Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Health and Social Care Trust

Minutes of NIAS Trust Board held on Thursday 15 May 2025 at 10.35am in the Boardroom, NIAS HQ, Site 30, Knockbracken Healthcare Park, Saintfield Road, Belfast BT8 8SG

Present:	Mrs M Larmour	Chair
	Mr D Ashford	Non-Executive Director
	Mr P Corrigan	Non-Executive Director
	Mr J Dennison	Non-Executive Director
	Mr P Quinn	Non-Executive Director
	Dr P Graham	Non-Executive Director
	Ms M Paterson	Chief Executive (Interim)
	Mr N Sinclair	Director of Operations (Interim)
	Dr N Ruddell	Medical Director
	Ms M Lemon	Director of Human Resources & Organisational Development (HR & OD)
	Ms L Donnelly	Director of Finance (Interim)
In Attendance:	Ms L Charlton	Director of Quality, Safety & Improvement (QSI)
	Mr S Mullen	Director of Planning, Performance & Corporate Services (Interim)
	Ms S Beggs	Temporary Board Secretary
	Maria Garland	Operations Business and Performance Manager (attended as an observer)

1 Welcome, Apologies & Declarations of Conflict

The Chair congratulated Mr Mullen on his recent appointment as Interim Director of Planning, Performance and Corporate Services and welcomed him to the Meeting.

The Chair also welcomed Ms Garland, Operations Business and Performance Manager, attending the meeting as an observer.

The Chair noted there were no apologies.

The Chair reminded those present that they should declare any conflicts of interest at the outset or as the meeting progressed.

The meeting was declared as quorate.

2 Previous Minutes (TB15/05/2025/01)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 March 2025 were **APPROVED** on a proposal from Mr Quinn and seconded by Mr Corrigan.

3 Matters Arising (TB15/05/2025/02)

Members **NOTED** the Matters Arising.

Risk Register – mentoring staff

Ms Paterson advised that a risk was added to the risk register in respect of supporting and mentoring staff transitioning to senior roles which is tabled for approval at GARAC.

ORH – NIAS Performance

At the last meeting Ms Paterson said that ORH will be benchmarking NIAS's performance against other organisations, with the intention of highlighting areas where operational response can be improved and agreed to provide an update. Ms Paterson said that since the last meeting she has spoken with ORH regarding this and that demand and capacity work is ongoing, ORH met with staff on 7 May regarding benchmarking to proceed to full modelling for reconfiguration of staffing. AACE as an affiliate partner also attended.

ORH indicated that they expect to issue the outworking's of this exercise by 16 June. She said that this will be a vehicle that designs all aspects of our future service model, with clear evidence-based targets, so NIAS can start to operate differently within an achievable practice and performance targets despite operating in an operationally challenging environment.

4 **Chair's Update**

Senior Exec Pay

The Chair updated the Board that NIAS are waiting for work undertaken by Korn Ferry to be completed and she has been in contact with the Department of Health in respect of that and it is anticipated this work will gain urgency. The Permanent Secretary and Mr Jim Wilkinson have committed to the continuation of NIAS being a priority within this piece of work.

Visit of Interim Permanent Secretary

The Chair thanked Board members who attended the Interim Permanent Secretary visit to NIAS, which was a very informed session. The Interim Permanent Secretary has indicated his intention to have a clear focus on the system and ambulance handover and communicated yesterday that this is a priority for him and will be in touch in terms of what that will look like. The Chair is optimistic there will be a clear departmental focus on delayed handovers and the effects.

NED's Appraisals

The Chair has been engaging with Non-Executive Directors to complete the appraisal process by the Department of Health's deadline. The Chair has requested feedback from the Board to assist her completing her own appraisal.

Other Matters

The Chair recently met with Mr Robert Sowney regarding the ongoing Organisational Culture work within NIAS and he has agreed to join the PCOD Committee.

The Chair met with Bron Biddle who has recently been liaising with colleagues to take forward the issue of sexual safety within NIAS and a report on her findings is due at the end of June.

The Chair attended the NI Public Sector Chair Annual Conference with some NEDs which discussed examples of collaboration across the public sector of groups working successfully together.

