

Dóchas
The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

Dóchas Board 103 (2-25)
27/03/25

Dóchas Board

held on Thursday, 27th March 2025 at 14:00 in the Dóchas office, Suite 8, Olympic House,
Pleasants Street, Dublin 8

M i n u t e s

Present: Rosamond Bennett (Christian Aid Ireland) Chairperson
John Moffett (Misean Cara) Vice Chairperson
Siobhán Cassidy (Trócaire) Treasurer & Company Secretary
Karol Balfe (ActionAid Ireland) (Virtually)
Olive Moore (Front Line Defenders) (Virtually)
Frank Long (Oxfam Ireland)
Martina Fitzgerald (External Board Member)
Paul Donnelly (External Board Member) (Virtually)
David Donoghue (External Board Member)

In attendance: Jane-Ann McKenna (CEO of Dóchas)
Anna Farrell (Finance & Operations Manager, Dóchas)

1. Meeting Opening and Standing Items

a. Welcome

The Chairperson opened the meeting, welcoming those present.

b. Apologies and Agenda

There were no apologies and no changes to the agenda as circulated.

c. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

John confirmed that he has a conflict of interest in relation to the application for full membership from Action Ireland Trust [Agenda item 5(d)] and so will absent himself from the discussion on that item. All other members present confirmed that there were no conflicts of interest.

Action:

- Anna to update Register of Interests re: above.

d. Minutes of Board Meeting

The Minutes of the last meeting, held on 30/01/25 were approved: Frank Long (Proposed), David Donoghue (Seconded).

e. Notes from Exchange with Irish Aid

The notes on the Exchange, which took place on 30/01/25 were taken as read.

f. Matters Arising and To-do List

Most of the items under Matters Arising or on the to-do list have been completed or will be addressed during the meeting. As previously noted the anti-fraud training for staff will be organised when there is a full team in place.

2. Reports and Updates

a. CEO Report

The **CEO Report**, which was circulated in advance, was taken as read.

The CEO highlighted some key areas of focus during the period covered by the Report:

- **Aid Cuts:** This was a huge priority over the last number of weeks, with the focus on raising the issue in the media, through political engagement and integrating it into all working group meetings to see how best to move forward. We met with Neale Richmond, Michael Gaffey and Joe Hackett to update them on how the cuts are impacting the sector. DFA have made it clear that they aren't in a position to fill the funding gap but are committed to increase the ODA budget year on year.
- **Network Infrastructure Project:** Work on the portal build is underway, with a demo planned for the AGM. A soft launch with a selection of members will follow, with full roll-out then before year end. In line with this we are also redeveloping our website.
- **Engagement with DFA:** During a meeting with the Civil Society Unit (January) to discuss ways of working we agreed to meet quarterly, look at how we can do policy dialogue differently, and organise 2-3 convenings with Dóchas member CEO's and the DG of DFA.
- **Head of Policy and Advocacy:** Chantal Sciberras has been appointed to this role and will start on 6th May. Simon Murtagh, who has filled the role on an interim basis, will finish up with Dóchas on 30th April.

In response to a question from Martina around plans for our pre-budget submission for 2026, given that the new Head of Policy and Advocacy won't be in place until May, the CEO said that we plan to factor the external context into the submission, which will be divided into two sections: (a) Climate: a research paper has been completed and will be discussed with stakeholders at a workshop on 10th April; and (b) Core ODA: What are we asking the Irish Government to do?. As part of the process of onboarding our new Head of Policy and Advocacy we will engage some support to assist her with political engagement and that will be done in parallel with the budget preparation.

The CEO said that we haven't secured a meeting with An Tánaiste yet but will follow up on our request. We had a very good engagement with Minister Richmond and are looking for opportunities to engage with him further.

b. Emerging Issues

There were no emerging issues.

3. Strategic Topic

• USAID and Aid Cuts

The CEO gave a presentation on *'Aid cuts: What does collective leadership look like?'* (copy in Shared folder), explaining that she has tried to frame it in terms of what are the next steps for Dóchas and how we bring the collective together in Ireland. This is the biggest crisis the sector has ever faced and the repercussions will be far reaching. We've come out of the initial shock phase and now need to find ways to bring the sector together.

