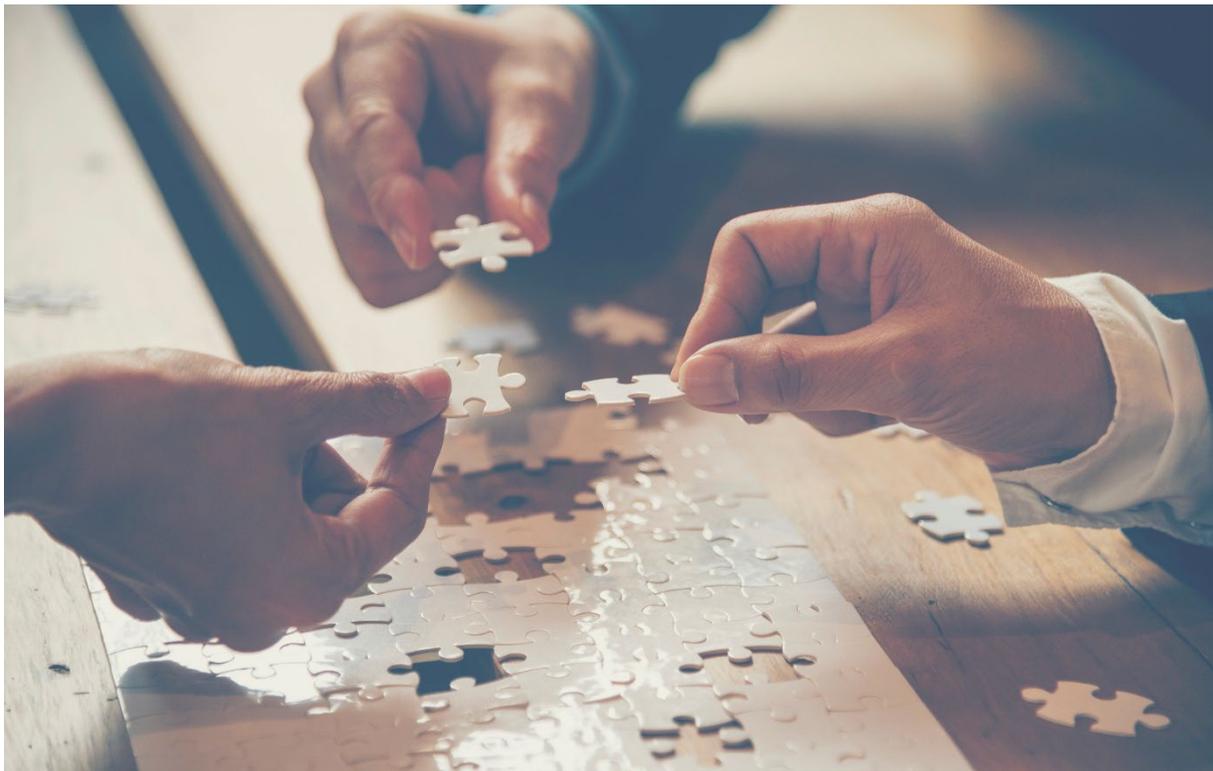


## Engagement Strategy – 2023-2026



If you have any accessibility requirements, please contact us at [admin@charitycommissionni.org.uk](mailto:admin@charitycommissionni.org.uk)

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Figure 1: Diagram of Commission stakeholders

## Section 1: Introduction

Welcome to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's Engagement Strategy for 2023-2026. The Commission was established to support and increase the public's trust and confidence in the charity sector.

