

MINUTES OF 37th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

HELD ON MONDAY 13th OCTOBER 2025

1. **Welcome and Introductions.**

Fiona Wallace told the meeting that she was standing in as Vice Chair for Nagalro as the Chair Yvonne Wilson has not been able to attend as she has had a recent bereavement. Fiona is delighted to welcome people by Zoom to Nagalro’s 37th Annual General Meeting. Given that Yvonne was not able to attend, Fiona Wallace asked if the meeting agreed that she could take Yvonne’s place as the proxy to all those who gave Yvonne their proxy votes.

1. **Apologies:**

There were 20 members in attendance and the AGM and 58 proxy attendees, the meeting was therefore declared quorate. Fiona Wallace presented their Chair and Vice Chair’s Report, **Sukhchandan Pal Kaur presented the Treasurer's Report. No** motions were proposed. There were apologies from Yvonne Wilson, Valerie Cannon, and Margeret Blake.

1. **Approval of the minutes of previous AGM held on 7th October 2024.**

The Minutes of last year’s AGM 7th October 2024 held via Zoom were accepted as a true and accurate record – proposed by Marvalyn Chambers, seconded by Pete Bentley.

1. **Addresses from the Chair of Nagalro: Yvonne Wilson and Vice Chair Fiona Wallace:**

It’s that time of year again for another Chair’s report. Yvonne wanted to let members know that Nagalro is beginning to get back on track after a most difficult year. In June Nagalro had our network meeting, which was well attended, and we hope raised our profile amongst fellow professionals. We also have a new treasurer Sukhchandan Kaur, who many of you will remember from her previous work on council.

We have regrouped and are now focusing on what Yvonne believes we are well known for - our excellent training and conferences. You will, have had an opportunity to attend our most recent conference on neglect: “Children Who Slip Through the Net.” When it comes to training and conferences, we aim to raise topical and current issues. It cannot have failed to come to your attention that these are difficult times for not just the UK, but the world. So many of our taken for granted freedoms are being challenged and the responses are varied and not always satisfactory. What is a very topical theme is the issue of immigration, and whilst this is not necessarily the platform to raise this, Nagalro does want us to begin to think quite seriously and focus on the rise of the Far Right and the impact upon our freedoms on many of us as people of colour. Many of you will appreciate that the Nagalro council has several members who are not white European but people of colour and it is I think our shared experience that we no longer feel as safe as we used to. That is not to say that racism has not always been present, but the threat to us as individuals, and to many of our friends of colour, is tangible right now. Yvonne indicated that she does not feel that there is enough government recognition and support of the erosion of our freedoms, nor enough intervention in preventing the far right from having freedom of speech whilst curtailing and seeking to stop those trying to make peaceful protests.

At the officers and training group, Nagalro has decided to make 2026 an Anti-racism year for Nagalro. We seek to offer a number of training events and experiences which will seek to raise awareness of the issues for us all as individuals but also primarily to think about how racism impacts the work of us as ISWs and Guardians with the children and their families that we work with. We will be looking to write and share articles via Seen and Heard, to put on training and to provide a safe space where practitioners can think and discuss the issues that we all face as practitioners, culminating in a conference autumn 2026 on anti-racist practice. Yvonne hopes that will be an interesting and innovative way of working in which we can bring about a change in thinking and practice.

We are in the process of updating our ISW directory and are hopeful to be able to encourage more members to join. Fiona Wallace, Clare Mowbray, and Niall Rynne continue to work hard to ensure it is fuelled with the information that those needing independent assessors will want and in a format to make it easy to navigate and search. Alongside that we can develop a register of experts of differing ethnicities and cultural backgrounds to support this register.

As always we seek to have more volunteers from council to work on various projects and groups, it is really difficult for officers alone to address all the issues we wish, so we again ask for volunteers.

We continue to try to work collaboratively with Cafcass but there have been very many meetings cancelled by them. We recognise completely that the loss of Jack Cordery was a huge blow to Cafcass and likely left them floundering for a while but I’m sure he would want to see us continuing to work together for the benefit of those we seek to serve. As a professional agency it is important that we continue to have a say in the policies that Cafcass are introducing as we want to be able to represent our members and ensure that their views and safety are included in any changes.

