

REGISTERED COMPANY NUMBER: NI030225 (Northern Ireland)  
REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER: NIC 104724

**Report of the Trustees and**  
**Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**  
**for**  
**Playboard Northern Ireland**  
**(A Company Limited by Guarantee)**

Lynn Drake & Co Ltd  
Statutory Auditors  
1st Floor  
34 B-D Main Street  
Moirá  
Co. Armagh  
BT67 0LE

## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

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**Playboard Northern Ireland**

**Reference and Administrative Details**  
**for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

<b>TRUSTEES</b>	Mr S Buchanan Chairman Mr R Winter Vice Chairman Miss J Hadden (resigned 29/5/2024) Miss S Kelly Treasurer Mrs P Lowry (resigned 14/11/2024) Mr N Galway (resigned 14/11/2024) Mr I Hontavilla (resigned 8/5/2024) Ms E Russell (appointed 14/11/2024) Ms J Winters (appointed 14/11/2024) Mrs F Cole Mrs K Corr (appointed 14/11/2024)
<b>COMPANY SECRETARY</b>	Mr J Gillen
<b>REGISTERED OFFICE</b>	7 Crescent Gardens Belfast Co. Antrim BT7 1NS
<b>REGISTERED COMPANY NUMBER</b>	NI030225 (Northern Ireland)
<b>REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER</b>	NIC 104724
<b>AUDITORS</b>	Lynn Drake & Co Ltd Statutory Auditors 1st Floor 34 B-D Main Street Moira Co. Armagh BT67 0LE
<b>BANKERS</b>	Bank of Ireland 4-8 High Street Belfast BT1 2AB
<b>CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER</b>	Mr A Herron

## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

The trustees who are also directors of the charity for the purposes of the Companies Act 2006, present their report with the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2025. The trustees have adopted the provisions of Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2019).

#### **Chair's Report**

As PlayBoard marks its 40th anniversary, it gives me great pleasure to introduce our 2024/25 Annual Impact Report. Now in my third year as Chair, I remain both honoured and energised by the opportunity to lead the organisation during a period of significant challenge and opportunity. Since its founding in 1985, PlayBoard has consistently demonstrated leadership, resilience, and vision in driving forward the play and playwork agenda across Northern Ireland.

This year's report offers a strategic snapshot of progress against the organisation's Strategic Plan, highlighting how PlayBoard has navigated a rapidly changing external environment while remaining focused on its mission to realise the right to play for every child and young person. I strongly encourage stakeholders to engage further via our website, social media channels, and regular e-newsletter - key platforms that reflect the breadth of our ongoing work and influence.

From a governance perspective, the year presented continued complexity. Persistent political instability has delayed critical decision-making at departmental level, directly impacting budgetary allocations and future planning. The Executive Committee and Senior Management Team have maintained close scrutiny of external risk factors, particularly as they relate to funding, policy, and service delivery. Our ability to adapt financial and operational strategies has ensured continuity of service and enabled us to maintain the organisation's core capacity.

Economically, rising inflation and increased service delivery costs have created additional pressures, yet the organisation has remained resilient. We have retained a disciplined focus on sustainability - prioritising core service provision while making strategic investments to maintain our public profile and policy engagement. This includes a strong presence across regional and national fora, where we continue to advocate for a statutory Play Strategy and for greater investment in play.

Strategically, the need for high-quality play opportunities has never been greater. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child reiterated this urgency, calling for comprehensive government action to embed the right to play in policy and practice. PlayBoard has responded by intensifying our advocacy and policy engagement, using our growing membership base (which increased by 7% this year) and a digital reach of over 500,000 to strengthen our call for legislative progress.

Our cross-sector engagement continues to expand, with growing interest in our work from the Republic of Ireland, further reinforcing PlayBoard's island-wide relevance and the strategic importance of play in education, health, and social development. As part of our future planning, we will be exploring new cross-border partnerships and funding opportunities to extend our impact.

Internally, PlayBoard's ability to maintain and strengthen its organisational effectiveness has been a testament to strong leadership and governance. The Executive Committee has continued to meet regularly to oversee risk, monitor performance against strategic goals, and ensure robust financial stewardship. Our commitment to good governance remains unwavering, and this year we again refined our risk management framework to better anticipate emerging challenges and support long-term sustainability.



## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

In conclusion, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our funding partners, whose continued support underpins all that we do. I also acknowledge and celebrate our talented staff team, whose professionalism, creativity and passion remain PlayBoard's greatest asset. Despite a difficult operating landscape, their work continues to improve the lives of children and young people throughout Northern Ireland and beyond.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, I thank our members and stakeholders for their ongoing commitment and support. As we look ahead, PlayBoard remains steadfast in its vision of a playful, inclusive future - a future that puts children's right to play at the heart of public policy and community life.

