

ANNUAL REPORT & STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2022-2023



Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG)
Castle Archdale Countryside Centre
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Contents

Overview.....3

Achievements and Performance3

Work Programme (in the year to 31 March 2023).....3

Membership6

Financial Review7

Administrative Details.....11

Structure, Governance, and Management.....12

Independent Examiners Report.....14



Cleared for landing – peregrine falcon © L. Hodges

Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2023

The trustees of the Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG) are pleased to submit their report and accounts for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Overview

Who we are

The Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group is a network of voluntary raptor fieldworkers who monitor and record the fortunes of birds of prey across Northern Ireland.

What we do

Birds of prey (raptors) are declining globally. In Northern Ireland 50% of regularly breeding or passage/ wintering birds of prey are Red or Amber listed. Threats to birds of prey in Northern Ireland include nesting and foraging habitat loss and persecution. The charity's purposes ('the purposes') are:

- to study, research, survey and monitor raptors (birds of prey) across Northern Ireland
- to encourage the conservation of raptors in Northern Ireland and elsewhere
- to provide information on breeding raptors to relevant statutory and non-statutory bodies in Northern Ireland
- to raise the awareness and profile of all native raptor species and the issues facing them
- to inform and assist the wildlife agency and the police regarding suspected illegal persecution of raptors
- to collaborate with other researchers and research organisations to develop our raptor research and monitoring programmes

Achievements and Performance

Work Programme (in the year to 31 March 2023)

The NIRSG collected, collated and analysed data on the location and status of raptors, and provided relevant expertise to government bodies, stakeholders and other NGOs, to underpin decision making and management and statutory responsibilities in-line with obligations under international, European and domestic law, policies and plans. There were two scientific staff, one full-time (paid) and one part-time (voluntary) who co-ordinated and upskilled volunteers, across Northern Ireland.

The Year in Numbers:



31st

Year in operation



412

nest records collated



913

sightings collated



140

People attended presentations



4

University research projects contributed to

Raptor Persecution Prevention

In efforts to learn more about the movements, survival, habitat usage and interactions between several species of birds of prey trained experts from the NIRSG collaborated with the Golden Eagle Trust, RSPB, Argyll & Countryside Trust, Scottish Raptor Study Group, CANN and PAWNI partners to track individuals using satellite tags attached via backpacks.

'Hawk-Eyes' is an NIRSG led project which aligns with the aims of the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime NI (PAW NI). Initiated in 2019; through the support of PAW NI, in 2022-2023 this project looked at the movement of buzzards and red kites across Ireland with the support of the Golden Eagle Trust. The movements and survival of birds were tracked daily and reported upon regularly through the bespoke blog site <http://wildlifecrimeni-hawkeyes.com>. In 2022 the PAW Raptor Subgroup partners created a video blog about the project to increase public awareness about the project, birds of prey, raptor persecution, the PAW NI group and how to recognise and report wildlife crime. The video can be seen here

'Birds without borders' was a Collaborative Action for Natura Network (CANN) project, a cross-border environment project which aims to improve the condition of protected habitats and to support priority species found within Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Scotland. The Birds without borders' project was set up to understand more about the interactions with ravens and buzzards and their movements, and to learn more about hen harrier movements; Hen harriers in Ireland and Northern Ireland face a range of threats and pressures, examined as part of the CANN project and share training and expertise across Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland. The proximity of forest and moorland may create some detrimental behavioural interactions for hen harrier with other species, in particular common buzzards and ravens which prefer forested areas, and hen harriers spend many energy-zapping hours chasing them away from nest sites to protect their vulnerable chicks. The locations of dead birds and survival from these technologies will provide significant insights into the fortunes of our raptors.

The NIRSG continued to work closely with the PSNI to raise awareness of what is a wildlife crime, how to recognise wildlife crime and how to report it ('Recognise – Record – Report'). We helped the PSNI develop a Flowchart for the internal use of PSNI call handlers and Investigating Officers in how to initially handle reports of suspected raptor persecution including during the Bird Flu pandemic. We continued the work of Operation Peregrine, with volunteers' data used to map at risk sites suspected to be targeted by those wishing to kill or harm birds of prey and working with Air Support Unit (ASU) of PSNI, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and the PSNI Wildlife Liaison team. A field visit was carried out with the licensing bodies to determine the risk of disturbance of highly technical PSNI ASU surveillance equipment (i.e. unmanned aerial vehicles) on peregrine falcons.

