

Version	Author	Date approved
V4.0	PDM	23.06.2025



Terms of Reference

Name of the forum

The Charity Commission Stakeholder Engagement Forum.

1. Summary

The Charity Commission Stakeholder Engagement Forum (the forum) is an important avenue through which the charity sector can engage directly with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (the Commission). The forum will enable the Commission to regularly communicate with a representative group of charity stakeholders to ensure the views of the sector are considered in the development of the Commission's work. It will provide a regular opportunity for joint discussion of issues and priorities, related to charity regulation, with a wide cross-section of charities. By providing the Commission with structured feedback from a range of charity perspectives the forum will help to identify and address gaps in our knowledge, increase our understanding of the challenges facing the sector, and ensure the views of charities are considered in how regulation is administered.

2. Context & Purpose

The vision of the Commission is that its work contributes to Northern Ireland having a dynamic and well-governed charities sector in which the public can have trust and confidence. Establishing the forum builds on the Commission's engagement with ad-hoc groups of critical friends and key partners on specific issues. The forum will enable the Commission to have a more dynamic and ongoing way of achieving an effective dialogue with charity stakeholders. The forum is not a strategic policy forum, but is primarily a practical, working forum, and engagement mechanism by which the Commission can receive feedback on its approach to communication, guidance and materials. The Commission will invite the

forum to comment on matters of importance to the sector and to raise topics with the Commission. The Commission also seeks the views of forum members on strategic elements its work, for example, the strategic plan.

The forum will be owned by its membership with the shared intention of helping charities understand and comply with their duties arising from charity regulation and help inform the Commission about issues within the sector concerning the implementation of charity regulation.

Given its diverse membership the forum will not communicate as a body with the Department for Communities, although members will be free to do so on behalf of their own organisations.

The [Commission's corporate values](#) of independence, accountability, proportionality, impartiality, transparency and consistency underpin the way we undertake our work as a regulator, including how we will engage with the forum.

3. Membership

The forum will be made up of no less than ten and no more than 25 representatives of the charity sector. We will strive to create a forum which is a balanced, diverse, cross section of the sector in terms of size, income, location and beneficiaries. The forum will also include professional advisors of charities, including accountants, legal representatives and representatives from funding bodies. Only one person from any charity, or organisation, can be represented on the forum. With the exception of the Chairperson, whose charity may have a separate seat on the forum.

Any member who fails to attend three meetings or participate in the work of the forum in a year will be at risk of forfeiting their place. A member will be alerted to this condition when they have not attended two meetings.

To minimise the risk of disruption to the operation of the forum, appointment as a member may require signing and committing to a Code of Conduct. Once appointed members will be required to disclose actual or perceived conflicts of interests to the Chairperson/Commission support staff as soon as they arise.

Each member will be appointed for three years; if during this period they have to step down their charity will be able to nominate a replacement from their charity. If they are unable to nominate a replacement, an

umbrella body most relevant to their part of the sector will be asked to nominate a replacement.

Once appointed a member's term on the forum can be renewed for up to six years.

4. Roles & Responsibilities

4.1 The forum will have an independent Chairperson. The role of the Chairperson will be to ensure that the forum operates effectively to meet its purpose.

- Be an advocate and champion for the initiative.
- Ensuring meetings run smoothly and all members can participate.

The Chairperson will meet with the Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive of the Commission at least annually, or at any time to discuss concerns or issues which may have arisen.

4.1a The forum will have an independent Vice Chairperson. The role of the Vice Chair will be to act in the role of the Chairperson, when the Chair is not available. They will help and support the Chairperson and forum by:

- Participating in the preparation and follow up for the forum meetings.
- Taking the lead of sub-groups if appropriate.
- Deputising for the Chairperson when required.

The Vice Chair will be elected by the membership of the forum every three years. The role of Vice Chair does not imply succession as Chairperson, when the Chairperson's term ends.

4.2 The role of the members is to:

- Represent views from the perspective of charities in their part of the sector, for example, a smaller charity with no staff and run by volunteers.
- Provide input and participation into agenda items and discussions.
- Disseminate information to their charity, when it is appropriate to do so.

4.3 The role of Commission staff is to:

- Provide secretarial support to the forum by calling and supporting meetings.
- Ensure concerns and potential conflicts are appropriately addressed and, where possible, resolved.

5. Meetings

Meetings will be held four times per year and, where possible, will include one face to face meeting. Agenda items will be compiled by the secretary to the forum from suggestions from both the Commission and the forum's members. AOB items should normally be suggested a week in advance of each meeting.

To enable the meetings to be constructive and open, they will be conducted according to the Chatham House rule. This rule is used around the world to encourage inclusive and open dialogue in meetings. It helps create a trusted environment in which to understand and resolve complex problems. When used effectively, the Chatham House rule helps to bring people together, break down barriers, generate ideas and agree solutions. Its guiding spirit is: share the information you receive, but do not reveal the identity of who said it, or the organisation they represent.

For this reason, detailed meeting minutes will not be taken. Neither the Commission nor any members will make a recording or use digital programmes for note taking, unless for reasons relating to a disability. Key discussion and action points will be noted by the support staff. The Chairperson will review and agree the summary before distribution.

Each meeting will not last any longer than 2 hours and 30 minutes and will include a comfort break if required.

6. Resources

- The meetings will be held on an online platform such as Zoom. Meetings can be held virtually or in person as circumstances demand or agreed from time to time by the membership.
- Two of the four meetings may be held in person, and the Chairperson will strive to have at least one meeting face to face per year. The Commission will pay travel expenses within Northern Ireland to travel to these meetings.
- When meetings are held in person, the Commission will cover the costs of the venue and any light refreshments.

7. Review

A review of the effectiveness and viability of the forum including the ToR will be carried out by the Commission with the members of the forum at the end of every three year term. Unless the need arises to review sooner.