

**Minutes of Board Meeting No. 120 held on Monday 23 June 2025
at Marlborough House, Craigavon.**

Present:

Gerard McCurdy, Chief Commissioner (Chair)
Aoife Hamilton, Deputy Chief 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
Roisin Gargan, Acting Casework Manager – Item 5e
Ian Croskery, Finance & Admin Manager – Items 6c

Apologies:

Alan Hunter, Charity Commissioner

The meeting commenced at 9.30am.

1. Minutes of Board Meeting 119, 19 May 2025

Following discussion, the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 19 May 2025 were agreed as a true and correct record and to be published on the website, as proposed by Kieran Donaghy and seconded by Leanne McCullough. 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 119, 19 May 2025 to be published on CCNI website.

2. Conflicts of Interest

None.

3. Chair's Business, Correspondence and Meetings

The Chair outlined details of a recent meeting of sponsor department's Arms-Length Bodies Senior Leadership Group which he and the Chief Executive attended. Commissioners noted progress of Commissioner appraisals and details of the Chief Executive's annual performance review undertaken by the Performance Appraisal Committee on 2 June 2025. Following discussion plans were noted to hold a session later in the year to discuss risk-based decision making and operating the scheme of delegation for matters reserved for Commissioner decision making.

4. Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive introduced her report giving an update on recent litigation and correspondence received. Commissioners noted a meeting had taken place with Ray Caldwell, the new Grade 5 in sponsor team.

5. Policies and Processes

a. Strategic plan draft for consultation

Commissioners discussed the draft text and timings, and a number of queries were addressed and suggestions outlined. Subject to minor amendment, the Board agreed the key parts of the draft Strategic Plan 2026-29, the easy read version and equality assessment for consultation, as proposed by Aoife Hamilton and seconded by Patricia Kelly.

AP2: Draft strategic plan consultation process to be progressed.

b. Annual review of Board Operating Framework, Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and Annual Agenda

The Chief Executive introduced the paper and the four attached appendices. A number of queries were addressed and, following discussion, the Board agreed the documents, subject to minor amendment, as proposed by Leanne McCullough and seconded by Kieran Donaghy.

AP 3: Board Operating Framework, Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and Annual Agenda documents to be finalised and implemented.

Ian Croskery (Finance and Admin Manager) joined the meeting at 10.15am

c. Final annual report and accounts

The Chair noted the additions and amendments to the draft 2024-25 Annual Report and Accounts considered by the Board in May, which arose from external audit work. The Finance and Admin Manager addressed several queries and Commissioners noted the clean audit result. Following discussion, the 2024-25 Annual Report and Accounts were agreed, subject to minor amendment, as proposed by Hugh McKeag and seconded by Aoife Hamilton. The Board noted the Chair and Chief Executive would sign a 'clean' copy for submission to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for certification, after which the document would be sent to sponsor team for laying in the Assembly in early July.

The Board expressed thanks to Ian Croskery for all his work over the past two years and to all the Finance team on a clean audit.

AP4: Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive to sign a 'clean' copy of the finalised annual report and accounts for submission to NIAO for certification.

AP5: Certified annual report and accounts to be submitted to sponsor team for laying in the Assembly.

Ian Croskery (Finance and Admin Manager) left the meeting at 10.25am

d. Annual progress report to Equality Commission NI

The Board noted the contents of the report and a series of queries were addressed. The Board agreed to adopt the report, subject to minor amendment, for submission to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, as proposed by Kieran Donaghy and seconded by Aoife Hamilton.

AP6: Amended annual progress report to be submitted to Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Roisin Gargan (Acting Casework Manager) joined the meeting at 10.35am

e. Trustee Anonymity and Withholding Details Internal Guidance

Roisin Gargan introduced the paper and the revised Specific Internal Guidance, highlighting various amendments which the Board noted. A number of queries were answered regarding decision making and following discussion the internal guidance was adopted, subject to minor amendment, as proposed by Leanne McCullough and seconded by Aoife Hamilton.

AP7: Revised Trustee Anonymity and Withholding Details Specific Internal Guidance to be implemented.

Roisin Gargan (Acting Casework Manager) left the meeting at 10.45am

f. Chief Executive performance objectives

The Board noted the objectives as agreed by the Performance and Appraisal Committee.

6. Reports from Committees

ARAC

a. Minutes of meeting No 65 – 13 May 2025

Following discussion, the minutes of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) meeting held on 13 May 2025 were approved for publication, as proposed by Kieran Donaghy and seconded by Aoife Hamilton.

AP 8: Minutes of ARAC meeting No 65 – 13 May 2025 to be published on the website.