The NIRSG continued to work effectively with our partners at PAW NI (<https://www.wildlifecrimeni.org/>), in particular the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, PSNI, RSPB, AFBI NI and HSE NI on the Raptor Persecution Subgroup. We supported public awareness campaigns lead by PSNI, DAERA and RSPB by providing links to the public of leaflets and the PAW NI website. We also led on the production of the now biennial Raptor Persecution Report www.wildlifecrimeni.org/files/ugd/259455_9d8bf2a0d96a48ecacd6f9ab5fe8a3f9.pdf

In order to prevent the disturbance of nesting birds of prey NIRSG representatives spoke with a number of event organisers and public and private bodies in 2022-2023, including the NIEA wildlife team, NIEA Ornithology team, Forest Service NI, Local Council and Education Authority. We responded to concerns of the public related to birds suspected nesting in less than ideal places (for example on a church roof in Newry city). We provided expert advice on the recommended

course of action at the sites of a particularly 'aggressive' buzzard in Co. Antrim, a bird which was just protecting its young but had nested a little too close to humans for its (and their!) liking! Representatives also attended public meetings about planned developments including conservation plans for upland areas.

Our staff (the Raptor Project Officer and Raptor Monitoring Officer) were extremely honoured to be jointly awarded the WWF Wildlife Crime Partner of the Year award at the National Wildlife Crime Unit Wildlife & Rural Crime conference in November.

Advice To Public Bodies

We submitted a response to the Co. Down Forestry Scoping plan and a response to the Ards and North Down Borough Council Draft Local Biodiversity Action Plan. We worked closely with the Education Authority (Duke of Edinburgh expedition) and helped develop an information note to leaders of Duke of Ed expeditions on ground nesting birds and the disturbance of birds during the breeding season.

Collaboration / Support with Other Agencies

We attended the inaugural Barn Owl working Group meeting in September 2022, led by Ulster Wildlife. This group built upon the expertise of individuals associated with several conservation bodies, to work together and make best use of resources for the conservation of this enigmatic species. We had several meetings with the RSPB Investigations Team to work together to maximise the use of intelligence in raptor crime prevention. We also had several meetings with the RSPB red kite team to plan the 2022 and 2023 breeding season and wintering season monitoring. In preparation for the 2023 National hen harrier survey we aided the National co-ordinators, RSPB, with the design of survey square locations (using data collated by fieldworkers since the previous national survey) and helped develop the Northern Ireland specific instructions.

Information sharing

We produced and delivered multiple bespoke presentations, in person and online. In November we spoke via an online presentation to the Environment Network Northern Ireland, a group set up within the Northern Ireland & Home Civil Service to promote and share ideas with the aim to educate and build awareness of environmental issues. We provided information on the birds of prey found in Northern Ireland, their status, the threats and pressures they are facing and how people can report information to the NIRSG and how this is used in conservation of birds of prey.

In March Forest Service harvesting teams and personnel attended Belvoir Forest to hear NIRSG talk about the disturbance of nesting birds of prey, how to recognise the signs of nesting, recognise the signs of disturbance, and how to work to prevent these. In March we delivered two sessions of hen harrier survey training, ahead of the National Survey which began on 1 April 2023. These sessions covered identification of the species and the different ages and sexes of birds, where, when and how to carry out the survey and what behaviours to look for, and how to records and report findings.

By end of year 31 March 2023 we delivered a database of nest records and sightings of birds of prey in Northern Ireland recorded to NIEA. We delivered a subset of these to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel to inform the UK annual records of the occurrence of rarer species. We produced a confidential map of Peregrine falcon disturbance buffers (500m and 750m from nest sites occupied 2017 – 2021 and historic occupied sites) for use in scoping exercises for NIEA Ornithology team. We worked on a Data sharing agreement with Forest Service for the ease of sharing confidential information to aid harvesting plans and prevent disturbance of nesting birds

of prey. All raptor records are collated into an Annual Raptor Report and Excel Raptor Database and Raptor Shapefile and we produced our Spring 2023 Newsletter for NIRSG members in January 2023.

