

**MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON FRIDAY 8 OCTOBER 2021 @ 10:00 am
(VIA TEAMS)**

NI Committee/Boardroom Apprentice	
Paul Sweeney	<i>NI Chair</i>
Sandra McNamee	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Tony Doherty	<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>
Shaun Kennedy	<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>
Nuala Macauley	<i>Funding Manager (for item 5)</i>
Gillian Irvine	<i>Funding Manager (for item 5)</i>
Mark Creaney	<i>Funding Manager (for item 5)</i>
Bronagh Diamond	<i>Communications Officer (for item 5)</i>
Jenny Fitzgerald	<i>Funding Manager (for item 6)</i>
Sara Houston	<i>Knowledge & Learning Manager (for item 7)</i>
Jacqui Maxwell	<i>Governance Officer</i>

1. Opening Remarks & Updates

1.1 Chair's Welcome & Update

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting. He especially welcomed Shaun Kennedy who was attending his first committee meeting as this year's Boardroom Apprentice. Shaun briefed members on his background and the reason for applying to the Boardroom Apprentice programme. Introductions were made.

1.1.2 *The Chair updated the meeting as follows:*

- UK Board meeting was held on 29th September.
- New Chief Executive appointment progress.
- Ministerial re-shuffles and the October spending review.
- The UK Chair has introduced monthly meetings between herself, the Vice Chair and Country Committee Chairs, to encourage a more holistic and strategic approach to UK-wide business.
- The announcement of two new Committee appointments will take place once they are finalised and they will hopefully be attending the NIC strategic away day on 22 October.

1.2 NI Director's Update

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

- Together for Our Planet small grants fund.
- Living Spaces and Places Fund and stakeholder engagement.
- Young People in the Lead recruitment to launch next week via a blog and social media channels. We will ensure diverse engagement across Northern Ireland, working with smaller numbers digitally to recruit between 6-8 young people. It was noted that the young people seem more confident engaging digitally.

- Planning for the UK Platinum Jubilee programme.
- NI Ministerial appointments.
- The Fund wide impact report and the difference that we make beyond the reach of our funding. The report will be shared with NIC as soon as possible and we will drill down further regarding specific Northern Ireland data.
- Knowledge & Learning team staff resourcing.
- Priorities for the next 3-6 months.

2. Governance

2.1 Apologies

There were none.

2.2 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

2.3 Previous Minutes

The minutes from the 13 August 2021 meeting were agreed as accurate.

2.4 Matters Arising

- UK Funding Committee - the Chair acknowledged Eileen Mullan's contribution to the UKFC over the past number of years. As Eileen was standing down as a NI committee member on 31 October, the Chair will canvass interest to join the UKFC from the three remaining and two new committee members in due course. The next UKFC meeting is due to take place in November, the Chair will represent NIC at that meeting.
- Place Based Youth Work paper - committee agreed to note the background paper from the August meeting.

2.5 NIC Meetings Timetable 2021/22

Members noted the updated timetable. Kate Beggs reported that we may need to re-visit the dates and timings at the end of October to take into account the two new members' availability. Sandra McNamee confirmed that she was unavailable for the business meeting on Friday 8 April 2022.

3. Communications & Engagement Report

3.1 *Committee noted the report for Aug-Sep, which covered the following headings:*

- Traditional Media & Digital highlights
- Supporting our funded projects
- Customer engagement
- Public affairs and community engagement

3.2 *Amanda Doherty highlighted the following:*

- The Fund was working both UK-wide and by Directorate in relation to what levelling up will mean for our stakeholder engagement and conversations.
- The Funders Forum activity and planned conference.