1. **VICE CHAIR’s REPORT**

As Vice Chair, Fiona echoed Yvonne’s reflections on what has been both a challenging and an encouraging year for the Nagalro Council. Nagalro has welcomed new members to Council and appointed a permanent Principal Administrator, Paula Hyde, whose contribution has already brought significant benefits to the organisation as a whole.

In this report, Fiona wanted to focus in more detail on the challenges currently faced by our Independent Social Worker (ISW) members—particularly within private law proceedings, the role and independence of the Children’s Guardian, and the implications of recent case law affecting funding mechanisms and the continuing stagnation of Legal Aid Agency (LAA) rates. A working group within Nagalro is now reviewing the ISW Directory and exploring opportunities for further training. We warmly invite members—both from Council and the wider membership—to join this group, and we are particularly keen to include representation from the London area.

Nagalro continues to receive concerning reports of increasingly time-consuming demands and adversarial cross-examination, especially in private law cases. It is essential to recognise that ISWs often work independently, outside of the tandem model, and without the organisational infrastructure that can provide support and advocacy. These issues are central to our discussions about how to attract and retain ISWs and to understand why some practitioners may be seeking alternative types of work.

Additional pressures are also evident within public law practice. We have heard of cases where proceedings have concluded at an Interim Hearing, converted without notice into a Final Hearing—sometimes in the absence of a report from the Children’s Guardian and without confirmation that the child has been informed of the plan or that their views have been sought. In such circumstances, the Guardian’s analysis of the assessments, expert evidence, parental perspectives, contact arrangements, and, crucially, the child’s needs, may be entirely missing from the decision-making process.

More recently, Cafcass and the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) have issued new guidance on managing disagreements between social workers and Children’s Guardians. This development further undermines the independence of the Guardian role—both in perception and in practice—by placing additional pressure on Guardians, particularly when meetings are initiated and led by the Local Authority. These meetings also make further demands on Guardian time, which is already overstretched. To our knowledge, Nagalro, BASW, the senior judiciary, the Law Society, ALC, FLBA, and Resolution were not consulted in the development of this guidance.

These cumulative pressures shape the environment in which we are seeking to expand the pool of ISWs available for independent work. Achieving a balance between increasing numbers and addressing the systemic challenges of the marketplace is delicate and requires sustained engagement. We hope that these issues can be raised and discussed further when we meet, allowing us to contribute meaningfully to ongoing dialogue and to work collaboratively to improve conditions and opportunities for ISWs.

Yvonne has outlined aspects of the 2026 training programme above. In addition, Fiona is co-organising with Mariana Straton the March 2026 conference, **“No Safe Place? Rethinking Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Across Contexts.”** This event will explore child sexual abuse both within and beyond the family home, provide updates on recent inquiries, and challenge the assumptions that have contributed to a decline in identifying potential signs of familial abuse. The conference will also consider how agencies can better prevent children from becoming victims of sexual abuse, both within the family and in the wider community. We welcome contributions, ideas, and questions from members who wish to be involved.

Finally, Fiona wanted to thank all members for their continued commitment to Nagalro. Nagalro is always keen to hear from members who are not currently on Council but would like to become involved in our working groups and initiatives. Your expertise and engagement are essential to our collective impact.

Kevin Stroud asked about the membership being down and the ISW directory membership having increased and whether the corporate membership assisted. He was told that it has assisted.

Grace Bennett asked about the ISW directory, which she is not a member of, but wanted to know how people might be inspired to join.

Fiona Wallace told her that there is a need to expand the directory and entice people like her to join. That we encourage people to market themselves and she should keep an eye on the updates which are being planned.

**5. Treasurer’s Report**

Sukhchandan Pal Kaur welcomed members to the meeting. Paula shared the accounts online to enable Sukhchandan to present the annual financial statement for the year ending March 2025.

Sukhchandan told the meeting that the current Treasurer was appointed on 3rd May 2025 following the previous treasurer, Kathy Butcher, retiring from her role in January 2025. The financial responsibilities were overseen by the Finance Group who have continued to meet until October 2025.

This is the first annual report prepared by the current treasurer, Sukhchandan Pal Kaur who has worked closely and has been part of the Finance Group.

