

**CONFIRMED MINUTES  
MEETING OF BOARD**

**Friday 16 June 2023  
Cultra Manor, Ulster Folk Museum & Microsoft Teams**

**Members Present:**

Ms Charlotte Jess – Vice-Chair  
Ms Deirdre Bryce – via Teams  
Mr William Duddy  
Mr William McMullan  
Dr Robert Whan

**In Attendance**

Kathryn Thomson, Chief Executive (CEO)  
Colin Catney, Chief Operating Officer (COO)  
Ciarán Lavelle, Head of Collections Services (HCS) – item 8.1  
Michelle Ashmore, Secretariat

**1. Welcome & Apologies**

The Vice-Chair formally welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received:  
William Blair, Director of Collections

**2. Conflicts of Interest**

The Vice-Chair ascertained there were no conflicts of interest in relation to the business as set out on the agenda.

**3. Approval of Minutes**

**3.1 Minutes of Board Meeting held on 24 March 2023 and Special Board Meeting held on 5 May 2023**

Members approved the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 24 March 2023 and Special Board Meeting held on 5 May 2023.

Proposed by: Mr McMullan  
Seconded by: Mr Duddy

**4. Matters Arising**

**4.1 Update on Actions from the previous meeting held on 24 March 2023**

The CEO advised that actions from the meeting held on 24 March 2023 have been completed.

## **5. Business of the Chairman**

### **5.1 Board Work Plan**

The Board noted the Work Plan.

### **5.2 Board Self-Assessment 2022/23**

It was noted that the self-assessment contained some scores and ill-natured comments which do not reflect the views of the current Board or the Executive. The Vice-Chair advised that the Board had reviewed the Self-Assessment for 2022-23 in a private pre-meet to agree scores and to also record an action plan.

### **5.3 Election of Vice-Chairman**

The Vice-Chair advised that in line with the procedure at this time of year nominations are usually sought for Vice-Chairman. Given that the Board is currently in transition the Board agreed to maintain the status quo until such times as a new Chair is appointed.

### **5.3 Member Insights and Intelligence**

Dr Whan advised he had attended Bluegrass Omagh and reflected on a very positive engagement with stakeholders. Mr Duddy advised he also attended Bluegrass Omagh and the feedback received was overwhelmingly positive. He commended the team involved in the planning of it.

The Vice-Chair advised she had attended the DfC/ALB Senior Leaders Forum Conference hosted by the Permanent Secretary.

The Vice-Chair also referenced the increasing use of AI tools and technologies in the field of digital marketing, amongst others, to automate tasks, optimise processes, and the opportunity to consider how we could use it within the organisation.

### **5.4 Succession Planning**

The Vice-Chair advised that DfC officials have provided further guidance on the operations of the Board since the departure of the Chair and 9 Members at the end of April. Given that there are only 5 Members and the legislation states a minimum of 12, the DfC advice is that the Board, including Committees should continue to meet to hold discussions and to receive updates, but any significant decisions should be delayed until a new Chair and Board appointments can be made. It is hoped this happens late June/early July.

Members noted the update.

## **6. Loans & Disposals**

### **6.1 Loans approved by GP&F**

Members noted the loans approved by the GP&F Committee on behalf of the Board at its meeting on 19 May 2023.

### **6.2 Loans for Approval**

The Board approved the Loans for Approval as presented.

Proposed by: Dr Whan  
Seconded by: Mrs Bryce

## 7. Business of Chief Executive

### 7.1 Chief Executive's Report

The Chief Executive (CEO) reviewed the above report in discussion with Members, commenting specifically on the following:

- **Ulster Folk Museum** – The Reawakening project's Outline Business Case continues to await DfC approval. In the meantime, with the support of the NLHF grant, the project is progressing steadily and will achieve another significant milestone with the submission of its planning application in June;
- **Ulster American Folk Park** – Bluegrass Omagh was one of the casualties of the decision by Tourism NI not to operate its National Events Sponsorship Scheme 2023/24. The PPE will evaluate the long term sustainability of the event;
- **Research** – National Museums NI has been awarded funding as part of the Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships (CDP) scheme run by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). This is the first time we will participate in the scheme;
- **Collecting** – National Museums NI was successful in acquiring a major motorcycle collection. We are now planning to display this exciting new collection in the *Driven* gallery at the Ulster Transport Museum, launching late summer/early autumn 2023;
- **Cultra Manor** – currently, the business model for Cultra Manor and its grounds is based on exclusive hire – mainly as a wedding venue or for corporate events. As part of the Commercial Plan a review of future operations has been carried out and five options have been identified for consideration. It is proposed to conduct further due diligence on the preferred option;
- **Asset Management Strategy Update** – an update was provided regarding the disposal of Landseer Street; and,
- **Capital Programme** – An initial capital allocation of £0.68m for 2023-24 was received from the Department at the beginning of May, with a further allocation of £1.3m coming later in the month which gives a total of £1.98m for the year.

Members noted the report.

## 8. Strategic Priorities

### 8.1 Collections Access Plan – Review of Progress

A Collections Access Plan was presented to GP&F in February 2021 to provide further clarity on our corporate commitment towards collections access. It sets objectives over a period of circa 3-5 years.