4. NI Portfolio Stats/Programmes Pipeline Data

4.1 NI Portfolio & Pipeline Reports

Committee noted the reports. Alison Fraser highlighted as follows:

- Further to last week's decision meeting, Funding Officers had fed back to both the successful and unsuccessful applicants. The Chair commended Funding Officers for having to make some difficult phone calls but recognised that Officers had been managing expectations.
- Awards for All application numbers were down and budgets will be kept under review.
- Reasons for the drop in numbers are highlighted in the local team engagement papers for the next agenda item. This reduction in applications was evident across the Fund and

being experienced by other funders, but we expect demand to increase as public spending budgets come under increased pressure and restrictions lift.

5. Local Team Engagement - (*paper 09*)

5.1 This paper provided an update on the outreach work of the three local teams for the period January - August 2021. Committee noted the papers.

5.2 *Gillian Irvine, Nuala Macauley and Mark Creaney, Funding Managers reported on the covering paper and the local team reports for North Western, Southern and Eastern.*

5.3 *Discussion points:*

- There was still a large number of smaller groups nervous and uncertain about opening up fully after COVID. How can the Fund help them to regain confidence and resume activity?
- The Fund will continue to be approachable and respond to needs. The Team are confident to have conversations and remain flexible, which they are already doing, through for example grant variations.
- Groups are also looking at hybrid working and a mix of face-to-face and on-line activities, whilst also exploring how best to use, adapt and modernise their outdoor spaces.
- COVID is going to be with us in some shape or form for a long time to come and we need to help groups as much as we can regarding internal/external spaces.
- Succession planning and working together to help communities will also be impacted upon as we come out of the pandemic and some groups have reverted back to silo working as per pre the pandemic.
- Networks should be unpicking what worked during COVID, using reflective practice and how the sector came together during hard times.
- Is there an opportunity to sit down and talk to faith leaders in the future to discuss how their communities could apply for funding to help them thrive?
- Committee agreed that poverty is spreading deeper and wider and this topic can be revisited at the strategic away day.
- Regarding the reports format, Bronagh Diamond, Communications Officer reported that there is some repetitiveness across the three reports and merging into one report may work better.
- Committee fed back that they thought the reports were excellent, brought engagement work to life and highlighted the key issues to help inform committee decision-making. The three reports format works well and there is a richness of data, which is both informative and insightful.

6. Dormant Accounts Review

6.1 *Jenny Fitzgerald verbally updated as follows:*

- Reminded committee of the policy directions and a £21.9 million total funding pot to date.
- Up to 31 August this year, we have received 299 applications and funded 57 projects from the grant programme and 1 strategic investment project.
- There has been a low success rate overall compared to Lottery programmes.
- Rural groups and micro to small application numbers are low - 85% of awards are going to medium to large organisations.
- Reasons for not getting funding range from - not the right fit for the programme; expansion of services and/or programme delivery; establishing new organisations.
- There was also a misunderstanding of what sustainability and building capacity actually means. Many smaller groups struggle to plan strategically and although some applications met the programme aim, they were not thoroughly thought through.
- There is a trend of consultants being used more by lower capacity groups.
- Conversations are ongoing to encourage more strategic investment ideas/applications.
- The Dormant Accounts programme can't be all things to all people. We need to be realistic with what the budget can achieve.
- We will work to encourage groups to apply to the lower end of the funding range, promote our expectations and increase outreach work.
- We will also consider awarding development grants to help groups cultivate ideas.

6.2 *Discussion points:*

- A lot of work has been achieved in a very short space of time and the programme approach is right.
- Development grants may be a positive addition.
- Applicants can resubmit after feedback.
- Other funding programmes had started slowly. This is a similar situation and a slow burner.
- People have been so busy doing the actual work that they have not had the time to look at sustainability and how to keep going.
- Communications and success stories will be crucial over the coming weeks/months.

