

NICSSA MINUTES

Meeting: Annual General Meeting

Date: Wednesday 23rd April 2025

Venue: Mac Suite 1, Pavilion Stormont

Present David Ferguson (Chairman), Bertie Ellison (Vice-Chairman), Billy Gamble, Colin McWhirter, Dennis Millar, Tom May, Jim Savage, Michael Murray, Brian Murphy, Cliff Radcliffe, Philip Anderson, Caron Alexander, David Reilly, George Magill, Nic Leitch, Stephen Sherwood, Michael Curran, Val Russell, and Robert Kane.

Others present: Gerry Kelly (NICSSA CEO) and Tracy Smyth (Business Change Manager).

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Kieran Devlin (Operations & Facilities Director), Elizabeth Tohill, Paul McAreavey and Brian McFetridge (PMG Accountants); and Michael Carson (Treasurer).

2. Minutes of 2024 AGM

The minutes of the 72nd AGM (2024) were adopted by agreement of all present. Michael Murray noted Section 7 and recommended that reference was name to specific names. GK agreed.

The adoption of the minutes was proposed by Dennis Millar and seconded by Jim Savage.

There were no matters arising.

3. 2024 Annual Report

The CEO, Gerry Kelly, reported on the key achievements of the Association during the year which were set out in the 2024 Annual Report. He confirmed that a full and more detailed copy of the Annual Report was available online for information.

Despite the challenges presented by hybrid working in the NICS and wider public sector, NICSSA continued to engage closely with its volunteers in 32 workplace affiliated clubs to provide an extensive range of local activities and services. This included three very successful family mid-summer, Halloween and Christmas events involving over one thousand members during the year.

The team also provided over seventy members with a range of monthly prizes under our monthly giveaway initiative, and staff further enhanced NICSSA's benefits scheme by providing over one thousand offers and discounts to members in a range of leisure and other outlets across Ireland. He emphasised that the increase in giveaways was reflective of the gift aid collected to date via members subscriptions.

Staff also delivered over 350 events including health and wellbeing assessments and health exhibitions, resilience courses and physical activity sessions to over 11,000 participants from a range of clients in the NICS and the wider public sector.

Finally, the FindOut training initiative continued to grow with the addition of new service contracts for personal and team resilience and team building in a number of organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

In relation to the **capital development**, Gerry Kelly acknowledged that staff were both disappointed and surprised by the unsuccessful outcome of the capital funding application to SEUPB. However, he confirmed that work was underway on a new funding business case for submission to both the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Shared Island Fund, with a continued focus on securing funding to support the delivery of the organisation's masterplan.

Michael Curran asked whether there were any key lessons from the SEUPB application and if these were being incorporated into the new submissions. Mr Kelly responded that the two applications were very different and needed to be aligned closely with the specific aims and objectives of each funder. He explained that the SEUPB application had been primarily focused on cross-border initiatives and good relations programmes and events, whereas the DfC application would need to demonstrate a clear emphasis on increasing participation in sport and physical recreation.

Nic Leitch asked if there were any further architects fees required to move the project forward. Tracy Smyth advised that the capital designs were at RIBA stage 3 with planning approval also in place. She confirmed that NICSSA was at a state of readiness to move at pace once a funding package had been confirmed. She also advised that the next stage would be to develop the drawings to RIBA stage 4, which was detailed design.

4. Report of Honorary Treasurer and Auditor

IN Michael Carson's absence, Gerry Kelly provided an overview of the financial performance of the Association in 2024. The following points were highlighted by Mr Kelly:

- Facility fees related to the income generated from the hosting of cricket events during the summer. Office rental income, including from the new tenant, Netball NI, was up significantly.
- Subscriptions had fallen back to 2022 rates and efforts to continue to recruit more members this year would be needed.
- Find Out and Health works had a strong year and continued to perform well.
- Pavilion Expenses were down from last year, reflecting of the reduction in utility bills that had risen sharply in the previous year due to the war in Ukraine.

Gerry Kelly concluded by noting that the Association had ended the year with a small deficit of £6,414 for 2024 and saying he was content with the overall progress of the organisation.

The accounts were accepted on the proposal of Tom May and seconded by Billy Gamble.

5. Election of Honorary Treasurer

Mr Michael Carson was re-appointed to the position of Honorary Treasurer on the proposal of Tom May and seconded by Billy Gamble.