The Chair thanked the Executive Team on dealing with various matters during Ms Paterson's absence and offered the Boards' condolences and support to Ms Paterson during this difficult time.

5 **Chief Executive's Update**

Ms Paterson thanked Board Members and colleagues for their support recently and shared her appreciation to the Senior Team for their approach in assisting to maintain business as usual.

As Ms Paterson has been absent, she hasn't attended recent meetings, however, she referred to the Support and Intervention meeting with SPPG which was encouraging. There appears to be a change in approach and how NIAS are managed in respect of performance and financial perspective. The framework provided was very encouraging and Ms Paterson felt more assured that NIAS may get some traction on the various issues that have occurred over the last few years.

Ms Paterson and colleagues attended the recent Finance Summit and NIAS participation in this was constructive.

The Health Committee visited NIAS and there was a follow up opportunity for NIAS to inform them on the current issues. There was significant media attention at the start of the month regarding a patient who died whilst self-transporting to hospital. NIAS would like to put it on record that the conduct and dignity of the family of the patient who died was noteworthy and an unreserved apology had been issued by NIAS. NIAS plan to have more conversations with TU colleagues in that space.

At Ms Paterson's invitation Ms Charlton briefed members on the Health Committee session which she and Mr Sinclair attended on 8 May in Ms Paterson's absence. She advised that the committee had presented an opportunity to update on service challenges as well as opportunities to contribute to system wide transformation. Ms Charlton advised that there had been significant discussion relating to the lost operational capacity as a result of delayed ambulance handovers and also resulting impact on staff late finishes. The Committee had been keen to discuss models in place in London which have seen handover times reduce and sought confirmation regarding the plans to introduce within NI. Ms Charlton advised that the key points within the GIRFT and Northern Ireland Audit Office report were also highlighted, and members of the committee appeared to be supportive of the need to introduce regional measures to improve handovers. Mr Sinclair

had briefed the Committee on the work with ICH to increase safe non conveyance NIAS role in terms of transformation.

Ms Charlton and Mr Sinclair had also been asked about NIAS position in relation to 'Maggie's Call' as Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) had been with the Health Committee immediately before NIAS. They had advised that the organisation had worked alongside NIFRS in the development of a model which would result in a co response to cardiac arrest, setbacks within NIFRS in relation to introduction across the region had delayed the delivery of training through NIAS, however the organisation would be ready to discuss the training programme when NIFRS were in a position to proceed.

Mr Sinclair added it was a good experience and overall, a very positive meeting.

Ms Charlton advised that Philip McGuigan Chair of Health Committee and another colleague had visited NIAS two weeks prior and therefore there had been an opportunity to brief them in advance about ongoing issues.

Mr Corrigan was delighted that the Health Committee are not challenging NIAS on delayed handovers and are aware of all the ongoing work in respect of that. He asked if the Committee are seeking answers from other Trusts in relation to the same issues. Ms Charlton advised that whilst the Committee did not directly refer to engagement with other HSC Trusts however members did refer to assembly debate on the matter and also to engagement with DoH and SPPG in this regard. It was suggested that the matter of ambulance handover delays should be raised with SPPG at a forthcoming meeting in July. Ms Charlton advised that she and Mr Sinclair give the Committee a sense of how much of an outlier NIAS are in terms of handover times in England, in order that they could appreciate the enormity of variance and advised them NIAS continue to work collaboratively with other HSC Trusts to seek an improvement.

Ms Charlton acknowledged the collaborative efforts across the region to improve the handover position however highlighted that despite an agreed two hour back stop there is still a year on year deteriorating position.

The Chair attended a meeting with Trust Chairs and the Interim Permanent Secretary on Monday and there was a communication yesterday highlighting this is a priority for the Permanent Secretary moving forward.

The Chair thanked Ms Paterson and colleagues for the update which was **NOTED**.

6 **Update on Organisational Culture Work (TB15/05/2025/03)**

The Board **NOTED** the high-level update on work underway and plans linked to the delivery of the Trust's Strategic Objective to improve Organisational Culture.