During a general discussion the following comments were made:

- The government and Europe haven't been good at calling out what's happening to the development sector. Trade and defence are the key priorities.
- We need to focus on the importance of ODA; how Europe matters – possibly focusing on the EU Presidency and Ireland's role in that regard; Financing for development and climate are really significant.
- The sector definitely won't look the same and everyone will be affected either directly or indirectly. In terms of secondary impacts, some of our partners may not be there going forward.
- We know that two members are more directly impacted than others, with one recently announcing job cuts and the closure of some programmes. Some other members will be affected down the line

The Chairperson said that there is an opportunity now for Dóchas to lead on this.

Actions:

- The CEO will organise calls with other CEO's during April to identify what they want Dóchas to do and devise a plan to mobilise the membership around this issue.

4. Finance, Audit & Risk Committee

a. Report from Committee

The minutes of the last meeting (19/03/25) were circulated to members in advance. The meeting focused on reviewing the Directors' Report and Financial Statements and Management Letter, Reserves Policy and Risk Register. The committee received updates on various funding applications, interactions with the Charities Regulator, and USAID funding cuts. The committee also discussed the Auto Enrolment Retirement Savings Scheme and agreed that overdraft facilities would be explored in case they are required in the future. A multi-annual budget which looks at the impact on reserves over a four-year period was subsequently developed and was discussed with the CEO this afternoon.

b. Directors' Report & Financial Statements, Management Letter and Letter of Representation

Copies of the Directors' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2024, auditor's (Crowe) letter of representation and management letter were circulated to members in advance.

The Treasurer said that the audit went very smoothly, the auditor's report is clean and unqualified and the management letter is clean, with no issues identified during the audit process. Income (€803k) and Expenditure (€817k) were down on 2023 figures, mainly because the salary hosting agreement with ICVA ended in 2023. Unrestricted reserves reduced by €55k and was €20k above the maximum level. Restricted reserves increased by €41k and there was an overall planned deficit of €14k at year end. The committee will keep an eye on the situation but are not worried from a going concern perspective. The Letter of Representation is standard and requires approval and signoff by the Board.

The Board commended the Treasurer and all those involved in the preparation of the Directors' Report and Financial Statements for 2024.

c. Dóchas Reserves Policy

The Reserves Policy was circulated to members in advance. The Treasurer said that there were no changes to the Policy, which was last reviewed by the Board on 26/03/24. The policy sets the target level of unrestricted reserves at 'between five and seven months of budgeted, committed and recurring unrestricted expenditure'. In the event that there is a derogation from the target level the FARC will bring the matter to the Board for discussion. As mentioned above unrestricted reserves

at the end of 2024 were €20k above the maximum, but there are plans to spend those down in 2025.

d. Risk Register: The Risk Register was circulated to members in advance. It was noted that:

- Risk 5 (Anti-NGO and civil society sentiment amongst Irish public and EU): Remains Amber in light of increased far-right rhetoric giving rise to anti-civil society and anti-ODA sentiment.
- Risk 10 (Irish Aid withdraws support): Moved from Amber to Green as the Worldview contract has been agreed and funding received.
- Risk 12 (Decline in member income): This new risk was added to reflect concerns that cuts in funding from USAID and DFID and other pressures on fundraising might impact members contributions to Dóchas. It is Amber as the impact of the cuts on members ability to contribute to Dóchas is, as yet, unknown.
- Risk 15 (Staffing Gaps): Moved from Amber to Green as the recruitment process for a new Head of Policy and Advocacy has been completed and we will have a full team in place.

Decisions:

- The Directors' Report and Financial Statements for 2024 and Letter of Representation were approved and signed by the Chairperson and Treasurer: Rosamond Bennett (Proposed), Siobhan Cassidy (Seconded).
- The Dóchas Reserves Policy was approved. Paul Donnelly (Proposed), John Moffett (Seconded).
- There were no changes to the Risk Register as presented.

