

CONFIRMED MINUTES

MEETING OF BOARD

Tuesday 16 September 2025
Training Room, Cultra Manor

Members Present:

Gordon Milligan – Chair
Keith Charlton
Ryan Cornett
Charlotte Jess
William McMullan
Sally Montgomery
Peter Osborne
Shane Quinn
Fiona Ryan
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 & Governance (HFG)
Michelle Ashmore, Secretariat

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Apologies

The Chair formally welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from:
Therese Rafferty

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 24 June 2025.

1.4 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

The Chief Executive (CEO) advised that actions from meeting held on 24 June 2025 are complete. The Chair will provide an update on action regarding Board Effectiveness from the meeting held on 13 May. Actions from 25 March and 28 January are now complete.

2. CHAIR & CHIEF EXECUTIVE BUSINESS

2.1 Chair & Trustee Business

The Chair advised it had been busy around the sites over the summer. Over recent months we have had visits from the Education Minister and Economy Minister to the Ulster Folk Museum. The National Library of Ireland Chair and Board Members visited the Ulster Museum in June in collaboration with Queen's University. We also had a visit to the Ulster Folk Museum from National Lottery Heritage Fund representatives in relation to the Reawakening the Folk Museum project.

The Chair also advised that following the Corporate Strategy launch the organisation now has a good focus on the annual Business Plan.

The Chair advised that the County Down Lord Lieutenant and Deputy Lieutenants are due to visit the Ulster Folk Museum in October.

The Chair also thanked Board members for returning their completed appraisals for 2024/25.

2.2 Business Planning Diary

The Chair advised the schedule included proposed dates for 2026 for Board and Committee Meetings.

Members agreed the schedule.

2.3 Chair Executive Report

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

- **Reawakening the Ulster Folk Museum** – In June the national NLHF Board approved the award of £10m to the project. This is conditional on the rest of the funds being secured by the deadline of 31st December 2025.

DfC has now set a date for the consideration of the Outline Business by a Casework Committee. This allows time for the subsequent DoF approval process before formal recommendation to the Minister and a decision to meet the NLHF deadline.

- **Ulster American Folk Park – The Journey Ahead – Ulster American Folk Park**
Following a few weeks delay within CPD, the tender for the integrated consultancy team was finally issued to the CPD Framework at the end of August with an aim to award a contract by the end of October. We are working to the end of March 2026 as the target for submission of the OBC.

- **Business Plan & Budget 2025-26** – Ministerial approval has been received for the Business Plan & Budget 2025-26.
- **Staff Conference** – taking place on 30th September and all Board members are welcome to attend.



Members noted the report.

3. PERFORMANCE REVIEW

3.1 Business Plan Review

The CEO presented the first year of the new Business Plan Performance Review 2025-26 for Q1 noting key performance indicators.

Members noted the update.

3.2 Financial Review

The Head of Finance & Governance updated Trustees on the status of the finalisation of the Annual Report & Accounts for 2024/25; the status of the 2024 and 2025 pay awards; and then took members through the 2025/26 YTD management accounts and budget forecast focusing on the main income and expenditure variances, commenting specifically on the following:

- That an ambitious annual target was set for self-generated income, however based on current average income per visitor data, it would be a considerable challenge for those targets to be achieved by year end, with the potential for an overall income deficit of c£0.5m. However Q1 is still much too early to make reliable forecasts given that a number of initiatives, projects, events and activities are still ongoing;
- The payroll spend was being managed tightly, that it is tracking on budget for the YTD, and is therefore expected to come in on budget by year end;
- The overall financial position is being closely monitored on a regular basis and that given the potential for a shortfall, that management are keeping options under review and not over-committing to ensure any year end deficit does not materialise. Management are seeking to limit any knock-on impact to business plan delivery and general visitor experience if spend has to be curtailed in certain areas; and,
- Bids to cover previously unmet pressures and contingencies were submitted to DfC into the June 2025 monitoring round, but were not successful. Based on discussions with DfC Finance, it was still not clear if an October monitoring round would be commissioned, however the Department are fully sighted on our pressures if additional funding does become available.

Members noted the update.

3.4 Q2 HR&OD Report

The Chief Operating Officer (COO) highlighted the following from the report:

- Resource Planning must be signed off by Senior member of staff in the first instance or it is unable to proceed;
- Recruit of Security roles is proceeding but proving difficult to recruit;
- We are recruiting heritage craft skills posts; and,
- Absence rate year on year trending downwards.

Members noted the update.

4. STRATEGY

4.1 Spotlight on Corporate Strategy: Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is one of 4 key impact areas outlined in our new Corporate Strategy 2025-2030.

The Director of Collections (DOC) provide a strategic overview presentation of the key initiatives, plans and proposals to deliver this programme of work.

Members approved of direction of travel, particularly in relation to plans and programmes relating to prison heritage.

The Chair thanked William for his presentation.

5. GOVERNANCE

5.1 Board Reserve Funds Bids (UTM Woodland Invasive Species Removal, Disposal of Mary Joseph and Staff Conference)

The CEO advised the reserve funds bids seek Board approval to cover the cost of the above projects that are exceptional and could not be funded from within the core recurrent budget.

As in prior years, if other sources of funding become available these will be exhausted first before recourse to the Board Reserves.

Members approved the UTM Woodland Invasive Species Removal, Disposal of Mary Joseph and Staff Conference Board reserve funds bids.

5.2 Verbal Update from ARAC

The Chair of ARAC provided a verbal update of the Committee meeting held on 1 September 2025 and highlighted the following:

- Committee TOR reviewed and approved;
- Satisfactory IA report has been completed for Commercial Strategy Review;
- Internal Audit Progress Report update was provided;
- External Audit complete and Chair passed his thanks onto HFG and his team along with the external auditors for an unqualified audit opinion;

- Corporate Risk Register approved; and,
- Raising Concerns (Whistleblowing) Policy and Procedure approved.

Board members noted the update.

5.3 Report To Those Charged With Governance

The CEO advised NIAO have provided their draft Report To Those Charged With Governance (RTTCWG) to ARAC. An unqualified audit opinion was received on the financial statements, with no proposed adjustments to the accounts.

Within the report four Priority 2 (medium) findings and two Priority 3 (low) findings have been made which the management of National Museums NI have accepted. All findings are being progressed for implementation by the target dates as set out in the report.

The final RTTCWG will be presented to the December Board meeting.

Board members noted the report.

5.4 Bi-Annual Assurance Statement

The CEO advised that the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement has been recommended by ARAC for approval.

The Board approved the statement.

5.5 Environmental Sustainability Policy

The National Museum NI's Environmental Sustainability Policy is reviewed and updated every 3 years. A number of revisions are proposed following the most recent review.

Members were content to approve policy once amendments raised by Sally Montgomery were made.

5.4 Loans, Acquisitions, Disposals

None for approval.

5. FOIs

The Board noted the FOI report.

6. AOB

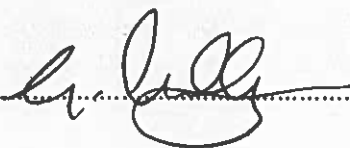
6.1 Any Other Business

The Chair advised that a facilitated Board Effectiveness workshop would be arranged for November 2025. The information gathered from Board self-assessment questionnaire will be used to facilitate the workshop.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The Chair thanked Members and attendees and drew their attention to the date of the next meeting – 11 November 2025 – and closed the meeting at 12.35pm.

Signed:

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Date:

..... 11/11/25

Copies:

DfC, Trustees, File, Website