Ms Lemon said the process itself should deliver cultural change within the organisation. The workshop held at the end of March was co facilitated by Kings Fund and the Leadership Centre which was attended by stakeholders, NEDs, TU's and internal staff. There were a number of key themes and messages that came out of the workshop.

A key part of the Organisational Culture work is the ongoing engagement with Bron Biddle via AACE regarding sexual safety, she has planned to meet staff across the Organisation particularly ensuring a strong outreach with staff in stations and ED's. Ms Biddle is also carrying out research and will provide a report with a number of recommendations for NIAS to take forward which should support and complement the findings of the Organisation Culture Workshop.

The resulting output will create a strategic map and corresponding plan that NIAS will seek to start implementing this year. Ms Lemon thanked Mr Quinn for assisting at the workshop and said that her, Mr Sowney and Mr Quinn met yesterday to discuss the next stages. There will be an established Programme Board with pre meetings in advance to facilitate. Some of the actions are work based related, about NIAS' reputation and how the public and patients perceive the Organisation.

Ms Lemon and her team will provide to PCOD with assurance in regard to delivery of the agreed plan and measures to be monitored going forward. Ms Lemon alluded to a previous conversation regarding capacity and advised that Kings Fund are

providing some help in that regard, which is helpful for independence and expertise.

Mr Quinn raised concern that Organisation Culture was raised as an issue in February 2024 and there needs to be momentum to maintain progress. The Committee terms of reference have been altered to ensure the Committee has oversight and accountability for this issue as it is a priority for the Organisation. He said the outcomes from the workshop are useful, although he has some reservations regarding the lack of attendance from front line staff.

Engagement with SMT and the Board will be a critical element of this work going forward. He recalled some of the key findings arising from the Workshop and highlighted there were a number in relation to stability.

He alluded to potential significant legacy issues that may arise, and he highlighted two areas for the Programme Board to take forward:
A – Develop a coherent plan as soon as possible
B – Engage on a one-to-one basis with SMT to ensure there is a common understanding of outcomes.

He said that NIAS need to build capacity within the organisation to drive this forward with clear actions. Mr Quinn requested to see a detailed plan at the next PCOD meeting.

Ms Paterson said the workshop was helpful and useful and improving culture within the Organisation is critical and therefore a plan must be implemented as soon as possible. She said that building capacity costs money and the Trusts are facing significant financial challenges, therefore it is important to ensure the actions are measurable and deliverable. Mr Quinn referred to other ongoing work within the Organisation that will contribute i.e. Mr Sinclair's team is looking at professionalism and education. Ms Charlton's team in terms of quality improvement adds positive elements within the Organisation Culture work.

Mr Quinn stated that culture is looking at how the public and stakeholders perceive NIAS, and subsequently what is driving the drop in demand.

Mr Dennison highlighted that it is important to explain the work so that staff understand why NIAS are carrying this out and suggested ensuring the Trust values are included and referred to throughout.

The Chair shared Mr Quinn's concerns about the delay in commencing this work and suggested looking in house to see how these matters can make a significant difference. This is so important and fundamental and 15 months to get to this stage doesn't display the urgency necessary, particularly when the service is under pressure. There needs to be a more urgent sense to this work bringing clarity to the actions moving forward. This work is about delivering on our values and should be front and centre of what everyone is doing in behaviours and actions. She elaborated that there is concern when the pillars of work undertaken are not intertwined. Culture shift has to be led by the Chief Executive across the Organisation and that needs to be evident throughout the organisation. High level updates and tangible actions are really important to ensure NIAS don't lose the energised discussion that took place last February 2024 to initiate this work.

Ms Paterson agreed that how NIAS communicate, and brand is key. The Chair said this work has been prioritised in the revised governance structure within PCOD. Ms Lemon added they need to get the balance right in terms of accountability and governance, culture change is about how the Organisation improves and there has been a lot of change in culture since February 2024, that is not included in the paper. She referenced the significant change in managing absence which has led to leadership changes and improvement. The Board acknowledged the progress made on absence management.

