

**CONFIRMED MINUTES  
MEETING OF BOARD**

**Tuesday 25 June 2024  
Boardroom, Ulster American Folk Park**

**Members Present:**

Gordon Milligan OBE – Chair  
Keith Charlton  
William Duddy  
Charlotte Jess  
William McMullan  
Sally Montgomery OBE  
Peter Osborne  
Mark Walker  
Robert Whan

**National Museums NI Attendance:**

Kathryn Thomson, Chief Executive (CEO)  
Colin Catney, Chief Operating Officer (COO)  
William Blair, Director of Collections (DC)  
Aaron Ward, Director of Public Engagement (DPE)  
James Lewsley, Head of Finance and Governance (HFG)  
Michelle Ashmore, Secretariat

**External Attendance:**

Helen Smyth, Internal Audit Senior Manager, EY

**1. Induction**

**1.1 Apologies**

The Chair formally welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Board members for travelling down to Omagh.

Apologies were received from:

Ryan Cornett  
Therese Rafferty  
Fiona Ryan

**1.2 Conflicts of Interest**

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

**1.3 Approval of Minutes from Last Meeting**

Members approved the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 9 May 2024.

#### **1.4 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting**

The Chief Executive (CEO) advised that actions from the meeting held on 9 May 2024 are complete. The CEO also advised that the two outstanding actions from January - item 1.4 update is included in her CEO Report and would be carried forward and item 2.2 would be scheduled when relevant.

Members noted the updates.

## **2. Chair & Chief Executive Business**

### **2.1 Chair & Trustee Business**

The Chair advised members that funding continued to be an issue and the CEO would provide an update from a revenue and capital perspective. He advised that meetings with DfC were ongoing regarding the funding position. Meantime development work continues for major projects such as the Ulster American Folk Park redevelopment and Reawakening at the Ulster Folk Museum.

The Chair advised that a Board Workshop on development of the new Corporate Strategy will take place on 29 August 2024. This will also include a session on risk management.

The Chair advised that the appraisal meetings with Board members are almost complete and that these discussions provide a good opportunity to continue with the development of relationships. He also highlighted some events have taken place recently including the Caravaggio exhibition opening, Threads of Empowerment: Conflict Textiles' International Journey and Cultra Motor Sports Festival – all of which have been hugely successful.

The Chair also advised that a new Board member has been appointed effective from 1 July 2024.

### **2.2 Chair Executive Report**

The CEO provided a verbal update from the Chief Executive report with the following highlights:

- **Reawakening the Ulster Folk Museum**
  - The updated Outline Business Case was submitted to DfC for approval on 17th June. The standard turn around period for business case approval is 12 weeks. We will be working closely with DfC over the next number of months to respond to any queries as quickly as possible as it goes through the approvals process with a view to achieving this target;
  - NLHF delivery application is due to be submitted by 15 August 2024;
  - We have been advised that the PEACE Plus decision making panel will meet at the end of August after which we will expect to hear the outcome of our application; and,
  - Ulster Scots Trail, 'Rhymin Rab's Ramble' was launched at the Ulster Folk Museum.

- **Ulster American Folk Park**

The Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for the redevelopment of UAFP was approved by DfC. This project is part of the Mid South West Growth Deal. We are currently assessing the next steps required (and costs) to progress this project to the next stage.

- **Ulster Museum**

- *Lavery on Location* closed on 9<sup>th</sup> June and exceeded targets for both visitors and income;
- *Caravaggio* was officially opened at a significant stakeholder event on 9 May 2024 attended by Deputy First Minister, Emma Little-Pengelly MLA, Junior Minister, Aisling Reilly MLA, and Irish Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Catherine Martin TD which was hugely successful. Since the exhibition has opened over 30,000 people have visited it already.

- **Ulster Transport Museum**

Cultra Motorsports Festival took place on 8 June with strong attendance and positive feedback.



- **Budget Position**

We have received a draft revenue allocation for 2024-25. While it represents significantly more than our baseline last year, it falls short of final outturn and therefore the structural funding has not yet been fully addressed. Further meetings have taken place with DfC to discuss next steps. It was advised that DfC are planning to commission an independent review of our financial position with a view to further consideration of our allocation.

Members noted the report.