### **Our vision:**

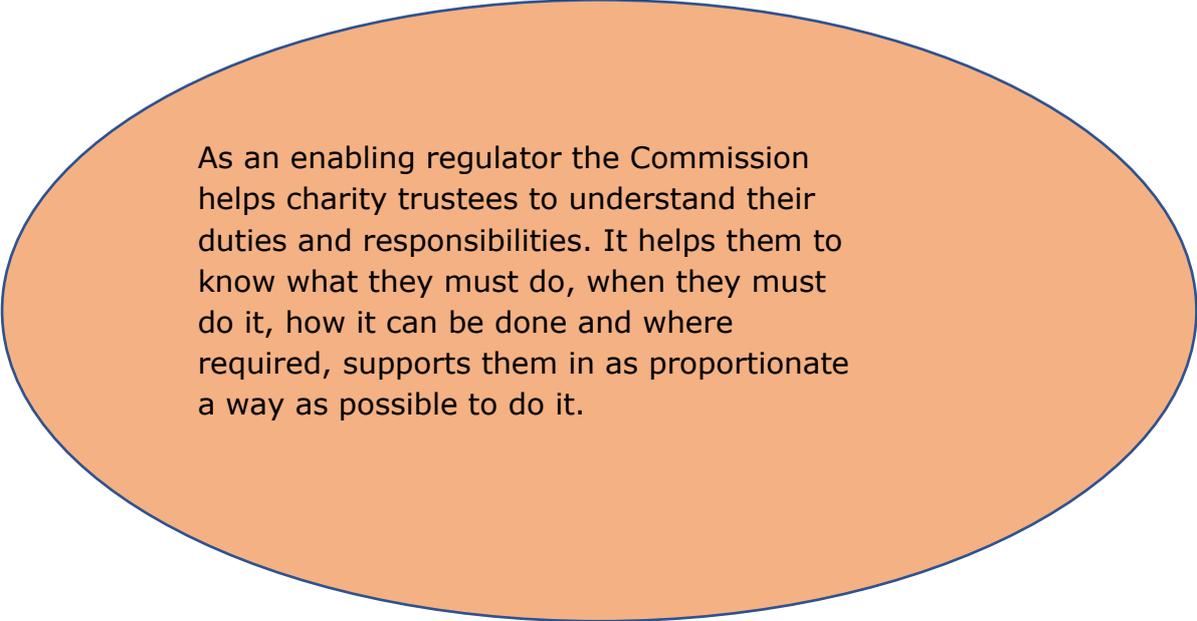
*Well run and trusted charities making a difference in peoples' lives.*

### **Our purpose:**

*enabling charities to do things right through proportionate regulation, best practice, and advice.*

The public wants charities to be well run and working for the public benefit. The best way to have a well-run charity sector is to have an enabling regulator that helps trustees know what the law expects and how they can comply with it.

### What is an enabling regulator?



As an enabling regulator the Commission helps charity trustees to understand their duties and responsibilities. It helps them to know what they must do, when they must do it, how it can be done and where required, supports them in as proportionate a way as possible to do it.

### Why have an engagement strategy?

Engagement is a two-way process through which interested stakeholders are involved with the Commission, providing feedback and in some cases, helping to co-design processes to ensure that they are user friendly.

While the Commission already carries out a lot of important communication work which informs charity trustees about good governance through guidance for example, we recognise communication is a one-way process. The Commission wants to ensure that we both engage and communicate with those who are impacted and affected by regulation.

To successfully deliver on this engagement strategy it is vital to understand what influences the public's trust and confidence in charities, who our stakeholders are and how we can engage and collaborate with them to maintain and perhaps increase the public's confidence and trust.

## **1.1 What drives the public's confidence in the charity sector?**

In 2020/2021 the Commission engaged Cognisense Ltd, a local research company, to carry out a large survey into public trust and confidence in charities in Northern Ireland. This research found that in Northern Ireland public trust and confidence in charities is strong, with an overall rating of 6.59 out of 10. It is a key function of the Commission to contribute to this level of trust remaining high and possibly increasing.