Ms Charlton referred to the need to ensure that the Trust have adequate capacity and individuals with the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience to support staff raising concerns. She also alluded to some positive experiences shared by staff, and staff describing that they have a real sense of belonging within the Organisation.

The Chair agreed it is important to not lose sight of the excellent work everyone is doing, which is always evident, for example at the Medal ceremonies. She appreciates cultural reform is a huge piece of work, culture is driven by those with the most impact and

culture change advocates, with leadership support put in place to help address the challenges. She thanked Ms Lemon for the update which is an important area for the Board to regularly receive assurance on.

7 **Update on Strategy Development Work (TB15/05/2025/04)**

Trust Board has previously discussed the NIAS Corporate strategy development process and timeline at a meeting in September 2024. Following subsequent discussion at Trust Board, a revised timeline for the strategy development process was provided to Trust Board. NIAS have proposed establishing a task and finish steering group to oversee the strategy development process and ensure ownership across directorates. Trust Board endorsed this approach and tasked Mr Quinn to chair the process.

Terms of Reference for the Strategy Development Steering group have been shared with Trust Board along with a timeline for the strategy development process.

Membership of the Steering Group has been agreed this week and the goal is to ensure representation from all directorates. The timeline demonstrates NIAS are at stage three of the process and have asked members of SPF to sit on the steering group as well as Trade Unions. A benchmarking process has started to include wider system engagement. Mr Mullen explained that SPPG had agreed a member of staff to work with NIAS on secondment, but the agreement has been retracted, however, HR are assisting to bring in capacity via an agency. As well as this, Mr Mullen is interviewing on Monday to backfill his previous post which will also provide further focus on strategy development.

Mr Mullen said he is attending a meeting with the Director of Public Health about providing NIAS with support and advise, which is key. The Chair suggested collaborating with PCC and utilising the existing wider group of stakeholders to engage with.

Mr Corrigan said from a governance perspective this will be a standing item at SPF and NIAS need to be collectively mature and flexible in managing these areas. He acknowledged Committees don't want to duplicate the work being done but Trust Board need to be advised.

He referred to avoiding replication of such matters within the new Committee structure and that NEDs will review the structure at the six-month stage.

8 **Patient Experience Outcomes Presentation (TB15/05/2025/05)**

Ms Charlton shared slides from a presentation to the Chief Nursing Officer's Business Meeting in April 2025. The presentation focused on experiential and clinical consequences for patients associated with delayed hospital handovers with important areas, including recent publications relating to ambulance handover delays, current handover delay position and resulting lost operational capacity to respond within NI as well as year on year deterioration relating to the 2 hour backstop position, comparative English data was also discussed, including a graph relating to the implementation of W45 within a hospital Trust in London.

The slides included data relating to the mean response times by geographical division for Cat 1, 2 and 90th centile for Cat 3 – showing particular protracted response times in Dec 24 some of which were the worst on record.
Ms Charlton referred to recent regional collaborative efforts to improve clearing of crews at ED at handover times to improve staff health and wellbeing although advised that regrettably the aim had not been achieved 28 weeks after implementation, with some NIAS staff consistently not getting home on time.

Ms Charlton referred to recent publications relating to corridor care and plans to undertake an audit of those waiting for an emergency response in community and referred to the hope that this could inform shared risk taking across the region. Ms Charlton referred to the Permanent Secretary recent meeting with the Trust Board and is hopeful new structures will help in this regard and make an impact. She emphasised that it is not about doing more, it's about doing it differently.

The Chair thanked Ms Charlton and said it is a really impactful presentation and reflective of previous comments. The Board will review over the coming weeks what improvements are implemented by the Permanent Secretary.

Mr Quinn agreed it is an impactful presentation for NIAS as well as other stakeholders, and it is useful for the Board even in terms of

developing strategies. The presentation itself forms a brilliant communication tool for current context and current circumstances NIAS are operating in.

Ms Lemon agreed with the comments that it is a really impactful presentation, and it draws out from a workforce perspective about the health and safety contravention to understand the risks. She referred to the GIRFT Report and London Model and one of key principles was that everyone across the system accepted the risk is in the community and therefore actions in the system are focused on addressing that. She concluded by saying that a cultural shift is key in improving matters.

