

**Minutes of Board Meeting No. 121 held on Monday 22 September 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  
Alan Hunter, Charity Commissioner  
Patricia Kelly, Legal Commissioner  
Caron Alexander, Independent Member

**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, Finance & Admin Officer  
Colleen Gallagher, Legal Advisor – Item 5c

**Apologies:**

None

The meeting commenced at 9.30am.

**1. Minutes of Board Meeting 120, 23 June 2025**

Following discussion, the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 23 June 2025 were agreed as a true and correct record and to be published on the website, as proposed by Aoife Hamilton and seconded by Patricia Kelly. The Board noted the progress of the Action Points from the last meeting as highlighted by the Chief Executive and it was agreed to mark action point 112(10) as complete.

**AP1: Minutes of Board Meeting No 120, 23 June 2025 to be published on CCNI website.**

**2. Conflicts of Interest**

None.

**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). Commissioners agreed to discuss common points from recent appraisals at a future meeting and noted the quarterly assurance questionnaire included in the resources section of the meeting pack.

**AP2: Commissioners to discuss common points from recent appraisals at a future meeting.**

**4. Chief Executive's Report**

The Chief Executive introduced her report and give an update on current issues including timings for aspects of the Threshold regulations and the Department for Communities (DfC) consultation on Section 167. A briefing was provided on the recent UK and Ireland charity regulators' meeting, which senior management attended.

**5. Policies and Processes**

**a. Partnership Agreement**

The Chief Executive introduced the agreement and its intention to replace the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM). The Board noted it began discussing an agreement with DfC in 2019, and while the document was largely what was anticipated there were a number of issues in relation to wording and DfC's commitment to resource the Commission. Following discussion, it was agreed to send the agreement back to enable a further conversation to address issues identified by the Board, as proposed by Leanne McCullough and seconded by Hugh McKeag.

**AP3: Further conversation with DfC on wording of draft partnership agreement.**

**b. Review of MSFM**

The Chief Executive introduced the paper and the Board noted there were no non-compliance issues. The Board noted the MSFM would continue until the Partnership agreement was agreed.

*Colleen Gallagher (Legal Advisor) joined the meeting at 10.20am*

*Leanne McCullough left the meeting at 10.20am*

**c. Legal update**

The Legal Advisor gave a high-level overview of issues and cases in progress since the last legal update in May 2025. The information was provided on a legally privileged and confidential basis and was duly noted by the Board.

*Leanne McCullough rejoined the meeting at 10.25am*

On behalf of the Board the Chair thanked Colleen Gallagher for all her work over the years and wished her well in the future in her new role.

*Colleen Gallagher (Legal Advisor) left the meeting at 10.40am*

**d. Overview of delegated decision report**

The Board noted the contents of the report and details of progress on manual changes and summary of all staff decision making from the period 1 May 2025 to 1 September 2025. The Board was content to continue receiving updates on a quarterly basis.

**e. Policy Development Plan & progress report**

The Head of Charity Services introduced the progress report and implementation of the Policy Development Plan from the start of April to present. Following a number of queries the Board welcomed the report.

**f. Stakeholder forum update**

The Deputy Chief Commissioner introduced the update from the last Stakeholder Forum held on 11 June 2025 to present. The Board noted the high level of engagement with members, for example, the recent facilitated feedback on enquiries communications. The outcome of a review of the forum last year and steps to expand membership to include representatives of legal and accountancy professions were welcomed.

Comfort break 11.05 to 11.10 am.

**6. Reports from Committees**

**ARAC**

Hugh McKeag, Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) chair gave an overview of the most recent committee and thanked Alan Hunter for chairing part way through the meeting.

**a. Minutes of meeting No 66 – 27 August 2025**

Following discussion, the minutes of the ARAC meeting held on 27 August 2025 were approved for publication, as proposed by Alan Hunter and seconded by Leanne McCullough.

**AP 4: Minutes of ARAC meeting No 66 – 27 August 2025 to be published on the website.**

**b. 2025/26 Corporate Risk Register & Action Plan**

The Chair of ARAC introduced the Corporate Risk Register and outlined the committee's consideration of proposed changes and details of a deep dive into the office accommodation risk. A number of queries were addressed and following discussion the register was agreed by the Board as proposed by Hugh McKeag seconded by Alan Hunter.

**AP5: Board agreed Corporate Risk Register 2025/26 to be implemented.**

**c. Review of Finance Procedures**

The Chair of ARAC noted the proposed changes which arose from staff and the committee suggestions. Following discussion, the procedures were agreed, subject to minor amendment, by the Board as proposed by Kieran Donaghy and seconded by Aoife Hamilton. It was agreed the procedure would be updated by staff to refer to the Partnership Agreement when this was in place instead of the existing MSFM.

**AP6: Amended Finance procedures to be implemented.**

**d. Review of Gifts & Hospitality policy**

The Chair of ARAC introduced the cover paper and proposed changes which the cover paper noted arose from Internal Audit's last assignment. Following discussion, the changes recommended by ARAC were agreed by the Board as proposed by Hugh McKeag and seconded by Kieran Donaghy.

**AP7: Updated Gifts & Hospitality policy to be implemented.**

**e. NIAO report to those charged with governance**

The Board report welcomed the clean audit and thanked the Corporate Services team for all their work during the year and also engagement with Northern Ireland Audit Office following the June Board meeting.

**f. Assurance Statement**

The Chief Executive introduced the assurance statement which has been agreed by ARAC. Following discussion, the assurance statement was agreed by the Board for submission to DfC as proposed by Hugh McKeag seconded by Alan Hunter.

