



**MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON FRIDAY 19 APRIL 2024 @ 10:00 am**

NI Committee	
Paul Sweeney	<i>NI Chair</i>
Kate Clifford	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Nick Garbutt	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Cara Cash-Marley	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Norman McKinley	<i>NI Committee member</i>
Hannah Sankannawar	<i>Boardroom Apprentice</i>
Staff	
Kate Beggs	<i>NI Director</i>
David Knott	<i>Chief Executive</i>
Alison Fraser	<i>Senior Head of Funding</i>
Amanda Doherty	<i>Senior Head of Comms & Engagement</i>
Michael Liggett	<i>Head of Knowledge & Learning</i>
Jacqui Maxwell	<i>Governance Officer</i>
Shane Ryan	<i>Senior Adviser - (observing)</i>

1. OPENING REMARKS:

1.1 Chair's Welcome & Verbal Update

The Chair welcomed David Knott, Chief Executive and Shane Ryan, Senior Adviser to the CEO and introductions were made.

The Chair commended staff on the previous day's all staff Connected session, which had been successfully hosted by the NI Directorate.

1.2 NI Director Verbal Update

- The May NI Committee away day and UK Board visit in June, were in members' diaries, with more details to follow.
- Senior recruitment currently taking place across the Fund (Director of People & Culture and Chief of Staff).
- Engagement with Allwyn and the NI Lottery Forum on public affairs and position on society lotteries.
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2. GOVERNANCE: (Chair & J. Maxwell)

2.1 Apologies

These had been received from Anne-Marie McClure, NI committee member.

2.2 Declarations of Interest

Kate Clifford, NI committee member declared non-disqualifiable interests on behalf of the Rural Community Network for Dormant Accounts and Sustainable Community Buildings programmes. (RCN is a recipient of a current Dormant Accounts grant and has applied to SCB).

2.3 Previous Minutes

The minutes from 9 February 2024 business meeting were formally agreed.

2.4 Actions List

The updated actions list was noted.

2.5 NIC Meetings Timetable 2023/24

Committee noted the updated timetable, which also included the delegated decision meetings for information.

2.5.1 UK Board Visit

Amanda Doherty reported that details were being finalised and requested that committee members be available for project visits on the afternoon of Wednesday 26 June and dinner that evening at Stormont. **More details and timings will be shared next week.** The Chair acknowledged the preparatory work already undertaken. **Action: A. Doherty**

3. DAVID KNOTT DISCUSSION WITH NIC

3.1 The internal picture across the Fund:

- The three strategy hallmarks - 1) a responsive and open community funder; 2) to be more focussed in certain areas and being purposeful as an organisation; 3) more than a funder and being both equitable and accessible whilst using innovation to drive change.
- Corporate Plan for 2024-2027 had been signed off by Board and would be published externally following the period of pre-election sensitivity in England.
- The Corporate Plan sets out how the strategy will be delivered over the next three years and includes new Key Performance Indicators to hold the Fund to account.
- The scale of the Fund - for example in the previous year £691 million was distributed with a grant being awarded every 7-8 minutes and £3-4 million pounds of business actioned every day.
- UK Chair recruitment was proceeding, and the appointment should be announced during the summer. David thanked Paul for his excellent work as the Interim Chair, which had provided stability during the previous year.

3.2 The external picture:

- Allwyn - their plans and the plausible growth for the National Lottery and good causes returns.
- General Election - an important moment this year.

3.3 Operational:

- Recruitment - senior appointments.
- Technology and digital review - website and grant making.
- Estates - ways of working and clarity of purpose.

3.4 Board and country committees' engagement:

- 3 June virtual meeting confirmed.
- 19 November a face-to-face meeting is being considered around the 30th anniversary of the National Lottery, to meet and hear about the work of the different directorates and country committees. The corporate plan will be used as the backdrop with an agenda for structure.

3.5 *The main points of discussion were as follows:*

- a) It starts with Community; how do we influence?
A huge amount of money is being invested across the UK, the Fund holds a high level of knowledge and learning that is very unique. We are at the heart of delivering on need and vulnerability and have the factual evidence to influence and engage. Can the National Lottery change policy at source with an evidence base that goes to government?
- b) Enhancing the performance of decision-making committees:
There are interesting insights on how the different countries operate. How will the organisation operate as a 'One Fund' across the UK and manage information? There is a significant amount of funding being delivered through the UK Portfolio and we will be exploring how to use that most effectively in the years ahead.

4. COMMUNICATIONS REPORT - (A. Doherty)

4.1 Committee noted the report for February & March and the highlights from the previous year. The main headlines were as follows:

- Media
- Digital
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Customer Satisfaction Survey

4.2 Amanda reported that we work hard to amplify the voice of grant-holders and maintain the positive coverage at 97%. The engagement on our digital channel has been strong, generated by content around our filming. We will also be launching our own LinkedIn page in the near future.

4.3 *The main points of discussion were as follows:*

- a) It was agreed that communities are winning the National Lottery every day. We have very positive stories regarding the investment we are making and the players make this happen.
- b) The communications report is always an excellent insight into the work involved and a lot of this is down to the funding officers building relationships on the ground with projects, who are then willing to share their stories.
- c) The Fund has a good reputation in the sector and the customer satisfaction score is always high.

