



**MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON FRIDAY 16 AUGUST 2024 @ 10:30 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>
Anne-Marie McClure	<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>
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>
Tom Walters	<i>Deputy Director - Impact, Evaluation & Customer Insight (for Item 5)</i>
Jacqui Maxwell	<i>Governance Officer - Minutes</i>

1. OPENING REMARKS:

1.1 Chair's Welcome & Verbal Update

- The UK Chair recruitment process was still on-going.
- Paul confirmed that he will remain as Interim Chair until the new Chair has been appointed.

1.1.2 On the Chair's request, Amanda Doherty updated members on what measures the Fund had put in place to support both staff and grant holders during the recent social unrest and racist violence.

1.2 NI Director Verbal Update

- Recent UK appointments (People & Culture Director, Chief of Staff, Deputy Director of Communications).
- The NI Directorate Away Day will take place on 29 August to consider Strengthening Communities programme. (Paul and Anne -Marie to attend from NI committee).
- UK Youth Voice - one of the NI Youth Voice team has been appointed as one of the new Youth Advisors to the UK Fund. Members will be kept updated on future plans for a specific Youth Voice presence in Northern Ireland.

2. GOVERNANCE: (Chair & J. Maxwell)

2.1 Apologies

There were none.

2.2 Conflicts of Interest

- In relation to item 4.1.1 - declarable interest was noted from Kate Clifford in relation to the Access to Resilience programme and the Rural Community Network being named as a partner in a number of the applications.

2.3 Previous Minutes

The minutes from the 19 April 2024 business meeting were formally agreed.

2.4 Actions List

The actions list was noted.

2.5 NIC Meetings Timetable 2023/24

- The timetable will be updated to show the 26 September Board meeting.
- Members were requested to hold 13 November for a Board/Country Committee meeting in Birmingham and reminded that an invite had been sent to their Lottery emails.

3. COMMUNICATIONS REPORT & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PAPER - (A. Doherty)

3.1 Committee noted the Communications report for April to July

The main headlines were as follows:

- Media
- Digital
- Engagement
- Customer Satisfaction Survey
- Board Visit

3.1.1 *Committee commented on:*

- The successful Board visit and positive feedback received.
- The high Q.1 customer satisfaction results for Northern Ireland.

3.2 Committee noted the Stakeholder Engagement paper:

This paper gave an overview of stakeholder engagement between August 2023 and July 2024 - including additional analysis; key priorities and the proposed engagement in the coming months.

3.2.1 *Amanda reported on the following:*

- September CO3 conference
- October NICVA conference
- November Funders Forum for NI conference
- Lottery 30th birthday joint distributor event in March 2025

4. PORTFOLIO UPDATES - (A. Fraser)

4.1 Portfolio Data:

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

4.1.1 *Alison reported on the following:*

- The Award for All success rate will be kept under review.
- The People & Communities and Empowering Young People programmes deadline for applications for those invited to apply is today @ 5pm.
- Access to Resilience - 65 applications were received. 51 will be taken forward to assessment, with decisions delegated to the Senior Head of Funding.
- Dormant Strategic decision making for CO3 application - Jacqui will be in contact next week to suggest dates and agree the sub-committee membership and process. Decision-making to be completed by the end of October. Conflict of interest from Anne Marie and Kate was noted.

ACTION: J. Maxwell

4.2 Pipeline & Decision Meetings:

- Committee noted application numbers and the planned decision meetings.
- Kate Clifford confirmed her declarable and disqualifiable interests with Jacqui after the meeting.

4.3 Unsuccessful Feedback & Grant Withdrawal:

Alison reported on recent unsuccessful applicant feedback and a delegated grant withdrawal process which had reached a satisfactory outcome after a difficult process

4.3.1 Members acknowledged the amount of work and time involved for staff to arrive at agreed solutions.

5. **IMPACT & EVIDENCE SERVICE UPDATE (*Tom Walters joined the meeting*).**

5.1 *Tom presented to committee as follows:*

- Strategic Commitment to Impact
- New Purpose for Evidence and Impact
- Missions Framework
- Impact Strategy

5.2 The main discussion points were as follows:

- a. The team was currently considering how to put in place the right mechanisms to help communities share their learning.
- b. Researching international platforms is a long-term goal to improve the Fund's systems and identifying how to bring knowledge into decision making.
- c. Explore how technology will enable clear visibility in a maze of data.
- d. Ensure that data is no longer in silos and holistic evidence is accessible.
- e. Regarding evaluations, it will be imperative to clarify the purpose for these and will require various conversations with grant holders.
- f. Case studies need to be utilised on a more regular basis to allow projects facing similar issues to get together and discuss freely.
- g. Ask projects how they would do things differently. We currently monitor the spend, but we also need to use the funding stories.
- h. Help grant holders at the start of their funding journey to make the process more straightforward and learn where they are starting from.
- i. Provide tools for both staff and applicants so they are looking at the same data to help integrate practice and learning.

