



Department of
Justice
An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Máinnstríe O tha Laa
www.justice-ni.gov.uk

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25th January 2024

REFERENCE: FOI\24\3

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your request for information dated 29th December 2023 and detailed below.

1. Who sits on the Northern Ireland Search and Rescue (NISAR) Board and from what organisations they represent.
2. The process of new Search and Rescue organisations joining NISAR.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives you two rights of access when you write to us asking for information. You have the right to know whether we hold recorded information falling in scope of your request, and you have the right to receive this recorded information subject to cost limit or exemption.

The information you have requested is provided below:

Overview

Department of Justice is the strategic lead on search and rescue matters in Northern Ireland and has responsibility for the development and implementation of search and rescue policy. The Northern Ireland Search and Rescue (NISAR) Practitioners Group has been in operation since 2014 following a strategic review of the organisation, administration and funding of search and rescue provision in Northern Ireland. This is progressed through the NISAR Practitioners and Policy Groups. The Practitioners



Group has responsibility for advising the Policy Group on operational Search and Rescue issues. The NISAR Policy Group chaired by DoJ focuses on strategic level issues.

1. Who sits on the Northern Ireland Search and Rescue (NISAR) Board and from what organisations they represent.

NISAR Practitioners Group

Independent Chair - Mr Simon Hutchinson is the Independent Chair of the NI Search and Rescue (NISAR) Practitioners Group.

A Representative from the following organisations:

- a) Police Service of Northern Ireland (given their role as Tasking Authority - 2 representatives attend).
- b) Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service;
- c) Maritime and Coastguard Agency;
- d) Northern Ireland Ambulance Service;
- e) Belfast Harbour Police;
- f) Sport Northern Ireland;
- g) Royal National Lifeboat Institute;
- h) Sky Watch NI;
- i) British Red Cross Society;
- j) Community Rescue Service;
- k) Foyle Search and Rescue;
- l) Irish Cave Rescue Organisation;
- m) Lough Neagh Rescue;
- n) Mourne Mountain Rescue;
- o) North West Mountain Rescue;
- p) Search and Rescue Dogs (Ireland North)
- q) Lagan Search and Rescue; and a
- r) Medical Representative. There shall be a medical representative on the group whose appointment shall be made by Department of Health. An NHS doctor who takes the lead with NI Air Ambulance currently undertakes this role.



NISAR Policy Group

Membership of the Policy Group is confined to those with strategic and policy responsibilities within those organisations which contribute significantly to NI SAR. The Group shall consist of members from the following organisations:

- a) **Chair** - Department of Justice - Chair and Secretariat – chaired by the Deputy Director of Protection and Organised Crime Division who are DoJ lead on NISAR.
- b) Independent Chair of the NI SAR Practitioners Group
- c) Police Service of Northern Ireland
- d) Maritime and Coastguard Agency
- e) Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service
- f) Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
- g) The Executive Office
- h) Department of Communities
- i) Department of the Environment (DEARA)
- j) Department of Education
- k) Department of Health
- l) Department for Transport
- m) Ministry of Defence
- n) United Kingdom Aeronautical Rescue Command Centre
- o) Royal National Lifeboat Institution
- p) Department of Tourism, Transport and Sport (ROI)
- q) Mountain Rescue Ireland
- r) Irish Cave Rescue Organisation
- s) Association of Lowland Search and Rescue
- t) Sport NI

2. The process of new Search and Rescue organisations joining NISAR.

Organisations wishing to join the NISAR Practitioners Group should contact the DoJ at DOJSMSearchand.RescueMailbox@justice-ni.gov.uk and request an application form – application form attached.



Application to join NISAR Practitioners Group¹

Name of Organisation:
Named point of contact:
Contact number:
Email address:
Name of national parent or umbrella governing body (if applicable) and tasking authority.
Are you accredited by this body?
Please provide details of the services provided by your organisation, which are relevant to search and rescue.

¹ The criteria are attached,



Please give an indication of the resources available to your organisation, both human and physical.

What geographical area does your organisation cover? If the service is land / water / mountain based only, please indicate that.

What added value, in terms of specific skills and / or experience do you believe your organisation can contribute to the NISAR Practitioners' group? (The current list of members is attached).

Do you have, or are you working towards, UK charitable status? If not, would you be prepared to secure this?



Are you prepared to be accredited by the DOJ as necessary? Yes / No

Any additional relevant information. (Please state here any potential conflicts of interest or other issues which may have a bearing on your organisations standing eg. Ongoing legal disputes or financial issues etc.

Please return this form to: DOJ Operations Branch

**Post: Room B4.16
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SG**

Email: DOJSMSearchand.RescueMailbox@justice-ni.gov.uk



Membership Criteria for the Northern Ireland Search and Rescue Practitioners Group

1. General Membership

- 1.1 Full membership of the Practitioners Group should comprise organisations which fall into one of the following criteria:
 - Search, rescue and recovery Organisations
 - Relevant statutory agencies
- 1.2 Organisations must belong to a national parent or umbrella governing body (and be accredited as meeting the standards set by that parent or umbrella governing body) and / or be able to be deployed by a tasking authority.
- 1.3 Voluntary Organisations will be considered to be capable of being deployed by a tasking authority when their tasking capacity and capability has been verified and is included in the assets register held by the Practitioners Group.
- 1.4 Membership will be approved by the Policy Group.