Administration

Throughout the year much attention was given to an Environment fund grant application to cover the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2028. This included attending information days in relation to the application form and design of workplans. We are extremely grateful to the NIEA for the award of grant funding. To carry out duties as administrator of the National Hen Harrier survey (2023) in Northern Ireland the NIRSG were tasked with design and implementation of a work programme for a Hen Harrier fieldworker and resources for the conduction of the survey in 2023.

The relevant licences, from the NIEA and BTO and NPWS, were applied for and annual reports on the usage of those licences were completed and submitted. Daily checking of the email account and weekly checking of the online recording system (Raptor Monitor) was carried out, as well as daily administration of records submitted via telephone, WhatsApp, Text, email and online.

Advice To Others

Advice was given to a MSc student (Trinity College Dublin) on the red kite reintroduction in Ireland and human-wildlife interactions and to a PhD student (Norwegian University of Life Sciences) on 'Living with the Wild': Rewilding Conflicts and Conservation Politics in Ireland'. Data and moulted buzzard feathers were also collected for post-doctoral research (University College Cork) for DNA work on the origin and relatedness of Irish buzzards. We provided data generated from satellite tags on red kites to the Swiss Ornithological Institute for the purposes of MSc and post-doctoral research on migratory and non-migratory movements of the species.

We also provided advice to BTO on the collection of dead birds of prey. We also provided advice and expertise to RSPB and NIEA and councils Planning Departments. Throughout the year we provided advice related to the identification and ecology of, and monitoring and surveillance of birds of prey, and of wildlife crime, to the public through Twitter.com, NIRSG.com, email, phone and in person during fieldwork.

Fieldwork

Throughout 2022-2023 NIRSG fieldworkers carried out over 1,200 days of monitoring of raptor nest sites, including the annual comprehensive survey of peregrine falcon across the country. In addition to ad hoc monitoring of nest sites during the breeding season we undertook a hen harrier winter survey to search for roost sites. As part of the Hawk-Eyes and Birds without Borders projects we monitored and coordinated the visiting of red kite and buzzard nests to attached satellite tags to young on the verge of fledging.

Membership

During 2022 – 2023 the NIRSG developed and designed a two-tier registration process with new application forms for the registration of full members and associate members. A referee process was developed for Full members, with a referee cover letter and form for reviewing Full membership applicants. A WhatsApp group was also set up for all members who wishes to communicate by that means and to share information. A newsletter was also circulated to members. At 1 April 2023 the NIRSG has 44 registered members. Membership is voluntary (i.e. no fee and no obligation) and renewed on an annual basis.

Financial Review

Finance & Governance Report

The NIRSG became a registered charity (NI108487) in 2022 and this report represent the first annual report for the Charity Commission of Northern Ireland. Governance is undertaken by a Board of Trustees (4 Trustees in the 2022-2023 period) who voluntarily have undertaken the role for a period of three years and have managed the charity transition period. A minority of the trustees (n = 1) are paid for works on behalf of the group in accordance with Charity Commission guidelines. The NIRSG would welcome new Trustees to join the Board and all full members are eligible to hold positions with the management structure and/or become and/or recommend additional Trustees. No further nominations have been received and the four Trustees are available to continue for the period 2023-2024. Any objections to existing Trustees are also welcomed and any of the other existing Trustees can be contacted should issues be raised about any individual Trustee.

The core work of the group is the delivery of the Environment Fund (EF) grant fund work programme which is funded by Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). We are very grateful to be working alongside the NIEA in the delivery on a comprehensive programme of raptor conservation and protection in Northern Ireland. The core cost elements to this are the support provided by that grant for the Raptor Officer (Dr Eimear Rooney) an essential expert in the delivery of the work programme and support for the volunteer network. The Raptor Monitoring Officer (Dr Marc Ruddock) assists in delivery of the EF programme in a voluntary capacity and is supported part-time by the Golden Eagle Trust in this role.

