

**CONFIRMED MINUTES
MEETING OF BOARD**

**Tuesday 23rd June 2026
Training Room, Cultra Manor**

Members Present:

Gordon Milligan – Chair
Keith Charlton
Ryan Cornett
William McMullan
Sally Montgomery
Shane Quinn
Therese Rafferty*
Mark Walker
Robert Whan*

National Museums NI Attendance:

Kathryn Thomson, Chief Executive (CEO)
William Blair, Director of Collections (DC)
Colin Catney, Chief Operating Officer (COO)
Aaron Ward, Director of Public Engagement (DPE)
James Lewsley, Head of Finance and Governance (HFG)
Susan Starrett, Acting Head of Experience and Enterprise Development – agenda item 4.1
John-Paul Coyle, UAFP General Manager (JPC) – agenda item 4.2
Nathan Domer, UAFP Acting General Manager (ND) – agenda item 4.2
Errin McElhinney, Secretariat

* Joined remotely via Microsoft Teams

1. Introduction

1.1 Apologies

The Chair formally welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from:

Peter Osborne
Charlotte Jess
Conor McCrory

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 12 May 2026 subject to one amendment raised by Keith Charlton that has been actioned.

1.4 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

The Chair advised that actions from the last meeting are complete.

2. Chair & Chief Executive Business

2.1 Chair & Trustee Business

The Chair asked that any Trustee that has not yet completed the Board Effectiveness Survey does so by 24th June 2026.

The Chair noted the ongoing budget pressures and ensure the Board that conversations with the appropriate stakeholders are ongoing.

2.2 Chair Executive Report

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

- **Major Capital Projects:**
 - Reawakening the Ulster Folk Museum: The new Integrated Consultancy Team (ICT) Atkins Réalis has been briefed and appraised and the project has moved into active delivery
 - The Journey Ahead Project: The Outline Business Case is on schedule for completion and submission to the Mid-South West Growth Deal by the end of June 2026. An Expression of Interest is being prepared to procure an ICT through the new Crown Commercial Services Framework.
 - Collections Resource Centre: The Project Board, involving DfC, HED, PRONI and National Museums NI has validated the site options appraisal, which confirms the Ulster Folk Museum as the preferred location for the new Resource Centre.
- **Application for IRO Status** – National Museums NI has recently submitted an application for Independent Research Organisation (IRO) status to the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Applications take a number of months to assess. The Board will be updated of the outcome in due course.
- **Great British Summer Savings** – As part of a recent UK Government announcement for a temporary scheme, National Museums NI will reduce general ticket prices and pass the saving on to our visitors without any adverse impact on revenue.
- **European Museum Directors Visit to China** – By invitation of the Chinese Ministry of Culture & Tourism and China International Culture Association, the Chief Executive travelled to China between the 9th-15th June, in a delegation of 9 European Museum Directors. The trip included attending and delivering a presentation at the 4th Global Museum Directors Conference, followed by a range of visits and meetings with sector colleagues in three different cities in China - exploring opportunities for co-operation and collaboration.

- **Volunteering** – The CEO noted the strategic investment in Volunteering at National Museums NI over the past few years, noting, in particular, the successes of Volunteer Week, and the Work Experience Week Programme that took place earlier in June. The CEO noted that National Museums NI are pursuing Investing in Volunteers (IiV) accreditation.

Members noted the report.

3. Performance Review – Q4

3.1 Business Plan Review

The Chief Executive (CEO) took Trustees through the Q4 Business Plan Review. Within the review, the CEO highlighted that it has been a positive year, formally closing out the first year of the Corporate Strategy 2025-2030.

The CEO noted a number of red indicators on the Key Performance Indicator Summary.

On Business Plan related activities progress, it was noted that activity 3.1, the Ashes to Fashion exhibition, has been extended to December 2026.

Sally Montgomery asked if Volunteering hours could be reflected as a KPI as opposed to the Net Promoter Score.

Mark Walker highlighted a number of red progress indicators against the Ulster Transport Museum. It was noted that a number of these site-specific Business Plan activities have been brought forward for delivery in line with the 2026-27 Business Plan.

Aaron Ward noted that the Ulster Transport Museum has had investment in recent years that may not always be visible – including the Transport and Industry Store (TIMs), the addition of the bikes in Driven and external landscaping works.

3.2 Financial Review

The Head of Finance & Governance (HFG) took Trustees through the Q4 year-end revenue and capital report, commenting on the following specific matters:

Annual Report & Accounts (ARA)

- The 2025/26 financial statements have been compiled with the first draft presented to ARAC on 8th June. He noted that the full ARA is currently being finalised ahead of submission to External Audit by the target date of 6th July.
- The Chair wished to note his appreciation on behalf of the Board for the work carried out by the Finance & Governance Team in recent months in completing the ARA on schedule.