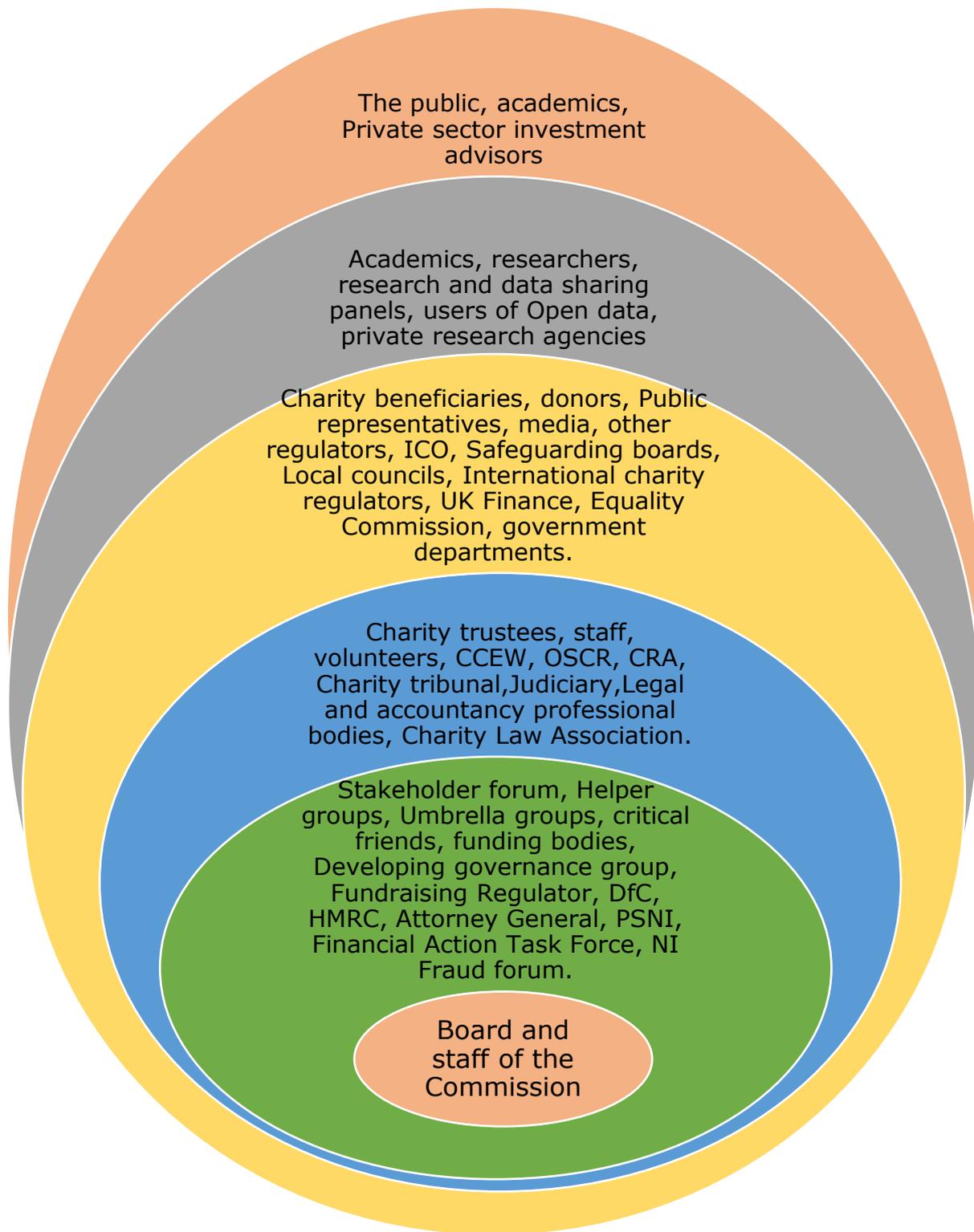
When people were asked what inspires their trust and confidence in charities the key factors they named were, transparency about how charities work and spend their money and whether they provide public benefit.

Registration and annual reporting are important ways in which charities can make this information available to the public.

## **1.2 Stakeholders**

We have identified a wide range of stakeholders who have an interest in, or benefit from, the charity sector. As such they are impacted by the decisions of the Commission. Each of these groups have key issues, interests and priorities which are relevant to them. We aim to increase our understanding of these by involving stakeholders in the development of policies and processes that affect the sector and public trust and confidence. Figure 1 shows the main stakeholders we have identified, a key to names which have been shortened is below:

CCEW	Charity Commission for England and Wales
CRA	Charities Regulatory Authority
DfC	Department for Communities
HMRC	His Majesty's Revenue and Customs
ICO	Information Commissioner's Office
OSCR	Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland



## Section 2. Engagement priorities

The overall aim of this strategy is to increase engagement with our stakeholders and take into consideration their views and opinions as we continue to develop as an enabling regulator.

The tables below outline the high-level engagement priorities for the Commission. Specific activities and timelines designed to achieve these goals will be set out in yearly implementation plans. A copy of the first implementation plan is published alongside this strategy on the Commission's website. What we can achieve will depend on the resources that are available to us. These priorities have been aligned to our strategic objectives which will guide all our work during 2023-2026.