4.4 The Chair commended Amanda and her team on an excellent report and the work involved in making the various videos with sensitively, which also has the added benefit of teaching projects how to tell their stories.

4.5 Media Training

The Chair and Nick Garbutt reported back on the training day for the Chair and NI Director and how it has helped us to think about messaging in support of the new strategy and imminent programme closure, the tone to use and being both coherent and

consistent in what the Fund actually does. An ‘Elevator Pitch’ will be presented to members at the May away day with encouragement to members to think about key examples of projects to support their messaging. There will also be an opportunity to discuss how NI Committee members can represent The Fund as part of their engagement role.

ACTION: A Doherty/N. Garbutt

It was agreed that The Chair, supported by Kate Beggs will be the main media spokesperson in relation to the work of the Fund in Northern Ireland.

5. PORTFOLIO UPDATES - (A. Fraser)

5.1 *Portfolio Data:*

Committee noted the figures for Awards for All; People and Communities and Empowering Young People.

5.1.1 Awards for All

There will be more data presented at the NIC away day on how the Awards for All programme has changed since increasing to £20K. Currently the average grant size is approximately £15K and 70% of customers are requesting more than £10K with an average grant spend time span of just over 1 year. This will have an impact on the programme budget. The paper in May will focus on what people are asking for, the types of projects we are funding, and the impact on the budget and success rate going forward. (Our ambition is that the success rate will remain at approximately 50%).

5.2 *Pipeline & Decision Meetings:*

Committee noted application numbers in the pipeline and the two decision meetings in June and July. Total applications for these meetings currently stand at 42, but this figure will reduce as they go through assessment and moderation.

5.3 *The main points of discussion were as follows:*

- a) It was noted that the People & Communities budget had been reduced in 23/24 compared with 22/23 which explained the decrease in amount awarded.
- b) Committee noted the high number of applications for Belfast & Derry/Londonderry and the various spikes in applications in certain areas and years. It was confirmed that it had a lot to do with timings and the team were being more proactive about managing the pipeline. We will take this format forward into the new programme to manage demand across Northern Ireland, and review who we are inviting to apply.
- c) What is the learning for the cold spots? **Kate Beggs suggested that it would be beneficial to have the three local area team Funding Managers presenting to committee at a future meeting on local context and trends. ACTION: A. Fraser**

5.4 *Sustainable Community Buildings & Access to Resilience - Verbal Updates*

- **SCB** - The first tranche had now closed with 104 applications received by the Southern team. We will be inviting 50 organisations to complete the carbon literacy training and develop their environment plan. There was a good geographical spread across the southern area, with some cold spots included.
- **ATR** - programme launched on 10 April. First external briefing session to take place on Friday 26 April. Sector feedback has been positive to date and as the programme is quite niche, a video was produced to help articulate what the programme is trying to achieve and who should apply. Jenny Fitzgerald, Funding Manager had worked hard on the messaging and customer testing.

- The Dormant Assets interim evaluation report will be ready in June.
- **Kate and Paul will have an introductory meeting with the Finance Minister in June. We will also be providing advice to DOF on future policy directions based on evidence from the programme to date.** **ACTION: K. Beggs/NI Chair**

6. PROGRAMME CLOSURE & STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME

6.1 Programme Closure

Amanda Doherty briefed members as follows:

- We will be announcing the closure of our two large grant programmes on Monday 22 April.
- Deadline for new applications is Monday 13 May.
- A number of senior stakeholders have been briefed in advance of the announcement and we have received re-assurance that this is the right course to take.
- If members receive any questions, please let us know if you require support.
- We will open again in the Autumn, possibly September, but a general election may delay this.
- Money will still be going out to projects May-September and we will be announcing £10 million worth of grants two weeks after closure. There will be no impact on the portfolio budget going forward.
- The message is that we are still available and ready to talk.

6.2 Strengthening Communities Programme

Following discussions at the December 2023 and February 2024 business meetings, this paper provided an update on the development of our new standard grant programme to launch in Autumn 24.

6.3 *Committee was invited:*

- i) **to note and discuss the content of the paper;**
- ii) **to consider the definitions of factors which contribute to social exclusion as outlined in section 4**
- iii) **to decide on the programme priorities for the first two years as outlined in section 5.1**
- iv) **to agree the eligibility criteria for grants up to £200K outlined in section 5.2**

6.4 Kate Beggs set the scene as follows:

- The shape of the NI portfolio from May to the Autumn (after we close People & Communities and Empowering Young People) will be - Awards for All; Sustainable Community Buildings and Access to Resilience.
- Numerous discussions have taken place at last year's committee away day and by the various teams looking at the four missions and prioritising using local knowledge and background against the NI context.
- The result of these discussions was a decision to move from two large standard grant programmes to one single programme focussing on two of the missions - Children & Young People and Healthier Lives and to also narrow our focus to offer more clarity.
- The Theory of Change is not a finished product, but will help with understanding and the different approach.