Stuart Buchanan  
Chairperson

## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

#### **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES**

##### **Objectives and aims**

As the lead NGO for play in Northern Ireland, PlayBoard works strategically to influence policy development that is supportive of play at regional and local government level, whilst also providing support for grass roots organisations involved in play delivery. Representing a strategic network of individuals and organisations both within, and related to, the play sector, PlayBoard exists to promote and to advocate play on behalf of its membership, and the children and young people it represents.

PlayBoard supports and develops the interests and aspirations of its membership with the aim of providing an independent voice for the play sector. Working with its membership, the wider play sector and key cross-sectoral stakeholders, PlayBoard works to promote, create and develop quality play opportunities aimed at improving children's play experiences, holistic development and overall quality of life across Northern Ireland.

In addition to its work in Northern Ireland, PlayBoard provides focused support and delivers play programmes within the Republic of Ireland in response to demand, whilst contributing at UK level through its representative role on the UK Children's Play Policy Forum and the UK Play Safety Forum.

PlayBoard provides support to any child or young person, individual or organisation whose ethos is based around supporting the child's right to play - to express their views and participate in the decision-making process as it relates to play and wider community planning issues. PlayBoard supports the play sector through the provision of play-based information, training and advice on a range of areas including play qualifications, committee governance, charity law, fundraising, best practice development, human resources, advocacy and school age childcare development.

In line with our mission statement, the principal activity of PlayBoard during the year was: Leading the Play Agenda. This took many forms, including targeted communications work aimed at promoting the benefits of children's play as a means of supporting the holistic development of the child; advocating for an adequate level of investment in children and young people's supporting enhanced access to play training and quality play projects, advising and assisting in the administration of funding to play services and engaging in political lobbying within a local, national and international context.

Over the year, PlayBoard has delivered advice, support and training to the play sector through one of its thematic support programmes, the play-based School Age Childcare Bright Start programme. Beyond Bright Start, PlayBoard delivered broader Workforce and Play Development programmes within a range of settings including Primary Schools (Positive PlayGrounds) and non-school age childcare settings (SureStart's, daycare providers etc.).

The year has been a successful one, with funding secured for two key play projects.

1. 'Spaces to Be': Building on PlayBoard's highly successful project, funded as part of the SEUPB 'OUR Generation' programme, PlayBoard successfully secured further funding to allow for the expansion of the initiative through PEACE Plus. The next phase of delivery will allow for expansion outside of Urban Village areas with a focus on play based approaches to tackling underlying health and wellbeing issues outside of the Urban Villages.

As part of the programme, children and young people will support develop skills and confidence through play to improve individual and community wellbeing acting as agents of change and helping to build peace for future generations. Using play, PlayBoard will build resilience in children and young people by recognising and celebrating difference, in turn supporting their positive mental health and well-being.

## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

2. 'Playful Minds': Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, 'Playful Minds' aims to support the building social connections through exciting and stimulating play opportunities across the Belfast City Council area. Through play, children will be supported to form relationships and develop social norms in a fun and age-appropriate way that moves at their own pace. These relationships will ultimately help to support their mental health and well-being as they grow.

As work continues on the Executive's Early Learning and Childcare Strategy, PlayBoard continues to administer the Bright Start programme on behalf of The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety through the Regional Childcare Partnership. Locally PlayBoard is represented on multiple networks and forums including the Childcare Partnerships, CINI Early Years Alliance, NICCY Participation Forum, All Party Children and Young People's group, Childhood, Transition and Social Justice Initiative.

On a wider level, PlayBoard continues to represent the interests of the play sector in Northern Ireland on a number of National and International Forums including:

- (i) UK Four Nation Children's Play Policy Forum
- (ii) UK Play Safety Forum
- (iii) The British Standards Institute (BSI)
- (iv) The international Standards Organisation (ISO)
- (v) The International Play Association via the Northern Ireland branch (IPA NI), and
- (vi) The European Network for School Age Childcare

#### **Public Benefit Statement**

PlayBoard's direct beneficiaries are children, young people, parents, carers, child-minders, playworkers and play-based organisations. Further the children and young people who are supported by those organisations can be viewed as indirect beneficiaries.

#### **BENEFITS**

The following benefits will be achieved from PlayBoard's purposes:

- (i) Increased effectiveness and efficiency of community and voluntary sector organisations concerned with the provision of play-based activities in Northern Ireland, resulting in enhanced outcomes and service delivery and, consequently an improved quality of life for those children and young people.
- (ii) Increased self-awareness, resilience, competence, and confidence among children and young people alongside the development of social skills and abilities and an enhanced sense of purpose and fulfilment through play.
- (iii) Enhanced knowledge and capacity of children, young people, parents, carers, child-minders, playworkers and play-based organisations to make healthier lifestyle choices through play.
- (iv) Increased knowledge, understanding and awareness of the importance of play in supporting child development among beneficiaries involved in delivering play-based activities.
- (v) Enhanced ability of the play sector to provide advice and information to statutory sector bodies and agencies, funders and others to exert a positive influence on the development of policy and practice for play.
- (vi) To provide statutory authorities and others with opportunities to connect with young people in a positive manner.

## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

The immediate beneficiaries are those community and voluntary sector organisations and statutory bodies and agencies and others concerned with play provision activities; raised awareness about the child's right to play and the cultivation of a society that favours equality and diversity and challenges prejudice related to the right to play in Northern Ireland.

(vii) Improved governance within Management Committees; resulting in improved sustainability of community Play Groups or Childcare centres.

(viii) Connecting children and young people to their communities through play, resulting in positive citizenship and behavioural change.

(ix) Increased opportunities for children and young people to engage in play activities that bring both communities and people together, leading to greater social cohesion, improvements in health and fitness, well-being and personal fulfilment.

(x) Enhanced mental health and well-being of children and young people which builds self-esteem, independence, resilience and respect for self and others.

(xi) Through advice, support, training and play-based activities beneficiaries are supported to develop new skills and coping mechanisms.

PlayBoard operates an outcomes-based accountability framework, which is used to measure the impact of all areas of work. Benefits will be evidenced in the following ways:

(i) Feedback and evaluations of the work and impact from children and young people who participate in PlayBoard programmes and who participate within the play organisations PlayBoard provide support, advice, and training. This enables PlayBoard to conduct internal reports of the play-based organisations concerned and carry out both internal and external evaluations of both their work and that of PlayBoard.

(ii) Evidence is derived from engagement and feedback from children and young people, community and voluntary sector representatives, reports produced by statutory sector bodies and agencies as well as funders and other likeminded organisations.

(iii) Evidence of impact is gleaned through analysis of social policy wherein play is now included.

(iv) Regular satisfaction and impact surveys are conducted with PlayBoard members, school age childcare providers, parents, carers and interested stakeholders.

### **PRIVATE BENEFITS**

PlayBoard can confirm that there will be no private benefits, and our purposes are not harmful to any of the identified beneficiaries.

### **ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE**

The year 2024/25 has continued to be one of challenge for many across the community and voluntary sector - albeit with signs of growing stability. There continued to be some level of uncertainty regarding the external funding environment, particularly at core and strategic level, however PlayBoard has been able to successfully navigate the challenges presented securing a level of core support from the Department of Education in line with full cost recovery.

## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

The continued political stability at NI Assembly level has provided for more cohesive and constructive engagement with government departments regarding policy change, albeit progress towards delivery of key policy objectives remains slow, due in part to continued public finance challenges.

At operational level, PlayBoard had a very successfully year securing two key pieces of funding to support the delivery of critical play programmes. Building on the successful 'Spaces to be' programme, PlayBoard secured funding for a further phase of the initiative through SEUPB's PEACE Plus programme. Funding will allow for the expansion of play based approaches to tackling health and wellbeing issues, whilst enhancing community cohesion, to a regional level.

PlayBoard secured further funding from the Big Lottery Fund for the delivery of 'Playful Minds', a programme that aims to support the building of skills and confidence through play across the Belfast City Council area.

Over the period, PlayBoard has continued to deliver a broad range of key services against the core themes within its overarching strategic plan as we sought to advocate for, deliver and develop play across twelve strategic objective areas:

Advocating for play.

Building our evidence based on practice and experience.

Strengthening our voice.

Developing and delivering a quality framework suitable for several sectoral contexts.

Promoting and developing the playwork workforce.

Delivering playwork.

Working with councils, schools, and childcare settings to enhance understanding and knowledge of play and playwork.

Developing strategic alliances, collaborations and new partners to promote the health and inclusion benefits of play e.g. PHA, disability sector.

Enhancing our cross-border profile to share learning and develop new relationships and partnerships.

Advancing PlayBoard's economic growth.

Developing PlayBoard's competence, capability, and capacity.

Enhancing organisational leadership, culture, and growth.

The Trustees Report provides an overview of the broad range of activities delivered in support of the key aims which underpin the Strategic Plan, namely:

Aim 1: Being the authoritative voice for play.

Aim 2: Promoting quality in play and playwork practice.

Aim 3: Increasing and improving opportunities and conditions for play.

Aim 4: PlayBoard's organisational growth and development.

Some highlights under each key strategic aim includes (not definitive):



## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

#### **Aim 1: Being the authoritative voice for play:-**

Strategic representation on 30+ networks, forums and partnerships including the UK Play Safety Forum, UK Children's Play Policy Forum, Network Youth NI, All Party Groupings, Childcare Partnerships, NICCY Participation Forum, British Standards Institute, International Standards Organisation, International Play Association (NI Branch).

Provided active representation for the school age childcare and wider play sector on the Department of Education's Early Learning and Childcare Strategy Reference Group and Stakeholder Forum.

Undertook direct advocacy with political parties (DUP, UUP, SDLP, Alliance, TUV, People before Profit) including MLA party group information sessions, individual MLA meetings, preparation of political briefing papers etc.

Held two play focused events at Stormont aimed at enhancing political understanding of the importance of play - one focused on research undertaken by PlayBoard with children and young people in Northern Ireland and one on the state of the Play Based School Age Childcare sector.