2. Process for Applications

- 2.1 Applications to join the Northern Ireland Search and Rescue Practitioners Group should be made in writing to the Department of Justice.
- 2.2 Once an application has been received a needs analysis will be carried out by the Practitioners Group to ascertain if there is a requirement for the organisation.
- 2.3 If a need for the capability is identified the application will then go to the relevant tasking authority for verification that they have the capacity and capability that they intend to declare to the Practitioners Group for inclusion in the assets register.
- 2.4 The Policy Group will then be asked to formally agree that the organisation should be admitted to the NI SAR Practitioners Group and the membership list on the Terms of Reference be amended accordingly.
- 2.5 Applications will be considered on a case by case basis.
- 2.6 Where an applicant has been refused admission they will receive written notification, within 14 calendar days of the decision, setting out the grounds on which their membership was declined. If they wish to appeal, they have 28 calendar days to make a written appeal to the Policy Group. The 28 days will be counted from the date the refusal notification was dated.



- 2.7 Where an appeal is dismissed by the Policy Group the applicant will receive written notification within 14 calendar days of the decision. If they wish to make further representation they may do so in writing to the Minister of Justice within 28 days calendar days. The 28 days will be counted from the date the appeal refusal notification was dated.
- 2.8 Where an appeal is dismissed by the Minister for Justice the applicant will be advised of the grounds on which their membership has been declined in writing within 14 days of the decision.
- 2.9 No subsequent application for membership of the Practitioner Group may be made within one calendar year (365 days) from the date of notification that membership has been declined or a final appeal has been unsuccessful, unless there has been a significant change in the applicant's circumstances.

3. Capability / Suitability for inclusion on the assets register

- 3.1 All members of the Practitioners Group should be accredited by: their parent or governing body, or to a standard deemed suitable by a tasking authority².
- 3.2 The frequency of accreditation should be in line with the parent or governing body's or tasking authorities internal requirements.
- 3.3 The Department of Justice should retain evidence of the authorising body's accreditation and timeframes for review.
- 3.4 The Department of Justice may also from time to time request additional inspections of all organisations.

4. Accountability

- 4.1 Voluntary organisations should have, or be working towards, UK charitable status or equivalent as deemed appropriate by the Policy Group.
- 4.2 The Policy Group may from time to time carry out audit exercises to ensure that the required standards are met.

5. Associate Members

- 5.1 Organisations that provide a function deemed necessary by the Practitioners Group but not encompassed by the criteria at section 1.1 may be considered for associate membership.
- 5.2 Organisations applying for associate membership should be subject to the same needs analysis and charitable status requirements as full members but not the call out element by a tasking authority.

² The relevant agency with statutory responsibility for search and rescue co-ordination and provision.



- 5.3 Associate members are not eligible to apply for funding revenue.
- 5.4 Other organisations may be invited, by the Practitioners Group Chair, to attend meetings or sub-groups if there is a specific need for their area of expertise.

6. Review of Membership

- 6.1 A review of eligible organisations will be carried out in line with the parent or governing body or tasking authority's internal requirements.
- 6.2 An automatic review of membership should be undertaken if a voluntary organisation can no longer provide the capacity or capability declared on the asset register.

7. Exit Strategy

- 7.1 The Policy Group may suspend or revoke membership of voluntary organisations who:
- undertake a commercial role in relation to search and rescue within Northern Ireland; or
 - do not declare a conflict of interest; or
 - no longer have the capacity or capability declared on the asset register; or
 - fail to meet the accreditation criteria of the parent or governing body or that expected by the tasking authority; or
 - are deemed to have brought the Practitioners group into disrepute.
- 7.2 Where an organisation has had membership suspended or revoked they will receive written notification, within 14 calendar days of the decision, setting out the grounds on which their membership was suspended or revoked. If they wish to appeal, they have 28 calendar days to make a written appeal to Minister of Justice. The 28 days will be counted from the date the refusal notification was dated.
- 7.3 The organisation will be advised of the outcome of their appeal in writing within 14 days of the decision.
- 7.4 No subsequent application for membership of the Practitioner Group may be made within one calendar year (365 days) from the date of notification that membership has been suspended or revoked, unless there has been a significant change in the applicant's circumstances.



If you are unhappy with the result of your request for information you may request an internal review within two calendar months of the date of this letter. If you request an internal review please do so in writing stating the reasons to the address above.

If following an internal review you were to remain dissatisfied you may make a complaint to the Information Commissioner and ask the Commissioner to investigate whether the DOJ has complied with the terms of the FOIA. You can write to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

The Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out.

Further details on the role of the Information Commissioner and the handling of appeals can be found at: www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

Records & Information Manager