Other income to the group typically comes from donations (occasional); the payment, by delegates, for conferences and workshops and training, fundraising and data requests. The data request process has been suspended for the long-term and only academic research data sharing agreements have been considered and no payments are made for such research data sharing. The group has considered a membership / subscription fee in the past, but under the current situation the subscription process is by way of formal registration inclusive of vouched and reference-based admission as either a full member or an associate member and the subscription rate is £0. The subscription rate (£0) is reviewed annually, and no changes are proposed for the 2023-2024 period.

Outgoing payments for the group are primarily for the raptor officer position and additional volunteer travel and training expenses. Volunteers are eligible to receive travel payments, should they wish, for raptor monitoring activities and the submission of nest records. The group has several active website including www.nirsg.com; www.raptormonitor.com; www.wildlifecrime-ni/hawkeyes.com for which costs are incurred annually as well as group insurance through an accredited broker and underwriter. Equipment costs are utilised for provision of monitoring equipment (e.g. binoculars and telescopes) and also in recent years the group has become more active in the deployment of bird tracking devices on buzzards and red kites to obtain a greater level of scientific data on dispersal and movement ecology of some of the species. Any individual items of >£500 are recorded on an asset register and documented accordingly.

The NIRSG has no outstanding loans or credit agreements, and no cheque books are operated with, and all payments and receipts are made to/from a single bank account by online banking. The PayPal account has not been utilised recently and we will aim to set this up better going forward as may allow a greater input of donations to the group now that we have become a registered charity. There is an existing small balance on the PayPal account. The group does not typically collect cash, except occasionally at conferences and events which were not undertaken

in 2022-2023 and where so received this is deposited to the bank account in branch. No cash was received or paid during 2022-2023.

The NIRSG provide significant levels of support and volunteer input through the delivery of individual programmes e.g. local education and awareness, the participation in workshops and training events and the collection and submission of raptor sightings and nest records. It is estimated that the volunteer contribution to the NIRSG and raptor conservation of a minimum of 1,205 days volunteering. Taking a conservative daily rate of £150 equates to a monetary equivalent of £180,750. This level of effort and contribution is humbling.

Accounts for the Year ended 31 March 2023

Receipts & Payments Account

Receipts	Current Year (to nearest £)	Previous Year (to nearest £)
Administration	£ -	£ -
EF grant funding	£ 44,150	£ -
Donations	£ -	£ -
Data requests	£ -	£ -
Conference income	£ -	£ -
Project income	£ 9,000	£ -
Subscriptions & Fees	£ -	£ -
Bank interest	£ 67	£ 1
TOTAL RECEIPTS	£ 53,217	£ 1
Payments		
Administration	£ -	£ -
Conferences & workshops	£ -	£ -
Staff costs & sub-contractors	£ 25,814	£ 825
Office & overheads (websites, hosting, storage)	£ 1,200	£ 1,778
Insurances	£ 1,323	£ 1,279
Equipment	£ 864	£ 264
Travel & Volunteer costs	£ 402	£ -
Other	£ -	£ -
TOTAL PAYMENTS	£ 29,603	£ 4,146
Net surplus/(deficit)	£ 23,614	£ (4,145)
Opening funds	£ 7,703	£ 11,848
TOTAL FUNDS AT YEAR END	£ 31,317	£ 7,703
Represented by:		
Cash at bank (31 March)	£ 30,207	£ 7,703
Asset	£ 970	£ 0
TOTAL CASH AT BANK	£ 31,317	£ 7,703

Signed by Trustees:

E. Rooney

Dr Eimear Rooney

Paul Larmor

Mr Paul Larmor

Alan Ferguson

Mr Alan Ferguson

Marc Ruddock

Dr Marc Ruddock

Notes to the Accounts

Restricted Funds

- The group held no specifically restricted funds during the year and where funds are restricted for usage these are clearly identifiable and traceable.