- The paper includes the **outcomes in paragraph 3.1** and we want projects to meet one or all of these outcomes.
- We do not need to finalise all the details today, but discussions will help frame final sign-off at the May Away Day.

6.5 *The main points of discussion were as follows:*

- Annex 1 - NIC discussed the wording of some of the outcomes and felt there could be more meaningful measures, but acknowledged these were taken from the Fund's agreed Missions Framework.
- Where does need sit and where is our money required the most?
- We are moving from responsive funding to being more intentional.
- We must avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation and we will work on external messaging to ensure this does not happen. Clarity is paramount.
- Older people will be included in the priorities list under people.
- We need to use the UK-wide missions framework and apply a lens to the priorities in both the programme description and assessment criteria. It is in our gift to change the priorities, but not the missions outcome.
- Rural should not just be about geography and the programme needs to be rural proofed. (The NI Rural Needs Act is about people having less access to services).
- In terms of the budget, this could be challenging, but we need to have the courage of our convictions using our strategy.
- The amount of money we have available will not make a massive difference in the big picture, but if we narrow the focus in the right way, we have a chance to make positive and meaningful changes to people's lives.
- Consider what the strategy means for the decision-making process. Take this opportunity to review the process/papers as a whole to make it clearer why someone did not get funding. Be more scientific in nature on how a project clearly fits the strategy better than others.
- Who will the programme exclude? Can we have a visual sense of how the new portfolio will look and feel to help understand the intention and impact?
- It was noted that successful applications from the last few decision meetings would fit into the new programme priorities.

6.6 *In light of discussions it was agreed:*

- That today's conversations had illustrated the different interpretations and understanding of the new programme.
- Officers will need more of committee members time between now and May to discuss further, so as to be ready to open in September/Autumn.**
ACTION: NISMT/NIC
- That to be eligible for funding up to £200K, organisations must have an average annual income over the last two years of less than £500K.
- In relation to an environment element, it was not the right time to include this in the programme in light of current NI priorities and would be an additional burden to applying. We can take learning from the SCB programme and this will help plant the seeds for future thinking.
- Committee agreed the approach to EDI and the factors determining social exclusion, subject to reviewing how rural communities are reflected in the matrix.**
ACTION: M. Liggett

6.7 The Chair commended staff on the amount of work involved in bringing the paper to committee.

7. END OF GRANT REVIEW PILOT - (M. Liggett)

- 7.1 This paper was a follow up from a discussion on developing a learning and impact framework. It sets out the findings from the review of End of Grant forms and invites discussion.
- 7.2 **Committee was invited:**
- 1) to note the content of the paper and discuss its conclusions
- 7.3 Michael reported how the review is contributing to the development of a learning framework which will not only document achievements and challenges in current programmes but will contribute to the design of a directorate learning framework for the new programme. The outputs from the End of Grant review are informing corporate work on developing an evidence and impact strategy
- 7.4 The review suggests that we need to better understand some of our processes. We could do things differently such as prioritising conversational approaches at the end of grant rather than using one dimensional forms to gather impact and evidence.
- 7.5 There is a lot of information to review and we are proposing to continue with this format and build a learning and impact framework so that when our new programme opens, we will have embedded a learning culture. The Knowledge & Learning team will work closely with the Funding team around the end of grant/grant management stage to help document our findings in an accessible format.
- 7.6 **This paper informs our thoughts and expectations around impact work and we intend to bring a paper in May that sets out proposed options for evaluation and support models.**
ACTION: M. Liggett
- 7.7 *The main points of discussion were as follows:*
- a) Committee thought that the paper was really useful and there is now a pace to these types of discussions.
 - b) With regard to project evaluations there is no uniformity and committee does not see the final product.
 - c) For grants up to 500K, there should be a standard type evaluation, measured against the same matrix, especially for repeat grants to show the impact. (Consideration should also be given to the up to £200K grants).
 - d) It is important for projects to be able to say to the funder that something is not working the way they planned and this should not be lost.
 - e) **Committee project visits help to actively gather evidence and examples. It would be helpful in the future to capture the experience for learning purposes through a light touch process.**
ACTION: M. Liggett
 - f) There are a number of different options - evaluation contract alongside the programme; support contract; specific framework all without becoming over prescriptive.
 - g) To empower projects, use a model that organisations can be trained in to help understand impact, so when a project ends the knowledge is there.
 - h) Consider a digitalised data network.
- 7.8 Committee thanked Michael for an excellent paper, which will bring the Lottery to a place where practice and policy can meet and to equip the sector to influence. Lottery

has the information and knowledge, which should be taken elsewhere to influence better grant and policy making; addressing social need and intervention.

7.9 Michael confirmed that the team will take on board today's discussions and consider the options going forward. **ACTION: M. Liggett**

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

8.1 Next Meetings/Events:

- NIC Away Day - 16 & 17 May
- UK Board Visit - 26 & 27 June
- PAC and EYP Decision Meetings - 21 June & 5 July.
- NIC business meeting 16 August.

The meeting finished @ 2:15pm

Paul Sweeney .

Signed: _____
Paul Sweeney, NI Chair

Date: 16 May 2024