7. Participatory Grant Making (*paper 10 enclosed*)

- 7.1 Further to committee agreement to proceed with a participatory grant making (PGM) pilot programme specifically for BAME communities at the October 2020 meeting, this paper provides an outline of our proposal for this fund.
- 7.2 Sara Houston, Knowledge & Learning Manager introduced the paper and reiterated the reason for wanting to deliver the pilot programme.
- 7.3 *Committee were asked to:*
- i. Note and discuss the content of the paper
 - ii. Agree to our proposed pilot programme as set out in section 4.
- 7.4 ***Discussion points:***
- The Chair commented on the excellent paper and commended the great work on getting to this stage of the pilot programme process and the excellent community development approach used.
 - Committee acknowledged that there had been a wide consultation with the BAME community to produce a programme that suits current needs.
 - Regarding the two high level programme priorities, it was confirmed there will be specific guidelines with examples and that the main aim was to keep them as broad and as flexible as possible.
 - Committee agreed that this was an exemplary example of how to reach out to the BAME community and sector stakeholders, including other funders, will learn from it. This work will also inform how we work with other groups who don't apply for our funding.
 - There will be insights from this programme that can be linked to Dormant Accounts and other funding programmes.
 - Committee also recognised and congratulated the team on the amount of work achieved over the last 12 months and offered their support going forward.
- 7.5 Kate Beggs confirmed that Sara Houston would be taking up an external secondment opportunity at the end of October with the Department for Communities and acknowledged the excellent job she had done on PGM, especially in the area of facilitation. Amanda Pawar, Funding Manager will be managing and taking the pilot programme forward with the support of the Knowledge & Learning team, and robust plans were in place. The committee wished Sara the best for the future.
- 7.6 ***Committee agreed to the proposed pilot programme as set out in section 4 of the paper.***

8. Reaching Out Supporting Families Conference

- 8.1 *Sandra McNamee verbally updated attendees on the SF Zoom conference, which took place on 30th September.*
- The well organised event was hosted by the Centre for Effective Services (CES) and attended by approximately 300 people.
 - The main purpose was to share the learning from the Reaching Out Supporting Families programme.
 - CES produced an excellent learning paper on the programme impact.
 - Early intervention was a topic of discussion throughout the event.

- Five themes were covered - 1. Whole family approach; 2. Partnership of families; 3. Early intervention & prevention; 4. Peer support; 5. Empowering families.
- Sandra thought that the best part of the day was hearing from the families and the project panels sharing their experiences of partnerships.
- Positive feedback from projects really shone through and proved that we had got the programme right.
- Sandra thanked the Communications Team for all the excellent support leading up to the conference.

- 8.2 Kate Beggs reported that she and the Chair will be meeting with CES on how best to follow-up the conference and share learning across Executive Departments.
- 8.3 Kate Clifford referenced the ongoing Executive work on the Anti-Poverty Strategy and thought that it would be good to produce a paper on what is working in the sector to share learning with policy makers using the above 5 themes.
- 8.4 The Chair thanked Sandra for representing the Fund at the conference and it was also good to note that two junior Ministers attended.

9. Any Other Business

9.1 Next Meetings

- Strategic Away Day - Fri 22 Oct (in person)
- P&C/EYP decision meeting - Fri 3 Dec (arrangements to be confirmed)
- NIC Business meeting - Fri 10 Dec (arrangements to be confirmed)

9.2 Strategic Away Day

The Chair thanked committee for agreeing to attend the Strategic Away Day in person at the Mount in Belfast and wanted everyone to feel comfortable throughout the day. Moira Doherty, Department for Communities Deputy Secretary will attend the start of the meeting to help set the policy context. This will also be Tony Doherty and Eileen Mullan's last committee meeting before standing down as NI committee members on 31 October. It was also hoped that the two new committee members will attend. The meeting will finish by latest 4pm and an agenda will be sent to members as soon as possible.

9.3 Boardroom Apprentice

Shaun Kennedy reflected on his first meeting, which he had found both interesting and refreshing and looked forward the year ahead.

The meeting finished @ 12:40 pm

Paul Sweeney .

Signed: _____
Paul Sweeney, NI Chair

Date: 11 February 2022