The Director of Public Engagement (DPE) advised members of an issue with the Ulster Museum café as a result of ongoing construction works. A further update will be brought to the September Board by which times it is hoped that the matter will have been resolved.

Members noted the update.

### **3. Performance Review**

#### **3.1 Business Plan Review**

The CEO presented the Q4 review of the Business Plan highlighting a strong performance overall for the year with all KPIs achieved with the exception of Carbon Emissions. This was due in part to the increase in the estate footprint, as well as the lack of investment.

Members noted the update.

#### **3.2 Financial Review**

The Head of Finance & Governance took the Board through the Q4 report, noting that the necessary funding was secured towards the year end allowing us to balance our budget and meet our requirements.

The Head of Finance & Governance explained the adverse to budget expenditure were funded by favourable income variances, and that these main variances resulted from higher trading activity and expanded grant funded activity on the UFM reawakening project.

The Head of Finance & Governance discussed the Capital outturn noting £3.4m of fixed asset additions in the year, of which £2m is DfC funded, with the remaining £1.4m coming from a mix of 3<sup>rd</sup> party funding and donated heritage assets.

The Head of Finance & Governance also advised members of the impending issues that will result from the lack of capital funding in 2024/25, with only £811k available across a £105m estate comprising 4 museums, 3 storage units, back of house infrastructure, and our digital estate.

The Head of Finance & Governance warned that this will inevitably add pressure to already constrained revenue budgets, elevate risk, increase estate and built heritage decline, and potentially restrict access to collections.

Members noted the update.

#### **3.3 HR&OD Report**

The COO presented the Q4 report.

Members noted the report.

### **4. Performance Review**

#### **4.1 Commercial Strategy**

The DPE presented the context of commercial development in National Museums NI. Whilst income generation is important, we also need to be careful to balance this with other priorities, such as ensuring inclusive access to our collections. The balance is in fostering financial resilience without compromising our role and purpose in society. He provided an

update on how we are performing against our commercial strategy since its creation. A discussion took place on optimising future opportunities and it was suggested that Members form a Task & Finish Group to support the Executive in this work.

Members thanked Aaron for the presentation.

#### **4.2 UAFP – Developing the Narrative**

The Director of Collections presented current and planned research, interpretive developments and partnership working for the Ulster American Folk Park.

Members thanked William for the presentation.

### **5. Governance**

#### **5.1 Board Effectiveness Review**

The COO advised it is best practice for a Board to conduct an annual review of its effectiveness. Since the last Board meeting the Chairman, COO and EY have met to design the proposed process that the Board will undertake later this year.

Helen Smyth from EY attended the meeting and explained how the Board Effectiveness Review could be carried out and the time frames for 2024.

Members approved this revised self-assessment process for implementation.

The Chair thanked Helen for attending the meeting.

#### **5.2 Verbal update from ARAC**

The Chair of ARAC spoke to the note of the Committee meeting held on 14 June 2024 and highlighted the following key points:

- The annual assurance report noted an overall satisfactory opinion for the year;
- The draft annual governance statement for 2023/24 was reviewed and approved; and,
- Draft annual accounts were reviewed and approved, however, members expressed concern at the ongoing reduction in capital provision over the last five years.

#### **5.3 Loans, Acquisitions, Disposals**

The DC recommended the following disposals:

- Disposal of the Leyland Cheetah bus chassis, through transfer to the Cavan and Leitrim Railway Museum; and,
- Disposal of the Leyland Tiger bus chassis, through transfer to the Cavan and Leitrim Railway Museum or by ethical deconstruction.

Members approved the disposals as presented.

The Board approved the loans for as presented.

**5.5 FOIs**

The Board noted the FOI report.

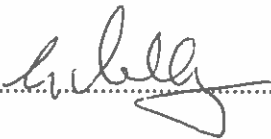
**6. Any Other Business**

The Chair noted that this was the final meeting for William Duddy and thanked him for his contribution throughout his tenure.

**7. Date of Next Meeting**

The Chair thanked Members and attendees, drew their attention to the date of the next meeting – 10 September 2024 – and closed the meeting at 12.53pm.

Signed:

  
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Date:

10/9/24  
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Copies: DfC, Trustees, File, Website