5.3 Next Steps

- An Impact & Strategy draft paper will be presented to committee at the 11 October NIC business meeting to gain feedback. Item will be added to the October agenda.

ACTION: J. Maxwell/T. Walters

6. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME (A. Fraser)

6.1 This paper provided an update on the development of the new standard programme.

6.2 Committee were invited to:

- i. note the progress
- ii. note the programme specific application form questions
- iii. note the draft assessment guidance
- iv. note the draft needs assessment framework

6.3 The main discussion points were as follows:

- a. It was confirmed that customer testing had been completed and that staff will work through some project examples at the August Team Away Day.
- b. Internal and external messaging is still work in progress and will be informed by customer testing and our away day.
- c. Environment is not a primary focus, but it will be encouraged and explored as part of the assessment process- e.g. buying local and circular economy.
- d. NIC noted the application form questions, assessment guidance and needs framework and were supportive of how the programme had been progressed.

6.4 ***Committee agreed that the paper was positive and the application form questions simple and clear.***

6.5 Committee noted the 2 October launch date. More details will follow regarding venues and timings and NIC involvement.

7. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES SUPPORT CONTRACT - (M. Liggett)

7.1 This paper outlined options for a potential programme support contract, including a preferred option.

7.2 ***Committee was invited to:***

- i. note and discuss the paper
- ii. consider section 4.0 and agree the preferred option outlined in 4.4 and 4.5
- iii. discuss and agree with elements of the preferred option outlined in 5.4 and 5.7

7.3 The main discussion points were as follows:

- a. Learning from across the Fund from previous contracts and costs were acknowledged.
- b. NIC noted that this is an opportunity for the Fund to lead the agenda by promoting and facilitating best practice.
- c. Creating safe spaces for reflective practice among our grant holders to openly discuss what works and doesn't work was seen as an important culture shift.
- d. The importance of contracting a third party who understands the impact of poverty discrimination and disadvantaged on communities is a priority and we should carefully explore ways to test the market on our approach.

7.4 ***Committee agreed that:***

Option 1 was the most logical option to appoint a third party to provide a demand-led development support contract for grant holders in addition to facilitating peer learning through communities of practice.

- Committee noted that the contract cost will come from the Northern Ireland grant budget.

- There was a desire to be innovative and that a procurement ‘warming-up process’ should be considered to help spark interest.
- Officers will explore what the other countries are doing for grants under and over £200K.
- An update paper will be presented to committee at the 11 October business meeting.

ACTION: Knowledge & Learning

8. RISK & GOVERNANCE DISCUSSION:

8.1 Kate Beggs set the scene using two recent funding decisions as examples, (when there were issues regarding good governance and how a community was going to be supported).

8.2 The main discussion points were as follows:

- It was agreed that risk was not a black and white issue, but we make the best decisions possible with the knowledge available on the day.
- It starts with community and having more emphasis on equity funding and supporting those most in need, means the risk may increase when funding lower capacity groups.
- How do we navigate gatekeepers using our local knowledge and support communities in the Northern Ireland context?
- More conversations are required in relation to the assessment reports.
- We agree on what tolerances are zero (our red areas e.g. fraud and safeguarding), and recognise that we have a tolerance for grant failure.
- Funding Officers are based in the local community, they have developed good relationships and engage in early conversations which help to manage our risk.
- Funding staff make a judgement call to take applications to committee. Certain groups might not have everything lined up perfectly, but the judgement is the project is fundable and will make a difference to people’s lives.

8.3 Committee agreed it would be beneficial to know Board’s current thinking on strategic risk appetite. The Chair confirmed that a risk and fraud management paper was going to Board on 26 September and he would feedback on the discussion at the October NIC business meeting.

ACTION: NI Chair

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

9.1 Next Meetings:

- PAC and EYP decision meeting - Friday 20 September
- NIC business meeting - Friday 11 October
- Board & Country Committees meeting - Wednesday 13 November in Birmingham

9.2 Farewells:

As this meeting was Michael Liggett’s (Head of Knowledge & Learning) and Hannah Sankannawar’s (Boardroom Apprentice) last committee, they reflected on their time at the Fund and attendees wished them well for the future.

The meeting finished @ 2:30pm

Paul Sweeney

Signed: _____
Paul Sweeney, NI Chair

Date: 11 October 2024

