



## Board of the National Museum of Ireland

### Meeting Minutes

16<sup>th</sup> July 2025 at 6:00pm,

Castlebar, County Mayo and via videoconference

*Approved on: 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2025*

**Present:** Cathal O Donoghue (Chair), Barra O Donnabhain, Rowena Neville, Ciaran Byrne, Helen Shenton, Susan Rogers, Suzanne Costello, Barney Whelan, Kieran Dowdall (NMI staff appointee), Beatrice Kelly, John Bowen, Marianne Doyle, Claudia Kinmonth (RIA appointee), Geraldine Sheridan (RIA appointee).

**Apologies:** Iseult Dunne (excused).

**In attendance:** Lynn Scarff (NMI Director), Aoife Hurley (NMI Director of Operations), Éimear O'Connor (NMI Director of Collections & Access), Jade Dillon (NMI Board Secretary and EA to Director).

1.0	Opening of meeting, apologies if any and adoption of agenda
1.1	The Chair opened the meeting. Apologies were conveyed for H. Shenton and S. Costello who would both be arriving slightly later to the meeting.
2.0	Adoption of agenda
2.1	The agenda was adopted. It was agreed that the private session would be moved to the end of the meeting, should there be time.
3.0	Conflicts of interests, if any (perceived or otherwise)
3.1	No conflicts of interest were raised.
4.0	Chair and Director updates

4.1	<p><u>Congestion of meetings</u></p> <p>The Chair acknowledged the recent congestion of board committee meetings, including combustible committee meetings and workshops, and thanked all members for their time. <b>It was agreed that the frequency of meetings would be reviewed to ensure sufficient time between them, allowing for more effective and productive discussions.</b></p>
4.2	<p><u>Minister's visit to NMI – Country Life, County Mayo</u></p> <p>NMI's Chair and Director warmly welcomed Minister for Culture, Communications &amp; Sport, Patrick O Donovan and his colleagues to NMI – Country Life on 9<sup>th</sup> July. The Minister was provided a tour of the Boats Gallery and had shown genuine interest and enthusiasm in the national collection and the work of NMI. The Board conveyed their sincere appreciation to the Minister and the Department for their engagement. It is hoped that the Minister will be available to visit other NMI sites in the coming months.</p>
4.3	<p><u>Natural History Museum</u></p> <p>The Board [REDACTED] and discussed the Natural History Museum capital project. They expressed their full support for the Executive and all those involved in this significant conservation initiative of a Victorian building [REDACTED] [REDACTED]</p>
5.0	<p><b>Final draft Budget Estimates 2026</b></p>
5.1	<p>The Board noted the draft and the Director provided an overview of the document. The Secretary recorded a number of suggestions from members of the Board and the Executive agreed to take these into consideration when finalising the document prior to submission to the Department of Culture, Communications &amp; Sport.</p> <p>S. Costello joined the meeting.</p>
5.2	<p>The Board considered the budget submission within the broader context of Ireland's current economic climate. It was noted that while the budget request includes a modest increase, the majority of funding requested is allocated to core operational activities. The Board acknowledged that, although NMI's</p>

	<p>budget has increased in nominal terms since the recession in 2008, its real-term value remains low due to inflation and rising pay costs.</p> <p>The Board expressed appreciation to the Executive for their effective use of resources and recognised the ongoing challenge of delivering on strategic objectives within constrained financial parameters. [REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>It was agreed that the Executive would return to the Board in a few months' time, with a review of budget estimates priorities, to facilitate discussion on the implications of the budget 2026 outcome for these priorities.</p> <p>The final draft of the Budget Estimates 2026 was formally approved by the Board with exception to minor amendments.</p>
5.3	<p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>
6.0	<b>Appointments</b>
6.1	<p><u>Appointment of Dr. Kevin Heanue onto the Governance Audit &amp; Risk Committee</u></p> <p>The Chair introduced the Strategic Plan Midpoint Evaluation agenda item 7.0 by outlining a vision for strengthening monitoring and evaluation practices to support the effective delivery of NMI's current Strategic Plan and beyond. In this context, the Chair proposed the appointment of Dr. Kevin Heanue, a specialist in monitoring and evaluation, as an external board member of the Governance, Audit &amp; Risk (GAR) Committee to enhance the Board's capacity in this area.</p> <p><b>The Board unanimously approved Dr. Heanue's appointment on to the GAR Committee.</b></p>
6.2	<p><u>Full-time Board member appointments required for the GAR and CE Committees</u></p> <p>The Chair of the GAR highlighted that the GAR Committee would greatly benefit from the addition of at least one more full-time Board member to support its</p>