<b>Strategic objective 1: Progressing charity registration to enhance accountability.</b>		
We will engage with:		
<b>Who</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>In year</b>
Stakeholder forum Helper groups	Amendments to guidance and crafting of clear messages re the implementation of a registration threshold.	1, 2 & 3
Stakeholder forum Helper groups	Redesign our registration guidance and supporting materials to make them more user friendly.	1 & 2
Stakeholder forum Helper groups	Engage with stakeholders to support taking forward 'open registration' through revision of guidance and support materials.	2 & 3
Charity trustees Charity contacts and representatives Helper groups	Increase direct engagement with applicants where they require support to register.	1, 2, & 3
Stakeholder forum Helper groups Charity trustees	Explore more proportionate registration for smaller charities.	1 & 2
Stakeholder forum Helper groups Critical friends Third party researchers	Engage with stakeholders using the register to explore how we can improve access to it.	2 & 3

**Strategic objective 2: Progressing our development as an enabling regulator.**

We will engage with:

<b>Who</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>In year</b>
Stakeholder Forum Helper groups	To better understand charity trustees' existing knowledge of regulatory requirements and what guidance, or tools are required and how we can best support delivery of them.	1 & 3
Stakeholder Forum Helper groups Charity regulators	Consider options for basic trustee training to help trustees understand their statutory responsibilities, in partnership with helper groups, and other stakeholders.	1 & 2
Charity trustees	Raise charity trustee awareness of their statutory responsibilities through the publication of online webinars, vlogs and blogs as requested by stakeholders.	1, 2 & 3
Good Governance group	To deliver joint events to promote the Code of Good Governance.	2 & 3
Working group, external experts, stakeholder forum and subgroup	Review and redesign the Commission's website - within budgetary limits.	1
User feedback from online surveys. Stakeholder forum, Helper groups	Review how guidance is pitched and communicated to charities.	1, 2 & 3
Partners in the sector	Carry out more in-person engagement, increase roadshows (both in person and virtual platforms) and explore other options for using technology to facilitate other methods of engagement.	1 & 2

**Strategic objective 3: Continuing to develop proportionate regulation.**

We will engage with:

<b>Who</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>In year</b>
User feedback from online surveys. Stakeholder forum Helper groups Critical friends Other charity regulators	Review how the submission of annual reports and accounts is acknowledged, and the level of feedback provided to charities.	2 & 3
User feedback from online surveys. Stakeholder forum Helper groups Critical friends Other charity regulators	Streamline the annual reporting system to be more proportionate to the size of the charity.	2 & 3
Stakeholder forum Helper groups Critical friends Other charity regulators	Review how internal review procedures operate and are communicated.	2
Helper groups Critical friends Other charity regulators	Explore new ways of sharing learning from compliance cases, outside of the traditional thematic report.	3

**Strategic objective 4: Operating as an effective and efficient public body.**

We will engage with:

<b>Who</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>In year</b>
Department for Communities Sector representatives	Contributing to working groups to support delivery of the Independent review.	1, 2, & 3
Commissioners Stakeholder forum	Building relationships with the charity sector and public.	1, 2, & 3

Charities Helper groups		
Charity trustees Charity contacts Charity representatives	We will deal effectively with complaints by engaging at the earliest opportunity using a range of methods: telephone, email and online or face to face meetings to improve customer standards.	1, 2, & 3

For this Engagement strategy to be effective it must be underpinned by clear values and enabling behaviours. Following our recent consultation these have been agreed as:

### **Integrity**

Honest, open, supportive, fair, trustworthy, respectful, valuing diversity, accountable.

### **Independence**

Impartial, fearless, supporting equality, rigorous.

### **Excellence**

Striving to be the best we can be, implementing best practice, learning, influencing, responding, leading, seeking continuous improvement, innovating, proactive, targeted.

### **Proportionate**

Proportionate: regulatory requirements tailored to the size, complexity and risk profile of the charity.

### **Accessible and Collaborative**

Good communications, flexible approach, listening, respectful in tone, reflective, engaging, encouraging and positive, visible.

