

**Minutes of Board Meeting No. 119 held on Monday 19 May 2025  
at Marlborough House, Craigavon.**

**Present:**

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

**In Attendance:**

Frances McCandless, Chief Executive  
Punam McGookin, Head of Charity Services  
Rossa Keown, Head of Compliance and Enquiries  
Aubrey McCrory, Head of Corporate Services  
David McGurk, Minutes  
Tanya Martin, Legal Advisor – Item 5f  
Ian Croskery, Finance & Admin Manager – Items 6b-j

**Apologies:**

The meeting commenced at 9.30am.

**1. Minutes of Board Meeting 118, 24 March 2025**

Following discussion, the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 24 March were agreed as a true and correct record and to be published on the website, as proposed by Hugh McKeag and seconded by Patricia Kelly. The Board noted the progress of the Action Points from the last meeting as highlighted by the Chief Executive.

**AP1: Minutes of Board Meeting No 118, 24 March 2025 to be published on CCNI website.**

**2. Conflicts of Interest**

Leanne McCullough declared a potential perceived conflict with a specific charity and the Chair agreed Leanne should leave the meeting for item 5f. The Chair also recognised Hugh McKeag had previously highlighted a potential perceived conflict relating to an organisation mentioned in papers for information.

**3. Chair's Business, Correspondence and Meetings**

The Chair highlighted a report by the facilitator of the recent strategic planning event held in Crumlin Road Gaol, and Commissioners welcomed the positive feedback. Correspondence from the Minister regarding open amendment clauses, the Assembly's Communities Committee regarding use of reserves by charities and plans for a twice-yearly meeting with the Deputy

Secretary were outlined. The Chair noted the Performance and Appraisal Committee will be held on 2 June 2025 to undertake the Chief Executive's annual performance review.

#### **4. Chief Executive's Report**

The Chief Executive highlighted several issues in her report including the updated annual budget position. This allowed budget for training, communications and engagement, with an additional temporary allocation to support concerns work.

An update was provided on sponsor department's drafting of legislation primarily to address Independent Review recommendations. Discussions around Section 167 have concluded the provision will be very challenging to implement

#### **5. Policies and Processes**

##### **a. Annual Report Text**

The Head of Corporate Services introduced the draft text, and a number of queries and suggestions were noted. The Board commended staff on the large amount of work achieved during 2024-25 as reported in the text. The Board agreed the draft text, subject to amendment, for submission to external audit as proposed by Aoife Hamilton and seconded by Hugh McKeag. A final draft will come to the June Board meeting.

**AP 2: Draft annual report text to be submitted to audit.**

**AP 3: Finalised annual report text to be included in June Board agenda.**

##### **b. Business Plan 2025-26 final draft**

Commissioners were briefed on changes to the plan since their December discussions, delivery assumptions and planned outputs. In relation to the concerns target it was noted the plan covered a transitional period when consideration would be given to changing the approach to Serious Incident Reporting and a broader organisational response to managing low risk concerns. Following discussion, the Board commended the Head of Corporate Services on drafting the plan, which was agreed subject to minor amendments for submission to sponsor department, as proposed by Hugh McKeag and seconded by Patricia Kelly.

**AP 4: Draft Business Plan 2025-26 to be submitted to sponsor department.**

##### **c. Communications - Social media options and 2025-26 Comms Planner**

The Chief Executive introduced the social media options paper and gave an overview of the Commission's social media presence and assessment of various platforms. A range of views were expressed about reputational risks, scale and nature of audience reach and plans to develop other digital communication channels this year. In light of concerns an immediate break was proposed from two existing social media channels. After further discussion of ethical and pragmatic considerations the Commission decided

on a majority vote to transition away from 'X' and 'Facebook' to other platforms within 8 months. Patricia Kelly, Leanne McCullough and Alan Hunter dissented, favouring an immediate exit.

The Chief Executive introduced the draft Comms Planner 2025-26 and queries about focusing on trustee communications in light of the previous decision were addressed. The draft Comms Planner was agreed, subject to minor amendment, as proposed by Kieran Donaghy and seconded by Aoife Hamilton.

**d. Board effectiveness action plan**

The Chief Executive introduced the action plan. Several further actions were agreed as completed and one was amended in light of the adoption of the Scheme of Delegation.

**AP 5: Board effectiveness action plan to be updated.**

**e. Update on scheme of delegation implementation**

The Head of Charity Services and Head of Compliance and Enquiries provided details of implementation noting work to update the Monitoring & Compliance manual, carry out assurance checks and registration decisions. In relation to Section 24 it was clarified that sign off would be by the functional head of service or the Chief Executive.

*Leanne McCullough left, and Tanya Martin joined the meeting at 11.45am.*

**f. Legal update**

The Legal Advisor gave an overview of updated advice and case progress since the last legal update in March 2025. It was agreed to make arrangements for a meeting of the Legal Advisory Group after the summer.