Revenue Budget Performance

- The Head of Finance & Governance drew members attention to Slide 3 which provided a reconciliation of income and expenditure in accounts to our budget performance, removing non-cash items and demonstrating that the organisation has come in on budget.
- The Head of Finance & Governance drew members attention to Slide 4 which sets out full I&E report for the year, with key variances as follows:
 - Self Generated Income - Admissions & retail suffered due to lower than expected visitors (adverse weather)
 - Exhibition tax relief claims and commercial income came in above target
 - Expenditure – salaries slightly behind budget due to delays in filling vacant posts
 - Operating Costs – came in above budget for two main reasons – additional maintenance spend (reactive) and planned maintenance that could be accommodated from easements in other areas. The Head of Finance & Governance noted that this was possible through Finance commissioning a mid-year reprofiling exercise, to be able to reallocate funds and accommodate emerging critical pressures.

Capital budget & investment

- The Head of Finance & Governance highlighted a total of £5.8m of capital additions in year. He noted the split of £2.8m invested in physical estates and digital infrastructure, in addition of acquisitions of Heritage Assets with a total value of just over £3m.
- The Head of Finance & Governance recognised the work of the curatorial team in sourcing such high value collections, being a clear example of delivering on our statutory remit regarding collections development. The Board acknowledged this and echoed this commendation.

3.2 HR & OD Report

The Chief Operating Officer (COO) took Trustees through the Q4 HROD Report June 2026. The COO highlighted the key points including the adapted Performance Excellence Framework (PEF) for middle/senior management to consider performance and roles based on leadership traits and organisational values. COO also noted the work around the Wider Leadership Team (WLT) development.

Sally Montgomery requested if the HROD Report could include detail on the hours spent training and total number of staff trained.

4. Strategy

4.1 Commercial Update

Susan Starrett, Acting Head of Experience and Enterprise Development presented to the Board of Trustees an update on the Commercial Strategy.

It was noted that the development and implementation of a retail/commercial strategy is outlined in the 2026-27 Annual Business Plan. The fully developed strategy will be presented to the Board when complete.

The Chair thanked Susan for the presentation.

The Permanent Secretary and Iain Greenway joined the meeting to engage in conversation with Board members.

The Permanent Secretary, Iain Greenway, Chair and CEO left for a tour of the Ulster Folk Museum.

Mark Walker, Chair of ARAC stood in as Chair.

4.2 US250 Update

John-Paul Coyle, UAFP General Manager and Nathan Domer, Acting UAFP General Manager presented to the Board of Trustees an update on the Stories of US programme, marking the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the 50th anniversary of the Ulster American Folk Park.

JPC and ND highlighted that funding for the programme has been received from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council as well as the Department for Communities.

The Board commended the Stories of US programme of activities. The Board expressed their desire to see an evaluation of the programme of activities, particularly the series of one day Bluegrass BBQ's as opposed to the previous Bluegrass festival weekend and the learnings from this moving forward.

The Chair of ARAC thanked John-Paul and Nathan for their presentation and travelling from the Ulster American Folk Park to join the Board meeting in person.

5. Governance

5.1 Board Reserve Fund Bid – Head Groundsperson

The Chief Operating Officer advised that the reserve fund bid seeks Board approval for funding of a Head Groundsperson to support the delivery of the Ulster Folk Museum Ecological Management Plan action plan and Reawakening Project.

The Chair and CEO returned to join the meeting.

The proposal was taken as read. Following discussion, members approved the Head Groundperson reserve bid fund.

The Landscape Development Officer is to present the progress of the Ecological Management Plan action plan in due course.

The strategy for the use of the Board Reserve Fund is to reviewed. Keith Charlton requested to see detail of what the Board Reserve Fund has committed funds to in the past two years.

5.2 Verbal Update from ARAC

The Chair of ARAC provided a verbal update of the Committee meeting held on 8th June 2026 and highlighted the following:

- Audits have been returned as satisfactory reviews, with 21 actions. 15 have been marked as complete with 6 still a work in progress. Collections Hazards were raised with a number of priority actions
- The next 3-year internal audit plan was approved
- The work of the Finance & Governance Team was commended in preparing the Annual Report & Accounts in a timely manner

5.3 Loans, Acquisitions, Disposals

The Board approved the loan as presented.

The Board approved the specimen acquisition as presented, subject to funding package.

5.4 FOIs

The Board noted the FOI report.

6. Any Other Business

None noted

7. Date of Next Meeting

The Chair thanked Members and attendees, drew their attention to the date of the next meeting – Tuesday 22nd September 2026, including AGM. It was proposed that this meeting will take place at the Ulster American Folk Park.

Signed:

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Date:

.....22/9/26