9 End Year Performance Update TB15/05/2025/06)

Mr Mullen presented NIAS's performance framework as of May 2025 which was **NOTED**.

The Trust performance report outlines the key performance metrics up to and including the full Financial Year 2024.25

Mr Mullen highlighted some areas from the report. Page two details that the call answering demand decreased by 11%. In terms of clinical performance, H&T and S&T is seeing a significant impact.

Absence has decreased to 8.7%, which the Permanent Secretary recently referred to as an exemplar to other trusts and offered them to contact NIAS for advice. Mental Health continues to be the main reason for absence.

Following discussions at SPF, the team are restructuring the report and dashboard. Mr Corrigan elaborated that the Committee struggled with the amount of detail in the report and that they need to have oversight of performance. Mr Corrigan has had a follow up meeting with Mr Walker and Mr Henry to refine the requirements of the report for SPF. NEDs appreciate an executive summary, and he is conscious not to create too much work for the team, however they agreed to maintain the full report as an annex if they need to see more detail if required. Effectively the same summary would go to Trust Board as well as SPF and SPF can hopefully add value as they can do a deep dive into certain aspects. These requests

for deep dives may come from SPF members or from Trust Board as the Committee are keen to have direction from Trust Board to help.

The Chair agreed with this approach outlined for SPF and welcomed the additional level of assurance that will provide, which can be revisited in September 2025, after 6 months of the new governance structures being implemented.

Mr Sinclair referred to the Trust doing a deeper dive into Cat 1 and 2's to ensure NIAS are doing everything they can. The Chair suggested looking at CAT 3's as well, at the Safety Committees, and that it is for the Chairs of those Committees to ensure there isn't duplication across the Committees.

Mr Quinn noted that the fall in demand is a trend, and the performance report is a useful tool for SMT. He noted that the absence management figures are excellent.

Ms Charlton advised Trust Board that due to software issues, the non-emergency data is not accurate. She advised of recent engagement with Barry Doran DoH in relation to a review of the 2007 Transport Strategy.

10 Finance Report (TB15/05/2025/07)

Ms Donnelly presented the finance report for month 12 to 31 March 2025. For the year ending March 2025, the Trust is reporting a year-to-date (YTD) expenditure of £126.273m, resulting in a year-to-date underspend of £0.026m when compared to the final budget.

Mr Corrigan referred to a discussion with Mr Christie about testing the Finance Report in terms of whether Trust Board is content that the Finance Report is fit for purpose. He has suggested that the SPF Committee use that report to get into more detail, but an overview is provided for Trust Board and GARAC. Dr Graham and Mr Ashford agreed.

The Chair acknowledged it has been a difficult year and praised Ms Donnelly for the work achieved so far. Ms Paterson agreed and said the Executive Team appreciate the support the finance team are providing.

The Chair queried if there is a plan for NIAS to implement Encompass, as all five geographical trusts are now live on Encompass. Mr Sinclair said that NIAS share an electronic patient form on Encompass and are currently identifying a solution to transfer into the encompass system, he assured the Chair it is all being considered.

Mr Quinn asked if the review of RCC will be shared and when they are likely to see the report. Ms Paterson confirmed that it has been shared with Chief Executives and there is agreement to share those details once the plan is developed.

11 Committee Business (TB15/05/2025/08)

Trust Board **NOTED** the one-page summary providing them with information on all matters discussed at each Committee since the new Structure commenced in April.

PCOD

Mr Dennison said the Committee will be in a position to give a more robust update after the meeting on 12 June.

PEQS

Mr Ashford referred to ongoing progress within EPRR and that Mr Woodrow and Ms Pillan are visiting NIAS to carry out some quality assurance.

12 Any Other Business

The Chair asked members if they feel the meeting time is sufficient to cover items and discussions required or if the meeting should be longer. Members agreed they are satisfied to continue with the current timings of meetings.

THIS BEING ALL THE BUSINESS, THE CHAIR CLOSED THE PUBLIC MEETING AT 12:40PM.

SIGNED: ___ M. Lavmour __

DATE: __**26/6/25**_____