



**MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE UPDATE MEETING
HELD ON FRIDAY 11 DECEMBER 2020 @ 10:00 am
(VIA TEAMS)**

Committee:

Sandra McNamee	-	<i>Interim Chair</i>
Eileen Mullan	-	<i>NI committee member (from 10:25)</i>
Charles Mack	-	<i>NI committee member (from 10:20)</i>
Tony Doherty	-	<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 & Engagement</i>
Norrie Breslin	-	<i>Head of Knowledge & Learning</i>
Michael Liggett	-	<i>Head of Knowledge & Learning</i>
Jenny FitzGerald	-	<i>Funding Manager (for item 4)</i>
Jacqui Maxwell	-	<i>Business Support Officer - Governance</i>

1. Opening Remarks

1.1 Chair's Welcome

Sandra McNamee welcomed all attendees to the last committee meeting of 2020 and reflected on what had been a very unusual year.

1.2 NI Director's Feedback on Key Corporate Matters

Kate updated committee - *(please refer to Annex A)*

2. Governance

2.1 Apologies

There were none.

2.2 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

2.3 Previous Minutes

The minutes from the 16 and 30 October meetings were agreed as accurate and will be signed by the Chair at a later date.

2.4 NIC Meetings Timetable 2021

Committee noted that an updated timetable, including new decision meeting dates had been emailed to members and that Jacqui Maxwell will be in touch to confirm as soon as possible. It was also acknowledged that some of the dates may change depending on the new NI Chair/Committee members availability. **ACTION: J. Maxwell**

3. **Funding Updates (NI Portfolio Overview Stats report; NI Programmes Pipeline Data report; Participatory Grant Making; Environment Top-ups)**

3.1 NI Portfolio Overview Stats and Programmes Pipeline Data reports

3.1.1 Alison Fraser updated committee on the key points contained in the NI Portfolio Overview and Pipeline Data reports. Members commented on the healthy application pipeline.

- Committee noted the increase in the Awards for All and People and Communities applications and the decrease in Empowering Young People.
- Committee recognised that although the previous EYP decision meeting had been very positive in relation to the quality of applications and the young people’s input had been exceptional, the projects funded were mainly ones that we have had an ongoing funding relationship with. Considering what is currently in the pipeline, it’s hard to predict if application numbers will increase in the future but trends have been indicating downward regarding application numbers for some time, but we have made a great investment into this sector. The programme will be kept under review as part of our new portfolio considerations and staff will continue their proactive outreach and promotion. It was also noted that we fund children and young people through our Awards for All and People and Communities programmes.
- Committee thought that the progress made with the young people members was exemplary and we need to bear this in mind going forward, both on the way we make decisions and how we continue to capture the voices of the young people in our decision making.
- Kate updated what the fund is doing UK-wide in relation to young people and the lived experience voice. This will be further explored in the new year and taken into account for the NI portfolio review.

3.2 Participatory Grant Making (PGM) & Environmental Top-Ups

3.2.1 Committee noted the paper, which provided an update on two pieces of work that had been agreed by Northern Ireland Committee at the October 2020 business meeting.

3.2.2 **PGM** - Alison reported that Sara Houston, Knowledge & Learning Manager was leading on the participatory grant making piece of work and was also linking in with a UK portfolio colleague who is an expert in this type of grant making. Progress was on-going and anticipate opening for applications before the end of March 2021.

- Committee were excited about this work and reinforced that we should be hearing from the unheard voices. Alison confirmed that Sarah is working closely with the local teams to ensure that the Funding Team’s knowledge and links with BAME groups are being utilised.

3.2.3 **Environmental** - Committee agreed there will be great learning from this programme and an opportunity to imbed environmental projects in our new portfolio.

- Committee also commented on how good it was to identify 20 existing grant holders to be included in the pilot, which had resulted in an excellent geographical spread across all council areas. The final list will be shared with committee once confirmed.

ACTION: A. Fraser

3.2.4 Committee were impressed that staff had made the time, given the very busy year, to work on both pilots, bringing them to the current position and ready to go forward in the new year.

4. Dormant Accounts

4.1 Jenny FitzGerald Funding Manager joined the meeting.

4.2 Committee noted the paper, which provided an update on the Dormant Accounts Fund and requested Committee's approval for the decision-making process.

4.3 Jenny talked members through the paper, highlighting the key points.

- Background
- Fund outline
- Learning
- Financial and presentational implications

4.4 Main discussion points:

- It was exciting to at last be in the position to launch the programme on Monday 14 December.
- In relation to sharing the learning, there are a lot of opportunities to link with others across the Fund and to work with grant holders, which will also help us to develop the programme.
- There have been ongoing conversations with the sector on what we want to achieve through Dormant Accounts. Dialogue will continue, whilst managing relationships and being transparent about how the programme develops.
- It was also thought it may take until next summer before some organisations are able to consider applying to Dormant given the impact of COVID.

4.5 Kate and committee thanked Jenny for leading on the programme during very uncertain circumstances. It was a new way of working and Jenny had done a great job.

4.6 Amanda confirmed that the final press release for Monday's launch will be shared with committee, hopefully later today and more communications activity is planned for the new year.