The Commission is committed to ensuring that actions come out of its listening and engagement. If actions cannot follow, then an explanation will be provided to those who have contributed to the engagement exercise. The Commission will ensure that in discussion with stakeholders and when collecting feedback, we will clearly set out the parameters of any proposal so that participants understand the confines within which the Commission is working. For those who respond to consultations, if their views are not included in the consultation report we will offer to explain why.

## 2.1 Resources

Increased engagement will become a central part of the regular ongoing work of the Commission. We acknowledge that, both from the Commission's and charity sector's perspective, this will need committed resources to be effective. We are also aware that this engagement can be a challenge for smaller charities that find it difficult to devote scarce resources or staff /volunteer time to consultation and engagement. Therefore, making full and better use of the Stakeholder Forum, helper groups and critical friends will be important in achieving improved engagement. The role of these various groups is set out below:

**Stakeholder forum** - The stakeholder engagement forum is an important avenue through which the charity sector engages directly with the Commission. Its meetings provide regular opportunities for joint discussion of issues and priorities, related to charity regulation and how the Commission implement it. By providing the Commission with structured feedback from a range of charity perspectives the forum helps to identify and address gaps in our knowledge, increases our understanding of the challenges facing the sector, and ensures the views of charities are considered in how regulation is administered. The experience of the forum also provides practical advice to the Commission in the development or improvement of its processes and guidance.

**Helper groups** – these umbrella and membership organisations provide practical support to individual organisations going through the registration and annual reporting process. They offer assistance and advice in many aspects of running a charity. They also engage with the Commission about issues arising within the sector and help to disseminate information from the Commission.

**Critical friends** – these are organisations and individuals with specialist skills which can help inform the Commission's development of processes and guidance. For example, accountancy organisations, the Law Society, the Charity Law Association and independent researchers. In the current financial climate ongoing engagement will be a challenge even for these larger groups.

The Commission too must be upfront and highlight that, in this climate, choices between competing priorities will arise. An example is the cost of renewing the web site. This is the main source of advice and communications with charity trustees, making it more user friendly and introducing new features, such as allowing the register to be searched for trustees by name, will take precedence over other desired changes.

The Commission has always been a small team and is likely to remain so and therefore one of the key messages we appreciate support in sharing, is the need to manage expectations about what the Commission has the power to implement and the amount the Commission can achieve.

### **Section 3. How the strategy will be implemented**

The engagement strategy will be implemented over a three-year period from 2023 – 2026 alongside the Commission’s Communications strategy. A joint implementation plan will be developed each year, in line with the budget and resources available to the Commission. This will set out what we intend to do and when, some of which may depend on developments being taken forward by our sponsor department. It will be designed to include essential and desirable elements so that it can be adjusted as necessary. A copy of the first implementation plan is published alongside this strategy on the Commission's website.

### **Section 4. Monitoring implementation and recording outcomes and progress**

The implementation of the Engagement strategy will be monitored throughout its duration and changes and improvements made if necessary. Feedback will be gathered from each training or public event and key contacts with stakeholders. This will be recorded on a spreadsheet alongside feedback from the implementation of the Communications plan.

Likewise, feedback from interested groups, individual charity trustees, charities or members of the public will be collated and recorded, along with compliments or examples of successful and creative approaches to engagement. Learning from this feedback will help us to adjust the strategy or our approach to similar events.

Feedback from a range of online surveys which pop up, for example, to record the experience of applying for charity registration or submitting an annual monitoring return will be applied to the updating of guidance or amendment of processes. Quantitative details of the number of respondents will form part of the review of the engagement strategy.

Emerging challenges and proposed solutions will be raised with the Senior Management Team (SMT) as they arise. Reports will also be delivered to SMT on completion of key elements of the Engagement strategy.

Update reports, including details of outputs and outcomes achieved, will be provided to SMT and the Board of Commissioners in September and March each year.

Complaints will continue to be dealt with through the Commission’s *Making a complaint about our services* process. These will be reported on separately from the Engagement strategy.

## **Section 5. Evaluation and review**

A review of the strategy will be conducted during the last three months of the strategy's lifetime (from January 2026). The aim of the review will be to identify indicators of success and learning which can be integrated into the work of the Commission and to inform subsequent engagement strategies.

The evaluation will identify success as improved engagement across charities, the public, other stakeholders and staff. A survey of key stakeholders to seek feedback on how the engagement strategy is working will be conducted as part of this review.

## For further information:

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