programme Pipeline -* is healthy. October decision meeting could potentially have 19 projects for decision.

4.4   With regards to application cold spots e.g. Ards and North Down, numbers could be attributed to low capacity and the number of faith-based organisations in certain areas, but it was acknowledged that outreach had not been a priority as Funding Officers needed time to assess the large number of Dormant Accounts applications. Outreach will start again in October.

5.   **COMMUNICATIONS & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT –** *(Amanda Doherty)*

5.1   Communications Report

5.1.1   Committee noted the activity for April to July, the volume of work over the period and the on-going relationship with the BBC, which was helping to highlight the Fund's impact.

5.1.2   The reporting period included the launch of the new strategy and engagement on social channels had been significant. The in-house produced videos had also helped to generate interest.

5.1.3   A discussion took place on how we communicate to a changing media environment. This will be considered further during committee media training, as we move into the next stage of the strategy development.

5.1.4   Amanda stated that as an organisation we are discussing the Fund's social media engagement and what channels to best use (e.g. LinkedIn and Instagram to reach different audiences and the fact that young people prefer shorter snappier soundbites and videos).

5.1.5   Committee also noted the excellent NI customer satisfaction results.

5.2   NI Directorate Stakeholder Engagement

5.2.1   Committee noted the paper, which gave an overview of stakeholder engagement between October 2022 and July 2023.

5.2.2   Amanda reported on a very busy period and the increased engagement with government & statutory departments. It was agreed that since Kate Beggs's appointment, the relationship with government departments has been significantly developed.

5.2.3   Committee agreed that the Fund had taken the right approach with departments, i.e. positioning ourselves as a helpful and supportive trusted partner.

5.2.4   It was noted that committee media training will be discussed in the Autumn and external stakeholder engagement will be identified at the end of this year and early next year.

6.   ADDRESSING NEED – *(Michael Liggett)*

6.1   Committee noted the paper, which set out how need is being addressed through current ways of working and invited discussion towards a more focussed approach to addressing poverty, discrimination and disadvantage in the new portfolio.

6.2   **Recommendation:**

The Committee was invited to:
- To reflect on the questions in paragraph 6.2 of the paper.

6.3   Michael gave an overview of the paper, including consideration of need at each stage of the customer journey and ongoing developments from current approaches.

6.4   The main discussion points were as follows:
(i)   The paper gave committee a lot of assurance of the processes that underpins all our work.
(ii)   Need is a subjective word, which is difficult to define.
(iii)   In relation to programme design, how do we define need and where is the data coming from?
(iv)   NI local funding teams can gather intelligence not just at an academic level, but a local level. Staff not only work in specific teams, but also live in some of the areas and can advise better on what the actual need is. Data can go out of date very quickly and we now have local intelligence from our own applications on what people are actually asking for, which is much more relevant.
(v)   We are a lot closer to the ground than the papers suggests. There is a lot of intelligence and deep insight within the staff team, committee and NI Funders Forum. We have a listening ear with years of experience to reflect on and it's important not to lose the uniqueness of how we work.
(vi)   Missing from the paper is reflective practice, what are we getting right and what is our learning? What is the legacy and leverage from People in the Lead? Share what is and what is not working with ourselves and other funders.
(vii)   What is the customer journey from Awards for All to a medium grant, to a larger grant?
(viii)   The other dimension of need is preventing problems from happening, which can be affected by timings of interventions. The earlier the intervention the better.
(ix)   Start to think more about individuals than organisations. How do we balance it?

6.5   **The Questions:**
-    Are there people and places where we could have a sharper focus?
-    Are there emerging signals or indicators of need we could be more aware of?
-    Are there particular practices we should explore (further) or adopt?
-    Are there examples of others in Northern Ireland who do this particularly well?

6.6 **Initial Feedback:**
   a) How can we engage with young people to encourage volunteering and thus help sustain community groups?
   b) It is now a very different environment for young people in relation to financial needs and how they engage. Do they know that certain community groups actually exist?
   c) The majority of people who volunteer are doing so as a 'call of action' and is close to their heart, for example through their personal lived experience.
   d) A volunteer programme takes time to implement, and the sector can struggle to deliver.
   e) Is there a desire for more convening? Challenge ourselves to do 1-3 sessions in the next 9 months?
   f) Consider what is the practical approach with a limited amount of resource. Can we fund research?
   g) A working group will be set-up to discuss convening and the priorities.