Delivered a series of webinars on (both NI and RoI focused) aimed at enhancing understanding of the value and importance of play including 'Progressing Play in Ireland', 'Emotions Matter', 'Play Matters' and targeted member sessions focused on government policy, including the Programme for Government.

Ongoing engagement with senior government officials across a range of departments aimed at enhancing the commitment to delivering quality play opportunities.

Increased social media presence: Facebook with 8,798 followers (7% increase in-year), X (formerly Twitter) with 5,864 followers (19% increase in-year) alongside the continued development of PlayBoard Instagram and LinkedIn social media platforms.

12 E-Plays issued in year alongside 4 E-Play updates providing details of strategic/policy matters and operational delivery to PlayBoard membership.

Delivered targeted social media campaigns and information resources aimed at supporting parents, schools, childcare settings and youth organisations to enhance play-based activities. Key publications included a series of play briefing sheets (Summer Play, Olympic Play Challenge, The Power of Play and Baby Playtime) and a number of research reports (State of the SAC Sector, Children & Young Peoples Survey report, Play in Ireland survey report),

Within the year, PlayBoard has increased its membership by 7% rising from 1,678 members at the beginning of April 2023 to 1,797 at the end of March 2024.

#### **Aim 2: Promoting quality in play and playwork practice.**

Worked strategically with a range of partners including government departments, Childcare Partnerships, local authorities, training providers, colleges and employers to promote greater access to training and qualifications, greater choice of courses and greater access to variety of approaches to learning.

PlayBoard delivered direct training across a range of settings including sessions for Childcare Partnership members, School Age Childcare providers, Nursery providers, SureStart, Daycare settings and other practitioner groups from across NI.



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### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

Delivered training in the RoI including Play Leader training in partnership with Donegal Sport, Planning for Play library-based training

Membership of UK School Age Childcare forum, connecting to regional representative bodies across UK to promote quality within play-based School Age Childcare settings.

Building on our successful partnership with the Mae Murray Foundation, finalised NI framework for inclusive play, establishing guidance and standards for the enhancement of inclusive fixed play delivery.

As a member of the UK steering group, PlayBoard provided developmental support to the ongoing National Occupational Standards Review process and participated within Playwork Education and Training Council (PETC) NI group and at wider UK level.

NI Executive Bright Start Programme - PlayBoard continued to deliver quality support on a group and one-to-one basis, delivered one-to-one governance guidance and support and undertook financial monitoring of 48 SAC projects in receipt of Bright Start funding.

Delivered cluster training and support sessions aimed at equipping SAC providers with the knowledge, skills and tools to manage their play-based delivery in an effective, high impact manner.

Through PlayBoard's work, the profile and professionalism of playwork has been enhanced, and training and practice has stimulated collaboration and cross-sectoral mobility within the children's workforce.

#### **Aim 3: Increasing and improving opportunities and conditions for play.**

Co-ordinated a series of events on UK National Play Day, promoting positive messaging regarding the benefits of play and encouraging community-based play sessions.

Supported and promoted local Play Day events held by councils and other providers, with a focus on encouraging people to celebrate play within their communities.

Commenced delivery of 2 key play programmes - 'Spaces to Be' and Playful Minds - delivering critical play-based health and wellbeing programmes within schools, childcare and community settings

Delivered successful play events with Mindwise and Donegal Sport

Developed the 'Wiggle Room', an innovative technology-based play project in partnership with BoomClap Play which was located at the Mac in Belfast for a 4-month run.

In recognition of expertise in relation to Inclusive Play, PlayBoard appointed to International Standards Organisation (ISO) Expert Group leading development of a global standard for ensuring quality inclusive play delivery.

Delivered 8 Positive PlayGrounds sessions within Primary Schools

Undertook play value assessments and provided recommendations for the enhancement of play park development in Kerry County Council area.

Provided feedback on proposed play park designs in Newry, Mourne and Down and Antrim and Newtownabbey Council areas.

## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

#### **Aim 4: PlayBoard's organisational growth and development.**

All Board meetings and Finance and Personnel sub-group meetings have been undertaken as required alongside PlayBoard's AGM which took place in November 2024.

Given the volatility of the funding environment, PlayBoard continued to seek ways to broaden the funding base for the organisation as a means of balancing risk. This included engaging with a range of funding bodies to grow capacity to meet underlying play need leading to successful bids for funding to support two key programmes - 'Spaces to Be' and 'Playful Minds'.

During the year PlayBoard internal subgroup has continued to work to develop a research and evidence base to underpin advocacy aimed at securing a Play Strategy for Northern Ireland.

During the year PlayBoard continued to develop its work in the Republic of Ireland in partnership with the National Childhood Network (NCN). This included the undertaking of joint research on children and young people's experiences of play and the barriers they face in fulfilling their right to play with launch of findings contributing the development of an IPA branch in RoI. PlayBoard further delivered play sessions, targeted play training, play value assessments and advocacy work in RoI aimed at pro-actively advocating for play and developing relationships with key stakeholders including political representatives, government officials, colleagues, and practitioners from across the children's sector.

## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

#### **FINANCIAL REVIEW**

##### **Financial position**

The financial results for the year are detailed in the attached financial statements, with total funds held at year-end outlined in the accompanying notes. These figures reflect a period of considerable challenge for the organisation, driven by external factors beyond our control.

##### **Strategic Context and Challenges**

Throughout the last financial year, the organisation like many within the wider NGO and charitable sector has operated in an increasingly uncertain and difficult environment. This has primarily been due to a destabilised political climate, which has significantly impacted funding availability at both core and strategic levels. The lack of consistent, long-term financial commitments has placed added pressure on service delivery and strategic planning.

##### **Looking Ahead in Uncertain Times**

While the recent resumption of the Northern Ireland Assembly brings a degree of cautious optimism, the ongoing absence of confirmed departmental budgets and clear decision-making continues to limit forward planning. The broader economic downturn further compounds this uncertainty, creating a hesitant funding landscape that demands adaptability and resilience.

##### **Strategic Reflection and Organisational Direction**

In response to these conditions, the Executive Committee will undertake a thorough review of the organisation's form, function, and strategic remit. This will involve critical reflection on how the organisation can best serve its membership and continue to fulfil its mission under increasingly complex and constrained circumstances. The review will aim to strengthen the organisation's operational foundations while ensuring strategic clarity and relevance in a rapidly evolving external environment.

##### **Strategic Financial Overview**

A review of the financial results for the year indicates an overall deficit of £9,463. However, this figure includes a depreciation charge of £26,802, of which £24,404 has been allocated against the designated fund related to the purchase and improvement of the organisation's building. When adjusted for this, PlayBoard reports an end-of-year trading surplus of £17,339. This positive outcome, achieved despite ongoing external challenges, reflects careful financial management and the organisation's commitment to long-term sustainability. Moving forward, PlayBoard remains focused on strengthening its financial position to support the continued delivery of its aims and strategic objectives.

##### **Building Organisational Capacity and Strategic Responsiveness**

To deliver on its strategic aims, the Executive Committee recognises the need to maintain both the capacity and competency required to meet existing funding obligations, while also cultivating new partnerships and initiatives. In this regard, strategic investment in organisational development remains a priority. By building on a strong operational foundation, the Executive Committee is focused on ensuring PlayBoard can respond proactively to opportunities and challenges in an increasingly complex operating environment.

##### **Governance, Budgeting, and Future Direction**

As part of its commitment to good governance and improved outcomes, the Executive Committee will present a responsible and manageable budget. This financial plan will prioritise alignment with strategic goals, enhanced impact delivery, and improved sustainability. Through careful stewardship and forward-looking planning, PlayBoard aims to strengthen its position and ensure it continues to deliver effectively for children and young people across Northern Ireland.

## **DESIGNATED FUNDS**

The Executive Committee recognise that purchasing, renovating and furnishing the building at Crescent Gardens has a financial impact on the organisation. £88,676 of the unrestricted general fund has been designated for such activity. The Executive Committee also agreed that an unrestricted designated business development fund be implemented and any unrestricted undesignated reserves above £502,488 be allocated to this fund to enable PlayBoard to meet its aims and objectives.

£24,404 of the depreciation charge this year has been set off against this designated fund brought forward. This leaves a designated fund balance to be carried forward of £1,082,978.

## **RESERVES POLICY**

### **Strategic Approach to Reserves Management**

PlayBoard's reserves policy plays a critical role in demonstrating sound financial stewardship to existing and potential funders, donors, and wider stakeholders. A well-articulated policy not only builds trust in the organisation's financial management but also provides a clear rationale for the level of reserves held. It serves as an indicator of the charity's financial resilience and preparedness to meet future funding needs.

### **Purpose and Role of Reserves**

The primary aim of the reserves policy is to ensure sufficient funds are available to cover unforeseen costs, particularly within a volatile funding environment. The policy also recognises the importance of maintaining financial resources to meet potential liabilities in the event of the organisation ceasing operations. In the view of the Executive Committee, the reserves must provide adequate financial stability, enabling PlayBoard to continue delivering on its mission and charitable objectives well into the future.

### **Reserves as a Strategic Planning Tool**

Beyond financial protection, the reserves policy is a key element of strategic planning. It supports decision-making around the funding of new projects or initiatives, informs the annual budgeting process, and enhances risk management by highlighting potential gaps or uncertainties in future income streams. This forward-looking approach ensures that reserves are both a safety net and a tool for sustainable growth.

### **Governance and Reserve Levels**

The Executive Committee has established that unrestricted funds not otherwise committed should be maintained at a level equivalent to six months of total resources expended. This benchmark provides a prudent buffer against financial instability. Any decision to draw upon reserves will be subject to rigorous scrutiny and formal approval by the Executive Committee, which will assess the rationale and determine an appropriate amount to be allocated, ensuring alignment with organisational priorities and fiscal responsibility.