Trustees' Expenses

- No expenses were paid to any of the Trustees during the year except to reimburse them for purchases made on behalf of the group.
- In line with the reporting and notification to Charity Commission Northern Ireland, (under Charities Act 2011 a single Trustee i.e. a minority of the Trustees (1 of 4; 25%) were paid to complete work on behalf of the group (ER) as the Raptor Officer

Trustees' Indemnity Insurance

- No charitable funds have been used to purchase insurance to indemnify the Trustees against the consequences of any neglect or default on their part. The group had in place the necessary insurance policies for the operation of the group through the nominated broker.

Accounting Policies

- Section 133 of the Charities Act 2011 permits a charity to prepare a receipts and payments account and a statement of assets and liabilities where gross income in the financial year does not exceed £250,000, therefore receipts and payments accounts and a statement of assets and liabilities has been prepared and presented for the year ended 31 March 2023.
- Bank interest is included separately and identifiably as income parameter.
- All income, including grants and investments is recorded when received to the bank account.
- All expenditure is recorded when paid from the bank account.
- Gift aid reclaimable on donations is included in the amounts of income once received.
- All transactions are process by online banking and no cheques have been issued or received during the reporting period.

Basis of Valuations

- Valuations have been provided for assets held for functional use; where possible the brand new purchase price/replacement cost is given. If this is not readily available a second-hand purchase price is given.

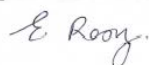
Independent Examination

- In the year ended 31 March 2023, gross income did not exceed £250,000 and therefore, in accordance with the sections 144 & 145 of the Charities Act 2011 an independent examination is required and this scrutiny was duly conducted (see Independent Examiners Report).

Payments not cleared at bank at 31 March 2023

- At 31 March 2023 there were no payments issued which had not cleared at the bank.
- At 31 March 2023 there were no payments received which had not cleared at the bank.

Approved and adopted by a meeting of the Trustees on 31 January 2024



Dr Eimear Rooney



Mr Paul Larmor



Mr Alan Ferguson



Dr Marc Ruddock

Administrative Details

Charity Name

The Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group also known as NIRSG.

Charity Number

Registered Charity in Northern Ireland, No .108487

Castle Archdale Countryside Centre

346 Killadeas Road, Irvinestown

Co. Fermanagh, BT94 1PP

Charity Trustees as of 31 March 2023

Dr Eimear Rooney

Mr Paul Larmor

Mr Alan Ferguson

Dr Marc Ruddock

Other Charity Trustees in the year to 31 March 2023

There were no other Trustees during the reporting year.

Trustees all indicated their willingness to serve for a further term and have identified the aspiration for recruiting, and nominations are always open for, additional trustees for the future.

Patrons as of 31 March 2023

There are no appointed patrons or honorary members.

Banking

Santander Business Banking Operations

Sunderland, SR43 4FW

Insurance Broker & Underwriter

We'reSure Motor, Home & Business Insurance

Unit C, Carrowreagh Business Park

Dundonald, BT16 1QQ

East Kent Underwriting Limited (EKU).

2nd Floor, Knightrider Chambers

12 Knightrider Street

Maidstone, Kent ME15 6LP

Structure, Governance, and Management

The Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group, founded in 1991, is a network of voluntary raptor fieldworkers who monitor and record the fortunes of birds of prey across Northern Ireland. We collect information by visiting known raptor breeding and wintering sites each year to check for occupancy and to record the status, distribution and breeding success of each species. We also visit previously un-surveyed areas to search for and to document new sites.

We promote and encourage the conservation of Northern Ireland's raptors by working in partnership with many others including landowners, statutory agencies, industry, academic researchers, educators, raptor rehabilitators and non-governmental organisations. The species we monitor include peregrine falcon, hen harrier, buzzard, merlin, kestrel, sparrowhawk, goshawk, red kite, white-tailed eagle, golden eagle, barn owl, long-eared owl, short-eared owl, marsh harrier, hobby, honey buzzard and osprey.

The Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group comprises skilled volunteer raptor workers that operate to study, research, survey and monitor raptors (birds of prey) across Northern Ireland and to encourage the conservation of raptors in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. In addition the group aim to provide information on breeding raptors to relevant statutory and non-statutory bodies in Northern Ireland and to raise the awareness and profile of all native raptor species and the issues facing them. The group and its expert volunteers aim to inform and assist the protection and wildlife agency and the police regarding suspected illegal persecution of raptors and to collaborate with other researchers and research organisations to develop our raptor research and monitoring programmes.