Ciarán Lavelle, Head of Collections Services provided a presentation on the transformative progress made over the first two years.

Members noted the update.

## **8.2 Budget 2023/24 – Response to DfC EQIA**

The CEO advised that in May, DfC published their Budget 2023-24 Equality Impact Assessment for consultation. National Museums NI submitted its response to meet the 7<sup>th</sup> June deadline.

Members noted and endorsed the response. It was agreed that the Vice-Chair would write to the Permanent Secretary in support of the submission made.

## **8.3 Commercial Plan Update**

The Chief Operating Officer (COO) advised the goal of the Commercial Plan is to double revenues to £5 million by 2027. He provided an update at the end of Year 1 on progress against the actions:

- **Rebuilding Teams** – In year 1 of the Commercial Plan success has been driven by the ongoing rebuilding of the Commercial Team, within our affordability envelope;
- **Retail** – Ongoing linkage to the national collections range are proving successful, supported with regular range refreshment, making the retail relevancy stronger than ever. The retail ranging is carefully aligned to the Commercial Plan Principles, with increased stock for sustainability products with ethical sourcing and environmental credential ranges;
- **Membership** – has now reached 1,245, a growth of 47% since 2021. This is testament to the training support plan enabling stronger selling from our Front of House Teams and online digital platforms. There is still a way to go and we need a Membership Officer; and,
- **Space Hire** – Performance is well up in terms of target.

Members noted the update.

## **9. Board Committees**

### **9.1 Audit & Risk Assurance Committee**

#### **9.1.1 Adoption of Minutes of ARAC Meetings held on 8 March 2023**

The Chairman of ARAC presented the minutes of the ARAC meeting. Members adopted the minutes of the ARAC meeting on 8 March 2023.

Proposed by: Ms Jess

Seconded by: Ms Bryce

#### **9.1.2 Verbal update of Meeting held on 2 June 2023**

The Chairman of ARAC provided a verbal update on the Committee meeting held on 2 June March 2023. Key points included:

- Mr Duddy was co-opted to the ARAC Committee to ensure quorum;

- Members agreed to meet separately to discuss the self-assessment and to feedback any suggestions for the Head of Finance and Governance;
- The NIAO had just issued a new tool to measure ARAC effectiveness and it was agreed to use this in future;
- The Internal Audit overall opinion for the year was Satisfactory; and,
- The internal audit contract is now complete and the procurement is ongoing for a new provider. It is estimated to be complete by the end of June.

Members noted the update.

### **Papers arising from the ARAC meeting on 8 March 2023**

The following papers were recommended for Board approval:

**9.1.3 Corporate Risk Register**

**9.1.4 Draft Governance Statement 2022/23**

**9.1.5 Draft Annual Accounts 2022/23**

The following policy was recommended for Board approval:

**9.1.6 Raising Concerns (Whistleblowing) Policy**

Proposed by: Ms Jess

Seconded by: Ms Bryce

**9.2 General Purposes & Finance Committee**

**9.2.1 Adoption of Minutes of GP&F Meeting held on 24 February 2023**

The Chairman of GP&F presented the minutes of the GP&F meeting. Members adopted the minutes of the GP&F meeting on 24 February 2023.

Proposed by: Mr Duddy

Seconded by: Mr McMullan

**9.2.2 Verbal update of Meeting held on 19 May 2023**

The Chairman of GP&F provided a verbal update on the Committee meeting held on 24 February 2023. Key points included:

- The quarterly Business Plan and Financial Performances were reviewed; and
- The Head of OD & HR provided an update on the organisation's development. He also took the Committee through a detailed Equality Commission Report.

Members noted the report.

### **Papers arising from the GP&F meeting held on 19 May 2023:**

**9.2.3 Performance Reports:**

- a) Financial Performance
- b) Business Plan Performance Report

The Board noted the Financial Performance and Business Plan Performance Reports.

#### **9.2.4 For Approval:**

The following report was recommended for approval:

- a) Equality Commission Report

The report was approved by the Board.

Proposed by: Mr Duddy

Seconded by: Mr McMullan

#### **9.2.5 For Approval:**

- a) Partnership Policy
- b) Lending and Borrowing Policy

The Board approved the policies:

Proposed by: Mr Duddy

Seconded by: Mr McMullan

### **9.3 Remuneration Committee**

#### **9.3.1 Adoption of Minutes of Meeting held on 11 November 2022**

The Board noted minutes for approval.

Proposed by: Dr Whan

Seconded by: Ms Jess

The Vice-Chair advised that she had completed the CEO's annual performance review and confirmed it was satisfactory. She congratulated the CEO on another successful year of leadership of the organisation.

### **10. FOIs**

The Board noted the FOI report.

### **11. Any Other Business**

None noted.

### **13. Date of Next Meeting**

The Vice-Chair thanked Members and attendees, drew their attention to the date of the next meeting – 22 September 2023 – and closed the meeting at 12.15pm

Signed:

*Charlotte Ivy*

Date:

*22 / 9 / 23*

Copies:

DfC, Trustees, File, Website