The Executive Committee have agreed a level of reserves of £502,488 needed to cover six months.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

PlayBoard's vision is of 'A society where the right to play is both valued and realised'. In seeking to achieve this vision, PlayBoard will continue to represent the voices of children, young people and the wider play sector, advocating and lobbying on their behalf with local and regional government officials, departments, Councillors and MLAs. PlayBoard will continue to build the capacity of the sector to fully engage with children and young people, enhancing their ability to deliver quality play experiences that support the holistic development and health and well-being of children and young people.

## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

#### **Over the coming period, PlayBoard will continue to lead on:**

- (i) The design, development and delivery of quality play training programmes aimed at both the playwork sector as well as wider sectors that have an interest in, or an influence on play.
- (ii) The undertaking of research aimed at highlighting the impact of play on individuals and communities.
- (iii) Proactively engaging with government Departments and Councils in order to influencing policy and practice.
- (iv) Advocate and lobby for children and young people's right to play.
- (v) Provide support, advice and guidance to all who has an interest on play.
- (vi) Deliver focused area-based community development projects centred on enhancing play experience within communities.

PlayBoard operates a rolling Strategic Plan which will be subject to review by the Board in the summer of 2025 to ensure that the organisation remains targeted and focused on its key strategic aims and objectives. An annual operational plan was agreed for the period April 2025 - March 2026.

#### **Some of the key challenges and changes for the next year include:**

- (i) Review of the PlayBoard Strategic plan.
- (ii) Successful delivery of the operational plan, ensuring that PlayBoard continues to meet its strategic aims and objectives.
- (iii) The securing of additional funding to ensure that PlayBoard has the capacity to deliver on its strategic plan.
- (iv) Successful completion of all contractual service level agreements in the delivery of face-to-face services.
- (v) Continued focus on supporting the play sector regarding the impact of the Children and Young People's Strategy and the upcoming Early Learning and Childcare Strategy.

PlayBoard has been awarded grant funding from the Department of Education to deliver, develop and further children and young people's play throughout Northern Ireland. PlayBoard is recognised as the Department's strategic partner for play in NI, a major achievement for PlayBoard, which no other organisation has achieved, and will play a vital role in PlayBoard's strategic plan moving forward.

PlayBoard will look to develop both its strategic and operational plan to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, appraising and developing different work methods and areas of delivery that will support the organisation in achieving its strategic aims.



## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

#### **STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT** **STRUCTURE**

PlayBoard NI is incorporated under the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, being a company limited by guarantee not having a share capital. The company is governed by its Articles of Association since its incorporation on 6 December 1985. PlayBoard is also a charity and has been formally admitted by the HM Revenue & Customs, as such, for income tax purposes and is registered as a charity with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland and abides by the legal requirements to submit an annual monitoring return form providing information on the charity's activities, governance and finances.

#### **GOVERNING DOCUMENT**

PlayBoard is governed by its Articles of Association. The Executive Committee confirm that they have complied with their duty within the Charities Act 2011 and have amended the Articles of Association in line with the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit, which were agreed on the 8th October 2013. PlayBoard will carry out a governance health check and make any recommendations arising from this on its Articles of Association, at its next AGM in November 2025.

#### **MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE**

PlayBoard operates as a membership organisation representing the play and playwork sector, with governance and strategic oversight provided by its Executive Committee. In line with Charity Law, the Directors of the company also act as Charity Trustees, ensuring accountability and alignment with charitable objectives. Under the company's Articles, these Directors are formally recognised as members of the Executive Committee. Within this structure, three Honorary Office Bearers - the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Honorary Treasurer - are elected to support leadership and governance functions. All members of the Executive Committee are formally registered as Company Directors, reflecting their legal and fiduciary responsibilities in steering the organisation's strategic direction and safeguarding its mission.

#### **APPOINTMENT OF BOARD MEMBERS**

Up to 10 Executive Committee members which include PlayBoard Honorary Officers are nominated and duly elected by PlayBoard at its Annual General Meeting. Committee members are appointed for a period of three years. Executive Committee members elected to an Honorary Officers post may extend their tenure to a maximum of six years. The Executive Committee can also co-opt up to four additional members to fill a skills gap in the Committee make up as they see fit.

#### **COMMITTEE INDUCTION AND TRAINING**

PlayBoard is committed to strong governance and accountability, ensuring that all newly appointed Executive Committee members receive comprehensive induction training. This structured onboarding process equips members with a clear understanding of their governance role and legal responsibilities under both charity and company law. The training covers the organisation's decision-making structures, strategic and operational planning cycles, and the relationship between the Executive Committee and the wider staff team. In addition, members are briefed on PlayBoard's organisational structure and key programmes of work, enabling them to engage fully and contribute effectively to the strategic direction and oversight of the organisation from the outset.