Schedule 1 Decisions

b. Three Commissioners Committee

- 16 May 2025 Noted

7. Corporate Services Report

The Head of Corporate Services introduced their report highlighting various strategic issues and challenges. An update on plans to pilot use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) software on specific areas of Commission work was provided. Following discussion, the Board approved an initial policy covering piloting the use of AI and to pursue participation in a Strategic Investment Board initiative and any DfC pilot, as proposed by Aoife Hamilton and seconded by Hugh McKeag.

Details of a recent development in the office relocation project were outlined and, following discussion, the Board agreed to pursue a substitute for the preferred option, as proposed by Hugh McKeag and seconded by Leanne McCullough. It was also agreed to raise the rating of the relocation risk in the corporate risk register to extreme, as proposed by Hugh McKeag and seconded by Kieran Donaghy.

The Chair of the Human Resources (HR) committee welcomed key personnel performance indicators in the report and noted these were in line with the positive staff feedback across the committee's HR dashboard.

AP9: AI Pilot Policy to be implemented.

AP10: Commission to seek to participate in SIB AI Pilot and any DfC pilot.

AP11: Relocation Risk to be updated to extreme in the Corporate Risk Register.

8. Charity Services Report

The Head of Charity Services introduced their report noting various casework progress, trends and details of high-profile cases. Following discussion, the Board agreed, subject to minor amendment, a proposed change to the Stakeholder Forum Terms of Reference, as proposed by Aoife Hamilton and seconded by Kieran Donaghy.

AP12: Amended Stakeholder Forum Terms of Reference to be implemented.

9. Compliance and Enquiries Report

The Head of Compliance and Enquiries introduced their report and gave an update on current high-profile concerns which the Board noted. The Board recognised improvement in filing defaulters following recent work by staff. Commissioners discussed their risk appetite when dealing with concerns over the past quarter and noted more frequent use of regulatory guidance.

10. Issues for next meeting

The Chair noted the following items are likely to be included at the next meeting on 22 September 2025:

- MSFM compliance review
- Legal update
- Incorporations manual
- Review of Gifts & Hospitality policy
- Report on delegated decisions made
- Possibly new Lease for agreement
- Possibly Threshold regulations

11. AOB

Meeting ended at 12.15pm

Register of Outstanding Action Points

Board Meeting and Action Point Number	Date Raised	Agenda Item	Action	Owners	Status (target)
120(1)	23/06/2025	1	Minutes of Board Meeting No 119, 19 May 2025 to be published on CCNI website.	Comms	Complete
120(2)	23/06/2025	5a	Draft strategic plan consultation process to be progressed.	HCorpS	Ongoing (Q2 25/26)
120(3)	23/06/2025	5b	Board Operating Framework, Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and Annual Agenda documents to be finalised and implemented.	CEx	Complete
120(4)	23/06/2025	5c	Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive to sign a 'clean' copy of the finalised annual report and accounts for submission to NIAO for certification.	CEx	Complete
120(5)	23/06/2025	5c	Certified annual report and accounts to be submitted to sponsor team for laying in the Assembly.	F&AM	Complete
120(6)	23/06/2025	5d	Amended annual progress report to be submitted to Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.	P&RM	Complete
120(7)	23/06/2025	5e	Revised Trustee Anonymity and Withholding Details Specific Internal Guidance to be implemented.	HCS	Complete
120(8)	23/06/2025	6a	Minutes of ARAC meeting No 65 – 13 May 2025 to be published on the website.	Comms	Complete
120(9)	23/06/2025	7	AI Pilot Policy to be implemented	HCorpS	Ongoing (Q4 25/26)
120(10)	23/06/2025	7	Commission to seek to participate in SIB and DfC AI Pilots.	HCorpS	Ongoing (Q2 25/26)

120(11)	23/06/2025	7	Relocation Risk to be updated to extreme in the Corporate Risk Register.	HCorpS	Complete
120(12)	23/06/2025	8	Amended Stakeholder Forum Terms of Reference to be implemented.	HCS	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(7)	19/05/2025	6a	Minutes of ARAC meeting No 64 – 11 March 2025 to be published on the website.	Comms	Complete
119(10)	19/05/2025	6e	ARAC to look at merging risk 1 and 2 of Corporate Risk Register.	HCorpS	Complete
119(11)	19/05/2025	6l	Quarter 1 report on delegated decisions to be brought to September board meeting.	HCS	Complete
119(12)	19/05/2025	8	Check with court office re previous direction relating to Section 54 of the Charities Act (NI) 2008.	HCS	Complete
118(5)	24/03/2025	5a	Amended manuals and related SIG to be implemented.	HCS	Ongoing (Q1 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 (Q1 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(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 (Q1 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.	HoCorpS	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)