**AP 6: LAG meeting to be set up**

*Tanya Martin left, and Leanne McCullough rejoined the meeting at 11.55am.*

**g. Comms and engagement update**

The Board noted the update.

**h. Review of Hospitality Register**

The Board reviewed the past six months' entries in the hospitality register. The Chief Executive outlined advice from internal audit on minor items that did not need to be included going forward. The Board noted the policy would be brought to the Board in June.

**i. Stakeholder Forum update**

The Head of Charity Services introduced the update noting the next meeting would be in June 2025.

**j. Independent Counsel Action Plan**

The Board noted all actions have been completed and commended staff on the amount of work that has gone into achieving this.

## 6. Reports from Committees

### **Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

#### **a. Minutes of meeting No 64 – 11 March 2025**

Following discussion, the minutes of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) meeting held on 11 March 2025 were approved for publication, as proposed by Gerard McCurdy and seconded by Leanne McCullough.

#### **AP 7: Minutes of ARAC meeting No 64 – 11 March 2025 to be published on the website.**

*The Finance and Admin Manager joined the meeting at 12.00pm*

#### **b. Draft Accounts 2023-24**

The Chair welcomed Ian Croskery, Finance and Admin Manager, to the meeting. The ARAC chair outlined the committee's consideration of the accounts preparation. Several queries were addressed, and the Board thanked the Finance and Admin Manager and staff for their work on the draft accounts which were agreed for submission to external audit, as proposed by Alan Hunter and seconded by Gerard McCurdy.

#### **AP 8: Draft accounts to be submitted for external audit.**

#### **c. Draft Governance Statement**

The Chief Executive introduced the draft Governance Statement which reflected suggestions from ARAC. These were agreed by the Board as proposed by Alan Hunter and seconded by Leanne McCullough.

#### **AP 9: Draft governance statement to be submitted for external audit.**

#### **d. Review of the Risk Management Policy and Assurance framework**

The Chair of ARAC introduced the paper and outlined plans to revise the risk register format around event risks in the coming year. The risk appetites and assurance checklist were agreed, subject to minor amendment as proposed by Leanne McCullough and seconded by Kieran Donaghy.

#### **e. Draft 2025-26 Corporate Risk Register & Action plan**

The Chair of ARAC introduced the draft register noting the updated risks related to delivery of the 2025-26 business plan. Following discussion, it was agreed to increase risk 6 to a high risk and the Board agreed to adopt the new register, as proposed by Hugh McKeag and seconded by Alan Hunter.

The Board asked ARAC to consider merging risks 1 and 2 at its next meeting.

#### **AP 10: ARAC to look at merging risk 1 and 2.**

#### **f. ARAC schedule**

The Board agreed the revised schedule as proposed by Kieran Donaghy and seconded by Hugh McKeag.

### **g. ARAC Annual Report**

The Chair of ARAC introduced the annual report and thanked staff for their assistance in its preparation, noting the format followed recently released Northern Ireland Audit Office guidance. The Committee's assessment of the organisation's approach to governance was outlined and the Board noted the committee's assurances on governance.

### **h. Internal Audit second assignment 2024-25**

The Board noted the second assignment report, which included a satisfactory rating and one priority three recommendation.

### **i. Internal Audit Annual Report & Opinion 2024/25**

The Chair of ARAC introduced the report noting the overall satisfactory assurance for the year with only minor recommendations.

*The Finance and Admin Manager left the meeting at 12.30pm*

### **Schedule 1 Decisions**

#### **j. Three Commissioners Committee**

- 21 March 2025 Noted

#### **k. Sole Commissioner Registration Decisions**

- 18 April 2025 Noted

The Board accepted plans starting in September to report on decision making on a quarterly basis going forward.

### **AP 11: Quarter 1 report on delegated decisions to be brought to September board meeting.**

### **7. Corporate Services Report**

The Head of Corporate Services introduced their report highlighting various strategic issues, challenges and outlined business plan stats and trends at year end which the Board noted.

### **8. Charity Services Report**

The Head of Charity Services introduced their report noting various casework progress, trends and details of high-profile cases. To enable preparatory work to commence on manuals the Board agreed high-level approaches to implement a registration threshold covering registration and de-registration, as proposed by Aoife Hamilton and seconded by Patricia Kelly.

Following discussion of a previous court direction relating to Section 54 of the Charities Act (NI) 2008 it was agreed to check with the Courts Office on its operation.

### **AP 12: Check with court office re previous direction relating to Section 54 of the Charities Act (NI) 2008.**

## **10. Compliance and Enquiries Report**

The Head of Compliance and Enquiries introduced their report and gave an update on current high-profile concerns. Information was provided about matters investigated as part of a closed concern which were now before the courts. Following discussion, the Board agreed to allow three months for submission of final accounts following submission of charity closure to enable display of information on the register, as proposed by Aoife Hamilton and seconded by Kieran Donaghy.