6. Election of Auditor

PGM Accountants were proposed as the Association's Auditors. Mr Kelly acknowledged the work of the auditors, particularly as more work was required by the Charity Commission's reporting guidelines. The re-appointment of PGM was proposed by Brian Murphy and seconded by Steven Sherwood.

7. Election of Members to Council

Mr Ferguson reminded the meeting that the organisation's governance structure was currently under review, with a particular focus on streamlining the existing Council of seventeen members. He explained that the aim was to reduce Council membership to 10–12 members, in line with best practice. He also noted that the current provision for six elected representatives was under review and subject to potential change. As such, he advised that the existing structure was now in its final year in its current format.

He went on to report that by the nomination deadline of 31st March 2025, only two nominations had been received by Council for the elected members' positions for the upcoming AGM: Val Russell and Colin McWhirter. Nonetheless, he confirmed that these nominations were sufficient to meet quorum requirements for this transitional year.

Robert Kane raised the point that the Rugby Club had submitted two additional nominations but had been informed by Kieran Devlin that the submission had been received after the closing date. He requested that these nominations be reconsidered, noting that there were still four vacancies. In support of this point, Michael Murray advised that he had evidence showing the Rugby Club's nomination email had been submitted before and not after the deadline for nominations. He subsequently approached the top table and showed Gerry Kelly a copy of the forwarded email to prove that it had been sent to Kieran Devlin on 28th March, before the nomination deadline. Bertie Ellison then highlighted that the role of the six elected representatives was to act collectively on behalf of all NICS sports clubs, rather than individual clubs. He suggested that specific club issues would be more appropriately raised at the Sports Forum, of which he is Chair. A discussion followed, with some members citing poor attendance as a challenge to the Forum's effectiveness. Bertie Ellison reaffirmed his commitment to the Sports Forum and pledged to ensure it continued to meet at least three times a year.

In further discussion the Rugby Club's continuing insistence that an e-mail application for Council membership had been submitted before the deadline was countered by the Association's assertion that it had not been received by the due date. Bringing this part of the discussion to a close, David Ferguson noted that this was the third year in a row that issues relating to the Rugby Club's failure to submit applications for Council membership on time had arisen. As the facts of the matter this year could not be determined at the AGM, he proposed reviewing all the information and evidence on the issue, reflect on it and discuss his findings and conclusions with the Rugby Club's senior officers in due course. In the meantime, on the grounds that it was not permitted by the Association's constitutional rules, he declined a suggestion from the floor that the Rugby Club's nominations should be considered at the meeting.

Val Russel and Colin McWhirter were both proposed as elected representatives by Bertie Ellison and seconded by Brian Murphy.

8. Motion

Proposal to increase subscriptions.

Gerry Kelly briefly outlined the case for an increase in the membership subscription rate in July 2025, which would increase by 24p per month/£2.88 per annum. Mr Kelly advised that this increase would not apply to the existing rate of £10 p.a. for under 16-year-olds; nor the £20 for the 16-18 age category.

Michael Curran asked why consideration had not been given to placing a ceiling on the membership rate for students as well, given the fact that clubs were trying to attract younger members to their clubs as well. Gerry Kelly advised that the decision not to apply this ceiling on student membership had been

taken by Members a number of years ago on the basis that most students were in part-time jobs and therefore could afford to pay the small annual subscription. He also pointed out that due to increasing costs and investment in the sporting facilities e.g. floodlights and carpet repairs, it was simply not financially viable to place this ceiling on additional groups, who could afford this increase.

Bertie Ellison supported this argument and suggested that another option was for the sports clubs themselves to consider either a price ceiling or indeed a reduction in their own membership fees.

The proposal to increase subscription was proposed by Cliff Radcliffe and seconded by Colin McWhirter.

9. Any Other Business

David Ferguson advised that five members had decided to retire from the Council in 2025, namely Geraldine Heaney, Karen McConnell, Siobhan Smyth, Caron Alexander, and Brian Murphy. He formally recorded his thanks for the commitment and contributions each had made to the Council, highlighting Brian Murphy's exceptional service of approximately 42 years, during which time his input into the work of the Association was invaluable.

In response, Brian Murphy said that his time on the Council had been a very enjoyable experience. He added that he remained impressed by the ongoing work of the Association and confirmed that it would continue to have his full support.

With no further business the Chair, David Ferguson, formally declared the meeting closed and thanked everyone for their attendance.