Minutes of Board Meeting No. 128 held on Monday 21 September 2026 at Marlborough House, Craigavon.

Present:
Gerard McCurdy, Chief Commissioner (Chair)
Kieran Donaghy, Charity Commissioner
Alan Hunter, Charity Commissioner
Patricia Kelly, Legal Commissioner
Leanne McCullough, Charity Commissioner
Hugh McKeag, Charity Commissioner

In Attendance:
Frances McCandless, Chief Executive
Aubrey McCrory, Head of Corporate Services
Punam McGookin, Head of Charity Services
Ainslie McMullan, Head of Legal Services
Padraig Quinn, Head of Compliance and Enquiries
David McGurk, Finance and Admin Officer
Nicola Fisher, Finance and Admin Manager – Item 6

Apologies:
Aoife Hamilton, Deputy Chief Commissioner

The meeting commenced at 9.30am.

1. **Minutes of Board Meeting 127, 22 June 2026**
   Following discussion, the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 22 June 2026 were agreed, subject to a minor amendment, for publication on the Commission's website, as proposed by Hugh McKeag and seconded by Kieran Donaghy. The Board noted the progress of the Action Points from the last meeting.

   AP1: Minutes of Board Meeting No 127, 22 June 2026 to be published on CCNI website.

2. **Conflicts of Interest**
   The Chair asked Board members to declare any conflicts relating to agenda items. Previously declared conflicts of interest by Alan Hunter and Leanne McCullough as members of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and potential perceived conflicts by Patricia Kelly, Gerard McCurdy and Alan Hunter regarding Féile An Phobail were noted. Leanne McCullough highlighted her potential perceived conflict with DPOANI and Patricia Kelly highlighted her potential perceived conflict of interest regarding Relatives for Justice, which the Board noted again. The Chair reminded Commissioners of their responsibility to recuse themselves from decision making in relation to any conflict of interests.

3. Chair's Business, Correspondence and Meetings

The Chair outlined details of an upcoming bi-annual assurance meeting with John Smith, Deputy Secretary, Department for Communities (DfC). He noted Nicola Fisher would be attending for item 6 and welcomed Padraig Quinn, the new Head of Compliance and Enquiries, to the meeting. The Chair acknowledged the work of staff and Commissioners in preparing the Commission's response to the Charities (Amendment) Bill.

4. Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive introduced her report. She updated Commissioners on correspondence and a recent budget briefing by the Head of the Civil Service. Details of discussions with sponsor department on plans to consult on raising the current audit threshold were outlined. The Chief Executive explained the impacts the use of AI by various service users could have on the Commission carrying out its regulatory functions. The Board welcomed plans to produce guidance on use of AI for service users and update digital forms.

5. Policies and Processes

a. Evaluation and research strategy 2026-29

The Head of Charity Services introduced the draft strategy highlighting that the planned research into public trust and confidence in the charity sector is dependent on sponsor department making budget available in 2027-28. Commissioners noted the strategy was largely focused on monitoring and evaluating the objectives in the Commission's Strategic Plan for 2026-29. Following discussion the strategy was agreed as proposed by Leanne McCullough and seconded by Alan Hunter.

AP2: Evaluation and research strategy 2026-29 to be implemented.

b. Updated internal evaluation guidance on registration

The Head of Charity Services introduced the guidance and highlighted key changes. Following discussion, the Board agreed the updated guidance and the procedural updates, as proposed by Hugh McKeag and seconded by Kieran Donaghy.

AP3: Updated internal evaluation guidance on registration and procedures to be implemented

c. Amended Privacy Notice

The Head of Legal Services introduced the paper and highlighted proposed changes to the Commission's privacy notice related to processing personal data included by charities in Annual Reports and Accounts. Details of advice and correspondence from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) were noted. Following discussion, the Board agreed the proposed changes to the Commission's privacy notice, subject to minor amendments, as proposed by Patricia Kelly and seconded by Alan Hunter.