## **11. Issues for next meeting**

The Chair noted the following items are likely to be included at the next meeting on 23 June 2025:

- Annual review of BOF and Code of Conduct, Standing Orders
  - CEx performance objectives
  - Quarterly assessment of meetings
  - Annual progress report to ECNI
  - Final annual report text
  - Trustee Anonymity guidance
- Gifts and Hospitality policy

## **12. AOB**

The Chair thanked Staff and Commissioners for all their help in 2024-25. He noted it was a very challenging year, and a lot had been achieved.

Meeting ended at 1.00pm

### Register of Outstanding Action Points

<b>Board Meeting and Action Point Number</b>	<b>Date Raised</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Owners</b>	<b>Status (target)</b>
119(1)	19/05/2025	1	Minutes of Board Meeting No 118, 24 March 2025 to be published on CCNI website.	Comms	Complete
119(2)	19/05/2025	5a	Draft annual report text to be submitted to audit.	CEx	Complete
119(3)	19/05/2025	5a	Finalised annual report text to be included in June Board agenda.	HCorpS	Complete
119(4)	19/05/2025	5b	Draft Business Plan 2025-26 to be submitted to sponsor department.	HCorpS	Complete
119(5)	19/05/2025	5d	Board effectiveness action plan to be updated.	CEx	Complete
119(6)	19/05/2025	5f	LAG meeting to be set up.	HCS	Ongoing (Q1 25/26)
119(7)	19/05/2025	6a	Minutes of ARAC meeting No 64 – 11 March 2025 to be published on the website.	Comms	Complete
119(8)	19/05/2025	6b	Draft accounts to be submitted for external audit.	HCorpS	Complete
119(9)	19/05/2025	6c	Draft governance statement to be submitted for external audit.	HCorpS	Complete
119(10)	19/05/2025	6e	ARAC to look at merging risk 1 and 2 of Corporate Risk Register.	HCorpS	Ongoing (Q2 25/26)
119(11)	19/05/2025	6l	Quarter 1 report on delegated decisions to be brought to September board meeting.	HCS	Ongoing (Q2 25/26)
119(12)	19/05/2025	8	Check with court office re previous direction relating to Section 54 of the Charities Act (NI) 2008.	HCS	Ongoing (Q1 25/26)
118(5)	24/03/2025	5a	Amended manuals and related SIG to be implemented.	HCS	Ongoing (Q2 25/26)

118(6)	24/03/2025	5a	Scheme of Delegation assurance checks to be implemented.	HCS	Ongoing (Q2 25/26)
118(11)	24/03/2025	5c	Updated enquiries manual v10 to be implemented	HoCE	Complete
117(4)	03/02/2025	5d	Additional proportionate process to be put in place to identify and address any open amendment clauses relating to registered charities.	HCS	Ongoing (Q2 25/26)
116(6)	16/12/2024	5c	Retention schedule to be fully updated and brought to the February board meeting.	HCorpS	Ongoing (Q3 25/26)
116(9)	16/12/2024	6c	Staff to be briefed and updated information security to be implemented.	HCorpS	Ongoing (Q2 25/26)
115(3)	11/11/2024	5a	Commission to notify office holder representative bodies of any potential to intervene in Charity Tribunal reference.	CEx	Ongoing (Q2 25/26)
115(8)	11/11/2024	5f	Explore sending newsletter to charity contact emails and discuss options for developing regular communication with the sector with the Stakeholder Forum.	Comms Officer	Ongoing (Q2 25/26)
115(10)	11/11/2024	6b	A review of hybrid working policy to be undertaken following office relocation.	HR Cttee	Ongoing (Q4 25/26)
115(11)	11/11/2024	9	Procurement process for online forms to be progressed.	HCorpS	Ongoing (Q2 25/26)
112(7)	20/05/2024	5b	Organisational arrangements for ensuring data opt out to be confirmed.	HCS	Ongoing (Q2-25/26)
112(10)	20/05/2024	5d	Consideration to be given to changing committee roles and structures following scheme of delegation.	CEx	Ongoing (Q3-25/26)
104(2)	27/03/2023	3	Litigation to be progressed in line with legal advice.	Chair/CE x	Ongoing (Q2-25/26)

102 (10)	19/12/2022	5f	Action plan including disposal schedule to be implemented.	HCorpS	Underway (Q4-24/25)
98 (7)	16/05/2022	5e	Training in complaint handling and dealing with trauma to be arranged.	CEx/ HCorpS	Trauma element Complete Complaint handling (Q3 25-26)
94 (3)	15/11/21	5a	Corporate Social Responsibility policy to be developed as part of the next strategic planning process.	HCorpS	Ongoing (Q4 25/26)