4.7 ***Committee agreed the decision-making process for the larger grants. These applications will be more complex and may also involve partnerships and onward grant making.***

5. EDI Outreach - Women & Girls and Disability

5.1 Norrie Breslin briefed members on the key points included in the two papers.

5.2 Women & Girls

- Total number of projects funded and overall funding in NI over the previous 5 years
- Employment and health
- Mental health; education; domestic violence and abuse; trans women
- Impact of COVID-19

5.3 Disability

- Facts & figures
- Context - (physical, mental, sensory, neurological)
- VCSE organisations supporting disabled people
- Impact of COVID-19
- Current portfolio and figures
- Considerations

5.4 Main discussion points:

- Regarding women's safety and domestic violence, the PSNI's most recent report shows a further increase in domestic violence during COVID-19 and is the highest since data started being collected in 2004. All the statistics are available on the PSNI website and it would be good to explore this further.
- In relation to an increase in funding requests, we are already funding a lot of projects that support women and men in relation to domestic violence and organisations have also received uplifts in their funding because of an increase in demand for their services due to COVID. (There has also been an increase in issues around the LGBTQ sector due to COVID).
- Projects that work with perpetrators is a potential gap and it is very specialised, but we have funded Men's Action Project in partnership with Fermanagh's Women's Aid, through the Supporting Families programme.
- Kate reminded committee that the core purpose of undertaking the EDI outreach work was to inform our local teams about certain issues in their areas through gathering information from our grant holders and the wider research. This is primarily to raise awareness in our current funding context and will inform our discussion around the next portfolio.
- Committee agreed that the papers were excellent, both in format and content and it was good that all staff had access to them.

6. Portfolio Review - (*verbal update*)

6.1 Norrie reported that NI staff had engaged in 13 conversations over the previous 11 weeks, covering 10 different topics. This resulted in 8 different briefings to support and inform conversations, and these have all been added to The Fund's UK knowledge bank.

6.2 Key points:

- i) How are we perceived and why certain people don't apply to us. Still need to break down some barriers, but the message is getting out that we are a flexible and approachable funder.
- ii) What is our development role as a funder and where has people in the lead taken us?
- iii) Who should we fund? Smaller/less of the larger organisations?
- (iv) Should we fund helper organisations and what is our role within the sector?

6.3 We are now reviewing all the information from the various conversations and pulling them together. We will combine this data along with the open Board discussion (from June 2019), what we heard during the Dormant Accounts consultation and the NIC strategic meeting on 30 October 2020. We will bring an update to February committee meeting. Portfolio considerations will also be discussed with committee at the May 2021 strategic away day.

7. Communications & Engagement Oct-Dec report

7.1 Committee noted the report and how it showcased the phenomenal work being carried out by The Fund in NI, including - press highlights; customer engagement; public affairs and social and digital media.

7.2 Amanda Doherty reported that there will be a major grants announcement before Christmas (163 grants), which is the largest number we have had in a long time. Committee agreed that it is important to get these positive messages out at this difficult time.

8. **Any Other Business**

8.1 Next meetings

Committee noted the meetings in February - Friday 12th (Supporting Families) and Friday 19th (business).

8.2 Eileen Mullan

Sandra congratulated Eileen on her appointment as Non-Executive Chair of the Southern Health & Social Care Trust.


8.3 NI Chair

Sandra will continue as NI Interim Chair into next year.

8.4 Thank You

Sandra thanked the committee and staff for all their hard work during a really difficult year.

The meeting finished @ 12:15pm

Signed: 

Sandra McNamee, Interim Chair

Date: 19 February 2021

Annex A

Northern Ireland Director's Update Business Meeting 11 December 2020

Appointments

- The public appointment process for the **new NI Chair** is ongoing. Interviews will now take place in January.
- Interviews for a new **NI Committee member** will take place w/c 14th December. A list of appointable candidates will be created and held for 12 months.
- John Rose will be **Acting CEO** following Dawn's retirement and until a new CEO is appointed. The recruitment process for this is ongoing, but an appointment is unlikely to be confirmed until the new Board Chair has been appointed.
- Emma Ackerman has been appointed as the new **Funding Strategy Director**. Her remit includes the UK Portfolio, Evaluation, Service Design and Funding Policy and Practice.
- Helen Jones will join the Fund as the new **Head of Funding Equity and Inclusion** in February, located within the Funding Strategy Directorate.

Business Planning

- Board discussed amendments to the **Corporate Plan** for 2021-2024 at its meeting on 10th December. NISMT have discussed the headlines of our **Directorate plan** for 2021/2 and are discussing key results and activities with teams. We will bring an updated Directorate business plan to the February business meeting.

Welfare

- The Fund has launched a new **Wellbeing Hub** on the intranet to bring together all available resources in support of colleagues' physical and mental wellbeing as we continue to work mainly from home.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

- The EDI module of the new Grant-Making Skills suite of training is being rolled out and Northern Ireland colleagues from all teams are taking part.

Priorities for the next 3-6 months

- Ensuring everyone's well-being is supported as we continue to work from home and/or transition to a blend of home and office-working;
- Launch of Dormant Accounts Grant Fund and starting to convene around NI-wide and sector-specific investments to build capacity, sustainability and resilience in the VCSE sector;
- Taking our portfolio review conversations out to stakeholders, grant-holders, customers and the general public;
- Participatory grant-making and environment top-up pilot schemes;
- Considering the role of youth voice and wider lived experience in our next portfolio.

Kate Beggs
NI Director