AP 4: Updated Privacy Notice to be published

d. Partnership Agreement Compliance

The Chief Executive introduced the paper and advised the Commission is currently in compliance with the requirements of the Partnership Agreement. Following discussion, the Chair undertook to raise the timing of cyclical reviews at the upcoming assurance meeting.

AP5: Chair to raise the timing of cyclical reviews at the upcoming assurance meeting.

e. Stakeholder Forum Update

The Head of Charity Services gave an update on recent forum meetings.

6. Reports from Committees

Nicola Fisher joined the meeting at 10.40am.

ARAC

a. Minutes of ARAC Meeting 70 – 8 September 2026

The minutes of the ARAC meeting held on 8 September 2026 were approved for publication, subject to minor amendment, as proposed by Hugh McKeag and seconded by Leanne McCullough.

The Chair of ARAC gave an update on matters discussed and outlined his concerns about the Commission's current budget position and the fundamental risk that existed to the Commission's ability to deliver a series of further legislative changes currently being discussed.

AP6: Minutes of ARAC No 70 – 8 September 2026 to be published on the website.

b. Assurance Statement

The Chair of ARAC introduced the statement noting it included additional notes requested by the committee. Following discussion, Commissioners agreed to submit the statement subject to inclusion of a further note reflecting the Board's view that its statutory remit across basic functions cannot be met due to budget constraints, as proposed by Hugh McKeag and seconded by Alan Hunter.

AP7: Assurance statement to be amended and signed before submission to sponsor department.
AP8: Chair to raise budget concerns at the upcoming assurance meeting.

c. Review of Finance Procedures

The Finance and Administration Manager introduced the review of the procedures and highlighted a series of changes including adopting a standard template approach to all business cases within the Commission's delegated limit. Following discussion, the procedures were agreed as proposed by Leanne McCullough and seconded by Hugh McKeag.

AP9: Amended Finance procedures to be implemented.

d. 2026/27 Corporate Risk Register

The Chair of ARAC introduced the Corporate Risk Register and outlined the committee's consideration of proposed changes to three risks. Commissioners noted ARAC had undertaken a deep dive into risk three. Queries were addressed and following discussion the updated register was agreed by the Board as proposed by Hugh McKeag seconded by Alan Hunter.

AP10: Board agreed updated Corporate Risk Register 2025/26 to be implemented.

e. NIAO report to those charged with governance

The Board welcomed the report, which included a clean audit, and thanked the Corporate Services team for all their work during the year. Details of positive feedback from auditors on the transparency and cooperation they received were welcomed by Commissioners.

Nicola Fisher left the meeting at 11.10am.

Schedule 1 Decisions

f. Three Commissioners Committee

- 19 June 2026 – noted

7. Corporate Services Report

The Head of Corporate Services introduced their report and gave an update on the office relocation. Commissioners noted a new party was introduced into the draft Agreement for Lease and Lease Agreement recently received which introduced risks which staff were assessing with Departmental Solicitor's Office support. The outcome of a recent mid-year review of the annual budget projections was provided. This reflected updated assumptions on annual salary uplift and Charities (Amendments) Bill business case spend.

8. Charity Services Report

The Head of Charity Services introduced their report highlighting various casework progress, trends and details of high-profile cases which the Board noted. The Board noted that Patrick Sloan was successful in the recent Casework Manager recruitment and congratulated him on his new role.

The Head of Charity Services outlined the current approach to publication of decisions and following discussion, the Board agreed to discontinue publishing an archive of casework decisions and to amend the publication policy, as proposed by Hugh McKeag seconded by Alan Hunter.

The Board also agreed to a minor amendment to the Stakeholder Forum Terms of Reference, as proposed by Leanne McCullough and seconded by Alan Hunter.

AP11: Amend publication policy to be implemented.
AP12: Updated Stakeholder's Forum Terms of Reference to be implemented.

9. Compliance and Enquiries Report

The Head of Compliance and Enquiries introduced their report highlighting various Enquiries progress, trends and details of high-profile cases which the Board noted. Following discussion of planned Schedule 1 committees it was agreed to amend the procedure to issue the agenda with meeting papers, as proposed by Leanne McCullough and Patricia Kelly. The number of future meetings will also be reduced.