Actions:

- Anna to return signed Directors Report and Financial Statements and Letter of Representation were to Crowe.

5. Governance Committee

a. Report from Committee

The minutes of the last meeting (24/03/25) were circulated in advance. The meeting discussed the process for the election/re-election of Directors to the Board of Dóchas (briefing paper included in Board pack), reviewed the Protected Disclosures Policy and the draft agenda for the AGM and received an update on the process for the external review of the Dóchas Board. In relation to the latter, Paul asked that members complete the Board Effectiveness Review Questionnaire on or before 8th April.

The Board thanked Paul for his work on the briefing paper on the election/re-election of Directors to the Board of Dóchas.

During a general discussion on the election process it was noted that:

- Paul shared a short document outlining the process for the election/re-election of Member Directors and External Directors with the secretariat this morning and once finalised it will be sent to nominees seeking election at the AGM.
- The election processes for Member and External directors are different. In the case of Member directors, all members receive an invitation to nominate candidates for consideration and their appointment must be ratified by a 50% majority of members present and voting at the AGM. Vacancies for External directors are advertised, candidates can be co-opted to the Board until the next AGM when their appointment must be ratified by a 75% majority of members present and voting.

b. Board Nominees

It was noted that we have received three nominations for two member Director vacancies: Siobhan Cassidy (Trócaire), Karol Balfe (ActionAid Ireland) and Gretta Fitzgerald (Concern Worldwide). The AGM will also be asked to ratify David's appointment as an External Director.

At the AGM the Chairperson will articulate the role of the Board and the competencies required for the positions to be filled, introduce the candidates, declare those that are seeking re-election, invite candidates to present their candidacy and invite members to vote. Votes will be counted and verified, the unsuccessful candidate will be notified, and the results announced to the AGM. The unsuccessful candidate will be invited to participate on a Board sub-committee.

c. AGM Agenda

A draft agenda for the AGM (8 May, 10:00 – 12:30, Trinity Portal, Pearse Street) was circulated in advance. The CEO said that items will include: statutory business; 2024 highlights, including the recommendations from the Mid-term review and presentations from some working groups; applications for full membership; and plans for 2025, which will include the launch of the new Members portal and a discussion on the future of ODA.

It was noted that due to a long standing commitment David is unable to join the AGM in person and so arrangements will be made to enable him to join virtually.

d. Application for full membership

- **The Leprosy Mission Northern Ireland** have applied for full membership. Due diligence was carried out and a briefing document on the application was circulated in the Board pack in advance of this meeting.

e. Dóchas Protected Disclosures Policy

It was noted that following the discussion at the January meeting the Policy was revised to reflect recent changes to the Protected Disclosures Act. The revised document, which is modelled on Transparency International's policy, was reviewed by the Governance committee (24/03/25) and was circulated to members in advance.

Decisions:

- The agenda for the AGM was agreed. Olive Moore (Proposed). Martina Fitzgerald (Seconded).
- The Board agreed to recommend to the AGM (8 May) that the application from The Leprosy Mission Northern Ireland be approved. Paul Donnelly (Proposed), Frank Long (Seconded).
- The Dóchas Protected Disclosures Policy was approved. John Moffett (Proposed), Karol Balfe (Seconded).

Action:

- Dóchas to follow up with The Leprosy Mission Northern Ireland re: representation at AGM for the discussion on their application for full membership.

6. Other Business

- The CEO is a member of the Ireland - Africa Rural Development Committee (IARDC).
- Our Head of Communications and Media, Niall McDonald, has been appointed to the expert advisory panel of the Global Ireland Media Challenge Fund.
- Siobhan has been co-opted to the Board of Educate Together. The Register of Interests will be updated when the appointment has been completed.

7. Meeting Dates for 2025

Board meetings in 2025 will take place at 10am on the following dates: 26th June; 25th September and 27th November.

The AGM and will take place on 8th May 2025.

Chairperson:.....

Date:.....