As part of their induction Executive Committee members are provided with the following:

PlayBoard's Articles of Association  
PlayBoard's Vision Mission & Values



## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

PlayBoard's Strategic Plan  
PlayBoard's Operational Plan  
PlayBoard's Trustee/Directors' Roles and Responsibilities  
PlayBoard's Finance & Personnel Committee Terms of Reference  
PlayBoard's Code of Conduct / Conflict of Interest policy  
PlayBoard's Skills Audit  
PlayBoard's Organisational chart  
PlayBoard's Audited Accounts  
PlayBoard's Principles of Good Governance  
The Code of Good Governance Northern Ireland  
PlayBoard Risk Register

## **GOVERNANCE**

The Executive Committee is instrumental in upholding strong governance within PlayBoard, providing strategic guidance and shaping policy direction through the formulation and oversight of the organisation's three-year strategic plan. This is complemented by a rigorous annual operational planning process, which enables the Committee to regularly monitor, evaluate, and adapt progress toward strategic objectives, ensuring continued alignment with PlayBoard's mission and the evolving external landscape.

To maintain effective governance, the Executive Committee, provides consistent oversight and responsive decision-making. Supporting this structure, the Finance & Personnel Sub-Committee meets quarterly with a specific remit to oversee PlayBoard's financial health and human resource matters. The Chief Executive, appointed by the Committee, is responsible for day-to-day management and is delegated authority-within clearly defined parameters-to implement the strategic and operational objectives approved by the Committee.

Throughout the year, the Executive Committee has remained vigilant to the economic climate, meeting regularly to assess the impact of the ongoing recession and potential threats to PlayBoard's income streams. In doing so, the Committee proactively evaluated both strategic and operational risks and reviewed financial forecasts and budget scenarios. As a result, a considered and balanced budget has been approved for the upcoming year, ensuring that PlayBoard remains financially sustainable and operationally resilient in fulfilling its commitment to children and young people's play.

### **Governance and Strategic Oversight**

The Executive Committee plays a central role in ensuring strong governance by setting the strategic objectives and policy direction of the organisation through PlayBoard's three-year Strategic Plan. Progress against these strategic goals is actively monitored through the annual operational planning process, ensuring that the organisation remains focused, accountable, and aligned with its mission.

### **Committee Structure and Operational Oversight**

The Executive Committee meets every six weeks, providing regular and consistent oversight of the organisation's direction and performance. In addition, the Finance & Personnel Sub-Committee, which focuses specifically on human and financial resource matters, meets quarterly to ensure robust management of core operational functions. Day-to-day management is led by the Chief Executive, appointed by the Committee, who operates within clearly defined terms of delegation. This includes responsibility for implementing and monitoring strategic and operational objectives as outlined in the approved plans.

## **Risk Assessment and Financial Planning**

Throughout the year, the Executive Committee maintained a proactive approach to risk assessment and financial planning in light of ongoing economic uncertainty. With particular concern for the implications of a prolonged recession, the Committee regularly evaluated potential threats to PlayBoard's income streams, including reductions in public sector funding and limitations on project-based grants. Strategic discussions focused on identifying the timing and scale of these risks and determining appropriate mitigation measures to ensure organisational resilience. This forward-looking oversight has been critical in enabling PlayBoard to protect its core functions, adapt to emerging challenges, and maintain financial sustainability while continuing to deliver on its mission.

## **Forward Planning and Resilience**

In fulfilling its governance responsibilities, the Executive Committee undertook a detailed review of strategic and operational risks to inform forward planning and ensure resilience. This comprehensive risk analysis was integral to shaping the financial framework for the year ahead, leading to the development and approval of a budget that prioritises both stability and adaptability. The agreed financial plan reflects a balanced and prudent approach-safeguarding PlayBoard's core operations while maintaining the flexibility needed to respond to external uncertainties and emerging opportunities. Through this process, the Committee has reinforced the organisation's capacity to remain effective, sustainable, and aligned with its long-term strategic objectives.

## **Conflicts of Interest**

Executive Committee members and staff have an obligation to act in the best interests of PlayBoard and its beneficiaries, present and future. Executive Committee members need therefore to be sensitive to the possibility that their activities outside the organisation (including holding office or being otherwise involved in organisations, companies, political parties or) could be perceived as having a bearing on - or coming into conflict with - the objects and integrity of the organisation. Executive Committee members have a duty in law to avoid conflicts of interest and must not take part in any discussion or decision in which there is such a conflict.

Each year both Executive Committee members and staff will be asked to complete a declaration of interests form to declare any affiliated connections through the following: Spouse, domestic partner, child, mother, father, brother or sister or close associates; any corporation, business or non-profit organisation of which you are serve as staff , officer, board member, partner, participate in management or are employed by; any trust or other estate in which you have a substantial interest or as to which you serve as a trustee or in a similar capacity. Disclosure forms are monitored as part of the risk register controls.