The NIRSG understand that the public benefit criteria apply to our activities which include (i) the advancement of environmental protection or improvement since the data collected by volunteers are utilised to inform conservation management at various spatial and temporal scales for statutory, non-statutory and the wider public and through the wider conservation and protection of raptors through our training, outreach, events, advice, education, surveys, reporting and research activities; and for (ii) the advancement of animal welfare through best practice, advice, reporting and research in particular the expertise of volunteers in the detection, prevention and reporting of raptor crimes and the groups participation in the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW NI) and production of strategic mapping and analytical research and publications on the awareness of illegal raptor killing and crimes that occur in Northern Ireland.

These efforts can be demonstrated through the extensive efforts of volunteers in survey, monitoring, analysis, education, training, reporting and ultimately in conservation of birds of prey and through building an enduring mechanism and network of citizen-scientists to protect raptors for current and future generations alongside providing volunteers the tools, skills, support and education and field skills to optimise the raptor network and conserve these protected species for all members of all communities and all parts of society to enjoy the natural heritage of birds of prey.

The work of the NIRSG benefits the range of raptor (bird of prey) species that occur in Northern Ireland and also benefits the volunteers who monitor these species across Northern Ireland. The general public also benefits from wider awareness and understanding during any outreach

activities. Volunteers may benefit from increase access to the countryside and recreational activities generating wider physical and mental health benefits.

The charity's purposes ('the purposes') are:

- **to study, research, survey and monitor raptors (birds of prey) across Northern Ireland**
- **to encourage the conservation of raptors in Northern Ireland and elsewhere**
- **to provide information on breeding raptors to relevant statutory and non-statutory bodies in Northern Ireland**
- **to raise the awareness and profile of all native raptor species and the issues facing them**
- **to inform and assist the protection and wildlife agency and the police regarding suspected illegal persecution of raptors**
- **to collaborate with other researchers and research organisations to develop our raptor research and monitoring programmes**

The NIRSG is an unincorporated association and is governed by a constitution which is to be found at Appendix 1. The Group is managed by the Management Committee which consists of volunteer Trustees. A minority of trustees also hold offices within the group. The Trustees are in regular contact with one another via email and phone and met regularly during the year to 31 March 2023. In relation to payments the Trustees only make payments when two, or more, Trustees approve the payment. Payments are made only by online banking from a single bank account. Full members, who do not pay a subscription fee, are afforded voting rights. Applications for Full membership are considered by Trustees via email following referee checks also conducted via email. The Annual Report and Statement of Accounts are prepared and approved by the Trustees and then presented to the members at an Annual General Meeting (AGM). Typically, the terms and conditions of grant-aid funding received, which funds the activity of the group set the work plan of the group and the associated spending in delivering the purposes.

Independent Examiners Report

Independent examiner's report to the charity trustees of Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group (NIRSG)

We report on the accounts of the Trust for the year ended 31 March 2023, which are set out on pages 9 to 10 above.

Respective responsibilities of charity trustees and examiner

As the charity's trustees you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. It is my responsibility to:

- examine the accounts under section 65 of the Charities Act
- follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Commission under section 65(9)(b) of the Charities Act
- state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of independent examiner's report

We have examined your charity accounts as required under section 65 of the Charities Act and my examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland under section 65(9)(b) of the Charities Act.

The examination included a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also included consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeking explanations from you as charity trustees concerning any such matters.

Our role is to state whether any material matters have come to my attention giving me cause to believe:

1. That accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 63 of the Charities Act
2. That the accounts do not accord with those accounting records
3. That the accounts do not comply with the accounting requirements of the Charities Act
4. That there is further information needed for a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Independent examiner's statement

We have completed our examination and have no concerns in respect of the matters (1) to (4) listed above and, in connection with following the Directions of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, we have found no matters that require drawing to your attention. We have not carried out an audit.



Neeson Chambers Ltd
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BT20 4AE

Date: 19 April 2024