	<p>function. He invited expressions of interest from Board members who may wish to join. B. Kelly expressed her interest in joining the Committee and was formally appointed by the Chair of GAR with thanks and appreciation for her willingness to serve on this important committee.</p> <p>Chair of the Capital &amp; Estates Committee, John R. Bowen highlighted that the C&amp;E Committee would also benefit from the appointment of another full-time Board member. B. Whelan expressed his interest in joining the Committee and was formally appointed by the Chair of C&amp;E with thanks and appreciation for his willingness to serve on this important committee.</p>
<b>7.0</b>	<b>Strategic Plan Midpoint Evaluation</b>
<b>7.1</b>	<p><u>Presentation from NMI Director</u></p> <p>The Director provided an overview of work carried out in the development of the strategic plan, the key themes considered, where we landed, and proposed options for discussion, including ‘is our vision and strategic plan still relevant and effective?’</p>
<b>7.2</b>	<p><u>Discussion</u></p> <p>The Chair thanked the Director for her presentation and invited board members to discuss.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board reflected on whether the current strategy adequately captures the full scope of NMI’s work. Members highlighted the value of broadening consultation beyond established stakeholders in order to better understand the perspectives of those who may not currently engage with NMI, and to gain real-world insights into barriers to collaboration.</li> <li>• The focus for the Board should be on understanding better how the strategy is also reflected in the Museum’s operational activity, and therefore considering the implementation plan as well.</li> <li>• While the Board acknowledged the volume of information already being shared, it was agreed that further work is needed to build on this foundation and to enhance how these insights are utilised.</li> <li>• The Executive acknowledged suggestions from the Board regarding ways to monitor organisational engagement with the strategy, including the use of tools to gauge awareness and relevance of the day-to-day NMI-wide activities.</li> <li>• The Board also briefly discussed the accessibility pillar of the strategy, noting the increasingly complex discourse around the focus on equity,</li> </ul>

	<p>diversity, and inclusion (EDI) practice internationally. The Board formally reaffirmed its support for EDI principles and practice at NMI.</p>
7.3	<p><u>Next steps</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was agreed that an early-stage self-assessment exercise with the Executive would be carried out and would be followed by an update into the Board</li> <li>• It was agreed that rather than attempting to address all areas simultaneously, a broader and more structured process would be developed later in the year to guide ongoing strategic implementation and review.</li> <li>• It was agreed that the process for developing the next strategic plan would commence towards the end of 2026.</li> </ul> <p>H. Shenton joined the meeting.</p>
8.0	<p><b>Sustainability – Introduction to NMI’s current Climate Action Roadmap</b></p>
8.1	<p>The Chair thanked Board members for revisiting sustainability matters through recent committee discussions and invited Director of Operations, Aoife Hurley to provide an overview of key focus areas outlined in the Climate Action Roadmap. These included water usage, waste management, paper reduction, and green procurement. A. Hurley informed the Board that a key challenge identified is the absence of baseline data, and she explained that she and her colleague Niall Brady, NMI’s Energy Conservation Officer, are actively working to address this to strengthen monitoring and reporting.</p> <p>A. Hurley outlined NMI’s ambition to become a leader in sustainability and informed the Board that NMI had previously applied to be considered for an energy conservation pilot project under the Office of Public Works (OPW). However, due to capacity constraints, the OPW is currently prioritising larger institutions, and A. Hurley stressed the broad portfolio of sites that OPW is required to manage and upgrade.</p>
8.2	<p><u>Discussion</u></p>

	<p>The Board thanked A. Hurley for her comprehensive presentation and inquired whether there were any areas of concern requiring Board attention. The Executive advised that NMI's ability to meet the 2030 Climate Action targets are slim, primarily due to the limited capacity [REDACTED] to support energy upgrades across the whole of the public sector. [REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>
9.0	A.O.B
9.1	Due to time constraints, it was agreed that the private session and the Board Effectiveness update would be moved to the AM meeting tomorrow. The Chair thanked the Board and the meeting was closed.
10.0	Date of next meeting
10.1	<p>17<sup>th</sup> July 2025.</p> <p><u>End of meeting.</u></p>

Approved by:

Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2025



**Prof Cathal O Donoghue**

Chair of the Board