At the start of each Executive Committee meeting, members will be asked to declare whether any agenda items raise a potential conflict of interest. This will be recorded and reflected in minutes. Where a conflict of interest occurs, the Trustee concerned will withdraw from the meeting for that item on the agenda. It is the potential, rather than the actual, benefit from which the conflict of interest arises which requires authority, in order to avoid a breach of trust and to ensure transparency.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT**

PlayBoard has developed and implemented a robust and comprehensive risk management toolkit that enables the Executive Committee to systematically identify, assess, and respond to potential risks facing the organisation. This structured approach allows Trustees to evaluate the likelihood and potential impact of identified risks and to put in place appropriate controls to mitigate them. Risk monitoring and review are embedded within organisational practice, with regular updates to the risk register ensuring responsiveness to both internal and external changes.

Through the Finance & Personnel Sub-Committee, risk is assessed on both a quarterly and annual basis, with particular focus on strategic risks—those with the potential to affect the organisation at a fundamental level, such as major financial overspend or reputational harm—and operational risks, which arise from the day-to-day delivery of services. The organisation remains committed to safeguarding the health and well-being of its staff, stakeholders, and the children and young people it serves, with continued monitoring of risks associated with Covid and proactive mitigation measures where possible.

To ensure PlayBoard remains fit for purpose, actions currently underway include:

- (i) Ongoing review and refinement of the risk register aligned to strategic objectives
- (ii) Strengthening internal controls and compliance processes
- (iii) Building financial resilience through diversified income planning
- (iv) Prioritising staff well-being and safe working practices
- (v) Enhancing organisational agility to respond quickly to emerging risks and opportunities.

The Board of PlayBoard meets on a six-weekly basis to provide strong oversight and ensure effective governance in managing organisational risk and financial sustainability. At each meeting, the Board rigorously reviews PlayBoard's risk management procedures, with specific attention to evolving Covid-related risks such as cyber security, data protection, and operational health and safety. In line with good governance, the Board ensures ongoing communication with funders to confirm the continuation of financial support and actively monitors the organisation's financial position, challenging assumptions, validating projections, and endorsing cost-saving measures where necessary to protect core activities.

The Board also assesses current and potential funding opportunities, ensuring that existing commitments are fulfilled while evaluating whether any planned projects can be delayed or cancelled to safeguard financial stability. Consideration is given to the strategic use of cash reserves to help absorb any unforeseen financial shocks. Risk management is embedded in all aspects of Board decision-making, with continuous assessment ensuring that mitigation strategies are both proactive and responsive. This structured approach ensures PlayBoard remains resilient, sustainable, and capable of delivering its mission in the face of ongoing uncertainty.



## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

#### **PAY POLICY FOR SENIOR STAFF**

PlayBoard's approach to senior staff remuneration is underpinned by transparency, fairness, and alignment with sector standards. Trustees (Executive Committee) volunteer their time and receive no remuneration.

The organisation has long adopted the National Joint Council (NJC) pay scales as a benchmark for salary setting across all roles, including the Senior Management Team. These pay points were initially determined through an externally benchmarked evaluation of comparable roles and responsibilities across the sector, ensuring that salaries reflect the level of expertise and accountability required. Recommendations on salary bands and progression are reviewed by the Finance & Personnel Sub-Committee, with cost-of-living adjustments carefully assessed and brought forward for Executive Committee approval. This structured approach ensures responsible financial management, supports staff retention, and maintains public confidence in PlayBoard's governance and use of charitable funds.

#### **SUSTAINABILITY**

PlayBoard NI is committed to the continuous improvement of its environmental performance for the benefit of current and future generations. As an organisation dedicated to the wellbeing of children, young people, and communities, we recognise our responsibility to minimise environmental impact and to promote sustainability in all aspects of our operations.

We are committed to integrating environmental best practices and principles of sustainability into our daily activities. This includes reducing waste, conserving energy and resources, and embedding environmentally responsible behaviours across all levels of the organisation. We will seek to comply with, and where possible exceed, all relevant environmental legislation and regulatory requirements.

PlayBoard recognises the growing environmental challenges posed by climate change, overconsumption of resources, and biodiversity loss. We believe that environmental sustainability is not only a moral imperative but a strategic priority that supports long-term organisational resilience and operational efficiency.

To this end, we have developed and implemented an Eco-Workplace Policy aimed at promoting a greener organisational culture. Through staff engagement, sustainable procurement, responsible energy use, and pollution prevention practices, PlayBoard will work proactively to reduce its carbon footprint and contribute positively to the wider environmental agenda.

We view environmental responsibility as an integral part of delivering a quality service, ensuring a safe and healthy workplace for our team, and reinforcing PlayBoard's values-driven commitment to a better future.

#### **STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES**

The trustees (who are also the directors of Playboard Northern Ireland for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the Report of the Trustees and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) including Financial Reporting Standard 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland".

## **Playboard Northern Ireland**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2025**

#### **STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES - continued**

Company law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charity SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the trustees are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the charitable company's auditors are unaware; and
- the trustees have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditors are aware of that information.

#### **AUDITORS**

The auditors, Lynn Drake & Co Ltd, will be proposed for re-appointment at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting.

Approved by order of the board of trustees on 18 June 2025 and signed on its behalf by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Buchanan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mr S Buchanan - Trustee