

Issue one, summer 2015

Charity registration update

When, in December 2013, the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland commenced compulsory charity registration for the first time, we knew a mammoth task lay ahead - a task which would impact on thousands of charities and take at least three to four years to complete.

According to estimates there are between 7,000 and 12,000 charities operating in Northern Ireland, each of which must be assessed to ensure it meets the criteria to be considered a charity under the law. Alongside this is an ongoing programme of development, education and awareness building, to highlight the registration message to charities, their trustees, supporters and the public.

Having now embarked on our second year of compulsory charity registration, we remain focused on building a public *register of charities* which is up-to-date, accurate and trustworthy.

By the end of 2014-15, we had registered

Date for your diary

Meet Northern Ireland's Charity Commissioners and find out more about the work of the Commission at our first annual public meeting in Belfast on 21 September 2015.

This is an unmissable opportunity to hear, at first hand, about the progress of the Commission as well as ask questions and share your views. There will also be a guest lecture by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, John Larkin QC (see *back page* for further information).



1,337 charities. This year (2015-16) we have a target of registering a further 2,500 charities, bringing the number of registered charities to over 3,800 by 31 March 2016.

Each registration application received is first checked by the Commission's administration team to ensure all documentation is attached. Once the documentation is complete, a casework officer is assigned to the application.

It is casework's role to assess the application to determine if the organisation meets the legal requirements to be registered as a charity (*continued on page three*).

Pictured are Commission staff and representatives from the first 14 registered charities at the launch of charity registration in Northern Ireland.

Registration top tip

Drafting a public benefit statement? Many registration applicants have found our *Purposes and public benefit toolkit* invaluable. See www.charitycommissionni.org.uk

Introduction from the Chief Commissioner

Welcome to the first edition of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's newsletter, *CCNI News*.

A new chapter for charity regulation in Northern Ireland is now well underway - one which will see every charity in Northern Ireland listed on a new, public *register of charities*. Each charity will also be required to report annually to the Commission on their activities, governance and finances, creating an environment in which the public can have confidence and trust in the charities they support.

Change, of course, can also bring with it a degree of uncertainty - where does your charity fit into this new regulatory environment? How can you ensure your charity is meeting its new, legal obligations?

The Commission understands that change can be daunting, which is why we have worked to provide a wide range of guidance and support across all areas of



our work.

I hope this newsletter will be a further resource for Northern Ireland's charities, providing an overview of recent developments within charity regulation and, of course, the Commission itself.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom McGrath', written over a light blue background.

Tom McGrath

**Chief Commissioner
Charity Commission for Northern**

Purposes and public benefit toolkit

One of the most popular registration resources on the Commission's website is the *Purposes and public benefit toolkit*.

It is aimed at supporting registration applicants in identifying their charitable purposes and drafting their public benefit statement, which is a key part of each registration application.

To do this, the toolkit offers a series of templates which applicants can use to write a public benefit statement which clearly demonstrates the public benefit which flows from each of their charitable purposes. The toolkit acts as a step-by-step guide, supporting charities in

writing a succinct and meaningful statement.

In April of this year, a new section was added to the toolkit, providing real life examples of charitable purposes and their associated public benefit statements.

The Commission would like to thank the charities which provided the toolkit examples, namely Echo Echo Dance Theatre, Fermanagh Enterprise limited and Shopmobility Newry.

The toolkit, along with a range of free registration resources is available in the *Registration support* section of:

www.charitycommissionni.org.uk

Annual reporting - file on time

With the Commission now in its second year of charity registration, we have noticed an increasing interest in what comes next.

Once registered, there are a number of new legal requirements which charity trustees should be aware of. These include the requirement for registered charities to report annually to the Commission on their activities, governance and finances.

Annual reporting is a vital element of charity regulation, providing the means by which charities may keep their entry on the *register of charities* accurate and up-to-date for the public, as well as supporting the Commission in monitoring charity compliance.

Under annual reporting, registered charities are required to report to the Commission on their first full accounting period after 1 April 2014 and the date of their registration. However, it is important to note that annual reporting is being



introduced to Northern Ireland on a phased basis.

Under phase one - the interim programme, which is live now - they are required to complete an annual monitoring return and submit their accounts and reports in the format they currently prepare them.

The Department for Social Development is developing, and due to consult on, the full regulations, which will be introduced as the second phase of annual reporting. The Commission will produce guidance on the new regulations prior to phase two being introduced.

Update on charity registration

(Continued from front page)

The casework officer may contact the charity to request further information or indicate areas of the application which require further work to meet the registration standards.

In the majority of cases, this is to highlight where the applicant might improve their public benefit statement, request clarity on the charity's purposes or information on the charity's trustees.

We understand registration is a new process and, to support charities, we have provided a range of free support tools and guidance, including registration

workshops, an online tutorial and a range of information documents. All of this guidance, and more, is available now in the *Registration support* section of the Commission's website.

While we provide this assistance where we can, and encourage all charities to use the guidance, it is important to remember that the onus is on the applicant to ensure their application meets the requirements.



Thematic reports on concerns about charities

Adding to its online library of guidance, the Commission recently published two thematic reports providing anonymous case studies and advice on concerns received about Northern Ireland charities.

The reports, which are available now in the *Charity essentials* section of the Commission's website, are:

- 400 concerns about charities
- Whistleblowing in charities

The majority of concerns received by the Commission are easily resolved through self regulation. This involves the Commission providing guidance on how the charity can resolve the issue, in accordance with the policies and processes set out the charity's governing document, the law or best practice.

In fact, it may have been that the issue did not need to be escalated to the Commission in the first place, but could easily have been put right by using the guidance available on the Commission's website.

The Commission's thematic reports and guidance documents such as *Running your charity* provide a useful resource to support charities in ensuring they are operating good governance.



For more information on thematic reports see the *Charity essentials* section of: www.charitycommissionni.org.uk

Date for your diary - Commission's first public meeting

The Commission is inviting charities, trustees, their advisors and anyone with an interest in Northern Ireland's charitable sector to its first annual public meeting.

The meeting, which will provide an opportunity to meet with the Commission's Board, will be held at the Duncairn Centre in Belfast on Monday 21 September 2015 (3pm to 5pm).

As well as an opportunity to hear about the work of the Commission and its future plans, there will be a guest lecture by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, John Larkin QC. Attendees will also have an opportunity to comment and discuss the issues raised.

Further details on the meeting, including how to book a place, will be available on the Commission's website soon.

On 1 June 2015, Minister for Social Development, Mr Mervyn Storey MLA, announced the appointment of two new Commissioners.

Seamus Magee has been appointed to the position of Commissioner for a three year term from 1 June 2015. Stephen Cockcroft has been appointed to the position of Legally Qualified Commissioner to take effect from 2 November 2015.

The positions were formerly held by Philip McDonagh and Rosemary Connolly.

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