

**CONFIRMED MINUTES
MEETING OF BOARD**

**Tuesday 10 September 2024
Training Room, Cultra Manor**

Members Present:

Gordon Milligan – Chair
Keith Charlton
Ryan Corbett
Charlotte Jess
William McMullan
Sally Montgomery
Peter Osborne
Therese Rafferty
Mark Walker
Shane Quinn

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)
Michelle Ashmore, Secretariat

1. Induction

1.1 Apologies

The Chair formally welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from:

Fiona Ryan
Robert Whan

The Chair noted that at the end of the meeting the Board would be joined by Emer Morelli and Iain Greenway from DfC for a presentation and discussion as part of the ongoing Board induction process.

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 25 June 2024.

1.4 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

The Chief Executive (CEO) and Chief Operating Officer (COO) provided an update on the actions from the meeting held on 25 June 2024. The CEO advised that item 4.1 was on the meeting agenda. The COO advised that he has spoken to EY regarding item 5.1 and that a questionnaire and workshop would be arranged regarding Board Effectiveness Review. Item 5.1 to remain on action list.

The CEO also advised that the two outstanding actions from January would be scheduled when relevant.

Members noted the updates.

2. Chair & Chief Executive Business

2.1 Chair & Trustee Business

The Chair thanked members for their input at the Corporate Strategy workshop which took place on 29 August 2024. He also provided an update on the next steps of the Strategy consultation – first with the Minister for Communities and then the public consultation which will run for 8 weeks. The final draft of the Strategy will come back to Board in February/March for approval.

The Chair highlighted the Ministerial visits which had taken place across the museum sites over the summer. The Chair advised a Royal visit would be taking place at the Ulster Folk Museum on Friday.

The Chair advised that Mark Walker would be taking over as Chair of ARAC from the AGM in November 2024 and thanked William McMullan for fulfilling this role over the last 2 years.

2.2 Chair Executive Report

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

- **Reawakening the Ulster Folk Museum –**
 - The PEACE Plus decision making panel will meet in mid September;
 - NLHF delivery stage application was submitted by 15th August deadline.
- **Ulster American Folk Park –**
 - The Heads of Terms for the Mid South West Growth Deal are due to be signed in mid October.
- **Ulster Museum –**
 - *Caravaggio* has proved to be an outstanding success attracting approximately 82,000 visitors before closing on 1st September.

- **Ministerial Statement in the Assembly –**
 - The Minister for Communities made a statement to the Assembly on 3rd July setting out his proposals for the development of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme.

Members noted the update.

3. Performance Review

3.1 Business Plan Review

The CEO spoke to the Q1 review. She highlighted that the Ulster Museum was performing strongly. She noted the anomaly at the Ulster Folk Museum with the switch of the Cultra Motorsport Festival from Folk to Transport. She advised that number visiting the Ulster American Folk Park have been impacted by bad weather and the ongoing cost of living crisis.

The CEO also advised that to date no risks are being flagged regarding KPI achievement.

Members noted the update.

3.2 Financial Review

The CEO spoke to the Q1 review. She highlighted that is has agreed with the Department that whilst the officially issued opening allocation of Grant in Aid is £16.119m, National Museums NI will work to an ‘accepted baseline’ budget based on the 2023/24 outturn of £17.6m. There is therefore a budget deficit of £1.5m at this stage.

An independent verification exercise of the funding required to deliver our statutory remit, is being currently being commissioned by DfC. It will be carried out in September 2024, ahead of October monitoring round.

Members noted the update.

3.3 Q2 HR&OD Report

The COO highlighted the following from the tabled report:

- We have received a ***Princess Royal Training Award*** for our work leadership and management development programme. Over 600 organisations expressed an interest in the award; 127 submitted an application and 52 awards were issued, following a rigorous assessment process;
- Absence rate has started to reduce and is currently 4.3%.

Members noted the report and passed on their congratulations to the team for the award.

4. Strategy

4.1 Reawakening the Ulster Folk Museum – update

The Reawakening the Ulster Folk Museum project is National Museums NI’s top priority for major capital investment.

The development phase of the NLHF grant is now complete and the delivery stage application has been submitted.

The Director of Public Engagement (DPE) presented an update what we have learnt from the project's development phase and what the next steps for the project are.

Members thanked Aaron for the presentation.

4.2 Our Work on Legacy – update

The Director of Collections (DC) presented an outline of our approach to dealing with conflict legacy as it relates to our evolving *Troubles and Beyond* programme, centred on the Ulster Museum. It also highlighted our development priorities and future opportunities.

Members thanked William for the presentation.

4.3 Commercial Working Group – terms of reference

At the last Board Meeting it was agreed to establish a Commercial Task & Finish Group comprising key staff and Board members. The Task and Finish Group will consist of 6 Board members who put themselves forward to join. The proposed Terms of Reference presented was also approved by members. The first meeting to be arranged for 3-4 weeks' time.

5. Governance

5.1 Board Reserve Funds

The CEO advised that the Board are aware of the challenging budgetary position for 2024/25 including the shortfall on revenue requirement and the extremely limited capital provision. As a result there are severe restrictions on spending, there are 3 critical projects that we are seeking to progress with support from the Board Reserve Fund:

- £101k for completion of the woodland restoration project at the Cultra site (a partnership between National Museums NI and the Woodland Trust with support coming from the NIEA);
- £60k for commissioning and delivery of a Concept Design (RIBA stage 2) report to explore options for Solar PV deployment on the museum estate by an appointed Integrated Consultancy Team through CPD;
- £11k for transportation of the Lanto Synge Collection, which is a Cultural Gift to National Museums NI, from London to Belfast rather than putting this on the donor who has already done so much to support the Ulster Museum, which he has chosen as a safe and worthy home for his prized collection.

These projects either support delivery of a longer term legacy or ensure future opportunities to access funding can be realised.

Members approved the Board Reserve Fund bids.

5.3 Loans, Acquisitions, Disposals

The Board approved the Loans for Approval as presented.

5.5 FOIs

The Board noted the FOI report.

6. Any Other Business

Emer Morelli and Iain Greenway, DfC joined the meeting at 12noon as part of the ongoing Board Induction Programme and gave a presentation to members.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The Chair thanked Members and attendees, drew their attention to the date of the next meeting and AGM – 5 November2024 – and closed the meeting at 12.55pm.

Signed:



Date:

5 November 2024

Copies: DfC, Trustees, File, Website

Actions

4.3	Commercial Strategy task and finish group meeting to be arranged for Board members and key staff	DPE
5.1	Next steps of Board Effectiveness Review to be discussed with EY and Chair	COO