AP13: Updated Schedule 1 procedure to be implemented.

10. Legal Services Report

Patricia Kelly left the meeting at 11.40am.

The Head of Legal Services introduced their report noting progress, trends and details of various legal cases, which the Board noted. A number of queries were addressed in relation to ongoing litigation and complaints.

Patricia Kelly rejoined the meeting, and Leanne McCullough left the meeting at 11.50am.

The Head of Legal Services gave a further case update.

Leanne McCullough rejoined the meeting at 12.05pm.

11. Issues for next meeting

The Chair noted, in addition to committee business, the following items are likely to be included at the next meeting on 9 November 2026:

- Draft business plan 27-28
- Board effectiveness action plan
- Stakeholder Forum update
- PDP progress report
- Trustee remuneration
- Incorporations manual
- Enquiries manual changes including amended Schedule 1 procedures
- Delegation assurance checks
- Retention and disposal schedule
- HMRC speaker

12. AOB

None

Meeting ended at 12.10pm

Register of Outstanding Action Points					
Board Meeting and Action Point Number	**Date Raised**	**Agenda Item**	**Action**	**Owners**	**Status (target)**
128(1)	21/09/2026	1	Minutes of Board Meeting No 127, 22 June 2026 to be published on CCNI website.	Comms	**Complete**
128(2)	21/09/2026	5a	Evaluation and research strategy 2026-29 to be implemented.	HCS	Complete
128(3)	21/09/2026	5b	Updated internal evaluation guidance on registration and procedures to be implemented	HCS	Complete
128(4)	21/09/2026	5c	Updated Privacy Notice to be published	HLS	Complete
128(5)	21/09/2026	5d	Chair to raise the timing of cyclical reviews at the upcoming assurance meeting.	Chair	Complete
128(6)	21/09/2026	6a	Minutes of ARAC No 70 – 8 September 2026 to be published on the website.	Comms	Complete
128(7)	21/09/2026	6b	Assurance statement to be amended and signed before submission to sponsor department.	Chair	Complete
128(8)	21/09/2026	6b	Chair to raise budget concerns at the upcoming assurance meeting.	Chair	Complete
128(9)	21/09/2026	6c	Amended Finance procedures to be implemented.	FAM	Complete

128(10)	21/09/2026	6d	Board agreed updated Corporate Risk Register 2026/27 to be implemented.	HCorpS	Complete
128(11)	21/09/2026	8	Amended publication policy to be implemented.	HCS	Ongoing (Q3 26/27)
128(12)	21/09/2026	8	Updated Stakeholder Forum Terms of Reference to be implemented.	HCS	Complete
128(13)	21/09/2026	9	Updated Schedule 1 procedure to be implemented.	HoCE	Complete
127(8)	22/06/2026	5f	Amendments to be implemented in relevant manuals following updated DfC exemption regulations.	HCS	Onoing (Q3 26/27)
125(9)	23/03/2026	5h	Arrangements to be made for a Board 'Away day' in Quarter 2.	FAO	Ongoing (Q3 26/27)
125(16)	23/03/2026	7	Agreement to lease and lease agreement to be approved by correspondence and signed by the Chief Executive.	HCorpS	Ongoing (Q3 26/27)
125(18)	23/03/2026	8	Section 37 publications approach to be implemented.	HCS	Complete
123(5)	15/12/2025	5c	Records Management Policy and Retention Schedule to be updated in 2026/27.	HCorpS	Ongoing (Q3 26/27)
123(6)	15/12/2025	5d	Updated Registration manual to be implemented.	HCS	Ongoing (Q3 26/27)
115(10)	11/11/2024	6b	A review of hybrid working policy to be undertaken following office relocation.	HR Cttee	Ongoing (Q3 26/27)
104(2)	27/03/2023	3	Litigation to be progressed in line with legal advice.	Chair/CEx	Ongoing (26/27)