6.7 **Conclusion:**
   This subject will be a work in progress and a follow-up paper will be presented at the October business meeting. In the meantime Committee members were asked to send any thoughts relevant to the conversation.

7. **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BUILDINGS PROGRAMME (***Mark Creaney joined the meeting***)**

7.1 **SUMMARY**: This paper set out a funding proposal to support community organisations to increase awareness and knowledge of climate and environmental issues and help make their buildings more sustainable, save energy and reduce carbon emissions.

7.2 **Recommendation:**
   The Committee was invited to:
   • Note and discuss the contents of the paper.
   • To agree that we should proceed with the development of the Sustainable Community Buildings Programme.

7.3 The main discussion points were as follows:

   (i) Is there an option to fund or part fund a small community to become entirely self-sufficient, to help capture the imagination and act as a flagship? This would be a significant impact and be a practical way to show others how to do it.
   (ii) Regarding applicants needing to complete the education/support programme before being able to apply for a grant, this showed intent and the requirement would be for at least two people from each organisation to attend. It is an interesting, non-technical course that supports people to consider actions they can take both as an individual and in a group.
   (iii) Regarding Phase 2 of the programme the following was confirmed:
   - A 5-year unbreakable lease is a standard legal requirement for a £50K grant
   - We will be appointing an expert award partner(s) to give guidance
   - Liability is between the grant recipient and the supplier
   (iv) Committee noted the eligibility and demand management section. The subject of reserves -v- income was discussed along with the variable benefits to certain buildings. It was also recognised that a number of voluntary organisations operate out of very old buildings.
   (v) Committee will be kept updated on the eligibility of sports organisations following discussions with Sport NI, who will be launching a separate programme to support spots clubs.

7.4 *Committee agreed to proceed with the development of the Sustainable Community Buildings Programme*.

8.   UK PORTFOLIO *(Mel Eaglesfield joined the meeting)*

8.1   Introductions were made.

8.2   Mel presented to committee as follows:
- There are currently two active programmes – the Climate Action Fund and UK Fund.
- The UK Portfolio has been in operation for 15 years.
- Projects need to have a UK benefit, either through delivery; sharing; convening or learning in more than one UK country.
- We are particularly interested in projects that have the ability to scale, either in terms of geography or delivery into new areas or different types of communities.
- We are trying to have a more forward look for any emerging issues and projects that add value.
- The UK Fund will help to support communities to come together with a budget of £15 million for this financial year and a minimum grant size of £500,000, to allow for multi-country delivery.
- The Climate Action Fund is complementing the Fund's country environmental programmes.

8.3   The main discussion points were as follows:
i)   Scaling - in relation to UK Fund interest, there has been a number of organisations that say they are ready to scale up but have yet to put actual plans in place to take this forward. We require active partnerships and being ready to deliver.
ii)   Convening – this is something that grant holders are encouraged to undertake as part of their funding and there are some great examples across the UK. The programme tends to fund less project delivery and more learning and convening activity. There is a role for the Fund to support and encourage organisations to facilitate convening.
iii)   Impact – we are launching the UK Fund earlier than other new programmes as we want this to help inform what the impact measurement needs to look like. Individual organisations need to also have significant plans on how they intend to measure impact, which we will try to aggregate.
iv)   UK Unity - the purpose of the UK Fund is not to promote unity, but to share good practice. We are always mindful when supporting national moments to navigate sensitivities. We have UK funding colleagues across the countries to help advise on this.

8.4   The Chair thanked Mel for her time and presentation, which had given committee lots to consider.

9.   ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

9.1   <u>Next Meetings:</u>
- All Team Away Day – Tue 22 August
- P&C/EYP decision meeting – October date to be confirmed.

The meeting finished @ 2:15 pm

Paul Sweeney.

Signed: _____   **Date:** 13 October 2023
Paul Sweeney, NI Chair