**AP8: Signed assurance statement to be submitted to DfC.**

**HR Committee**

Kieran Donaghy, Human Resources (HR) committee chair gave an overview of the most recent committee meeting and highlighted the results of benchmarking staff survey results with other charity regulators.

**g. Minutes of meeting No 44 – 3 September 2025**

Following discussion, the minutes of the HR Committee meeting held on 3 September 2025 were approved for publication, as proposed by Aoife Hamilton and seconded by Hugh McKeag.

**AP 9: Minutes of HR Committee meeting No 44 – 3 September 2025 to be published on the website.**

**h. 2023-26 People Strategy and Action Plan update**

The Chair of the HR Committee introduced the strategy and plan which was updated to reflect results of the 2025 staff survey and HR Committee comments and suggestions. Following discussion, the updated 2023-26 People Strategy and Action Plan was agreed, subject to minor amendment, as proposed by Patricia Kelly and seconded by Kieran Donaghy.

**Schedule 1 Decisions**

**i. Three Commissioners Committee**

- 13 June 2025 Noted

**j. Legal Advisory Group**

Patricia Kelly, Chair of Legal Advisory Group (LAG) gave an overview of the meeting held on 8 September 2025 which the Board noted.

## **7. Corporate Services Report**

The Head of Corporate Services introduced their report highlighting various strategic issues and challenges. Details of a recent development in the office relocation project were outlined and, following discussion, the Board agreed to the extension of the lease at Marlborough House until the end of March 2025, with the Chief Executive to sign a side letter to this effect, as proposed by Hugh McKeag and seconded by Leanne McCullough. A series of queries about funding the extension and timing of the relocation were addressed.

Following discussion, the Board confirmed the 2025-26 Business Plan engagement target was 40 events during the year as proposed by Patricia Kelly and seconded by Kieran Donaghy.

The Board noted the communications update and other details in the update.

**AP10: CEx to sign a side letter confirming extension to lease at Marlborough House to the end of March 2025.**

**AP11: HCorpS to amend the engagement target in the 2025-26 Business Plan Executive Summary and update DfC.**

## **8. Charity Services Report**

The Head of Charity Services introduced their report noting various casework progress, trends and details of high-profile cases. The Board noted plans to enable the operation of a registration threshold and minor administrative changes to manuals to reflect delegation which the Chief Executive had signed off. Arrangements to mitigate staff turnover in the legal team were discussed.

## **9. Compliance and Enquiries Report**

The Head of Compliance and Enquiries introduced their report and gave an update on current high-profile concerns. The Board noted as a result of the defaulters initiative, a further £2.5 million was now being made transparent in the charity register. Commissioners congratulated the Head of Compliance and Enquiries on the development of a new charity accounting Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP). Plans to redesign enquiries processes were also noted.

## **10. Issues for next meeting**

The Chair noted the following items are likely to be included at the next meeting on 10 November 2025:

- Comms and engagement update
- Review hospitality register
- Board effectiveness action plan
- Research strategy update
- Strategic plan consultation report
- Draft business plan overview
- Stakeholder forum update
- Potentially Heads of Terms for Lease
- Implementation of scheme of delegation update
- Possibly Threshold regulations
- CRAT (Enquiries risk assessment) demo

**11. AOB**  
None.

Meeting ended at 12.45pm

### 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>
121(1)	22/09/2025	1	Minutes of Board Meeting No 120, 23 June 2025 to be published on CCNI website.	Comms	Complete
121(2)	22/09/2025	3	Commissioners to discuss common points from recent appraisals at a future meeting.	Commissioners	Ongoing (Q3 25/26)
121(3)	22/09/2025	5a	Further conversation with DfC on wording of draft partnership agreement.	CEx	Complete
121(4)	22/09/2025	6a	Minutes of ARAC meeting No 66 – 27 August 2025 to be published on the website.	Comms	Complete
121(5)	22/09/2025	6b	Board agreed Corporate Risk Register 2025/26 to be implemented.	HCorpS	Complete
121(6)	22/09/2025	6c	Updated Finance procedures to be implemented.	HCorpS	Complete
121(7)	22/09/2025	6d	Updated Gifts & Hospitality policy to be implemented.	HCorpS	Complete
121(8)	22/09/2025	6f	Assurance statement to be submitted to DfC.	CEx	Complete
121(9)	22/09/2025	6g	Minutes of HR Committee meeting No 44 – 3 September 2025 to be published on the website.	Comms	Complete

121(10)	22/09/2025	7	CEx to sign a side letter confirming extension to lease at Marlborough House to the end of March 2025.	CEx	Complete
121(11)	22/09/2025	7	HCorpS to amend the engagement target in the 2025-26 Business Plan Executive Summary and update DfC.	HCorpS	Complete
120(2)	23/06/2025	5a	Draft strategic plan consultation process to be progressed.	HCorpS	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 (Q3 25/26)
118(5)	24/03/2025	5a	Amended manuals and related SIG to be implemented.	HCS	Ongoing (Q3 25/26)
118(6)	24/03/2025	5a	Scheme of Delegation assurance checks to be implemented.	HCS	Ongoing (Q3 25/26)
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 (Q3 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 (Q3 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 (Q3 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	Complete
112(7)	20/05/2024	5b	Organisational arrangements for ensuring data opt out to be confirmed.	HCS	Complete
104(2)	27/03/2023	3	Litigation to be progressed in line with legal advice.	Chair/CE x	Ongoing (32- 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)