The income in the year 2024-25 is slightly less than the previous year due to decline in the membership numbers.

The most significant point to note is the substantial deficit in the year 2024-25 amounting to £49,060.00 compared to the previous year at £225.00. Such deficit is attributed to two noteworthy expenses; the first relates to admin fees that are much higher than the previous year/s due to the temporary cover provision for the Principal Administrator for the sudden departure of Karen Harris on health grounds. The trend of higher admin fees will continue at the start of the current year. The second reason for the deficit relates to the essential legal and consultation fees required for Nagalro to comply with the legislation.

This has been a challenging time for Nagalro in view of the declining membership and increased expenditure. However, the indication for Nagalro’s future is strong.

In order to maintain Nagalro in a good financial position, the membership fee was increased from 1 April 2025 to £280.00. The fee structure for the directory, Seen & Heard, conference and training fees remains under review.

On a positive note, Nagalro continues to maintain healthy reserves of £200,000.00 and it remains in a good position to meet its liabilities in the current financial year. The reserves are carefully invested in two parts with £100,000.00 is in fixed deposit account and £100.000.00 is in a 95 day notice account to allow the flexibility should any funds be needed to meet Nagalro’s obligations.

We are halfway through the year. Nagalro’s income to date is £171,690.00. The total number of full members is 561 which is slightly lower than last year but higher than the previous forecast. The income from Nagalro conferences and training, corporate membership is higher than the previous year. However, there is a decline in the income from Seen & Heard and Associate membership.

The expenditure for the half year is £83,984.00. The admin expenses are high for the first few months of the financial year to ensure sufficient support and induction from the previous NAs for Paula Hyde who joined Nagalro in March 2025. There are some extraordinary one off expenses relating to legal and consultation fees and the Networking event in June 2025. Despite these expenses, the Nagalro remains in a position to meet its obligations. Paula and Sukhchandan keep a close eye on the finances, invoices are carefully scrutinised to tightly control the expenses wherever possible.

Despite 2024-25, being a challenging year, Nagalro finances have stabilised. Nagalro balance sheet in good condition with decent reserves.

**Recommendations:**

The accounts for the year 2024-25 are approved by the members at Annual General Meeting.

The annual report and accounts were approved by the meeting- proposed by Nial Rynne and seconded by Grace Bennett.

**6. Re-appointment of Auditors: Bright Brown & Co., Newport, Isle of Wight**

The re-appointment of the Auditors was agreed unanimously - proposed by Fiona Wallac and seconded by Pete Bentley.

Fiona indicated that we will be looking to see if the auditors provide best value for money in the next 12 months.

**7. Elections to the Council**

The Secretary, Julia Hughes, announced that as one-third of Council are required to retire each year, the following members of Council are resigning on 13 October 2025:

* Pete Bentley
* Yvonne Wilson
* Fiona Wallace

The following members are seeking election or re-election to Council:

* Pete Bentley proposed by Marianne Straton and seconded by Howard Bramwell
* Yvonne Wilson proposed by Claire Mowbray and seconded by Marvalyn Chambers
* Fiona Wallace proposed by Marianne Straton and seconded by Nial Rynne

One new member of council from Ireland was also elected:

* Valerie Cannon proposed Sukhchandan Pal Kaur and seconded by Fiona Wallace
* Eibhlin McNamara proposed by Marvalyn Chambers and seconded by Kevin Stroud.
* Ntombizodwa Nwafor proposed by Kevin Stroud and seconded by Fiona Wallace.
* Gerard Szary proposed by Claire Mowbray and seconded by Niall Rynne.

All were elected to serve from today as members of Nagalro Council.

The Officers of Council for the next twelve months will be:

* Yvonne Wilson, Chair
* Fiona Wallace, Vice Chair
* Sukhchandan Pal Kaur, Treasurer
* Julia Hughes, Secretary

**8. Any other business:**

None

**9. Closing Remarks: Fiona Wallacae**

Fiona told the meeting that this now concludes our meeting. She told the meeting that she thanked people for their attendance and repeated that she welcomed anyone who would like to join Council to join to ensure continuity on Council.

Julia Hughes, Company Secretary, 13th October 2025