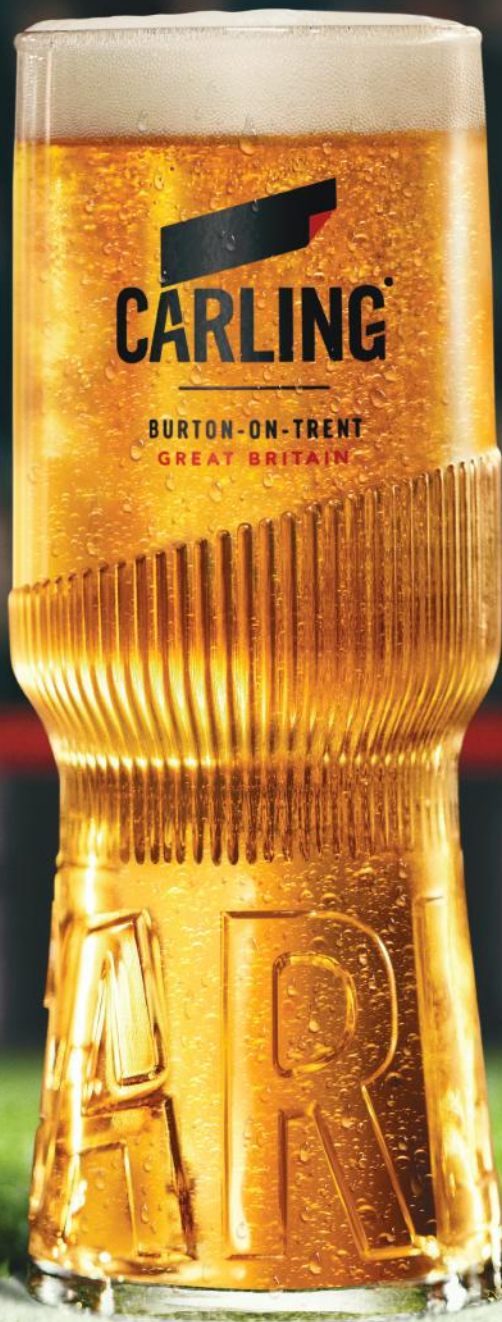


THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND FEDERATION OF CLUBS

# Review Club

VOLUME 39 - Issue 1, 2026



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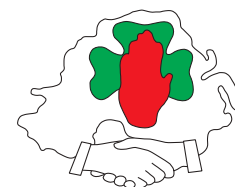
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## N.I. Federation of Clubs Membership Application Form



Name of club: .....

Address: .....

Telephone No: .....

Fax No: .....

### Club Officers

Chairman: .....

Tel: .....

Secretary: .....

Tel: .....

Treasurer: .....

Tel: .....

The annual membership fee is £50.00 payable to:

### The Northern Ireland Federation of Clubs

c/o 9 Henly Park  
Carrickfergus  
Co. Antrim  
BT38 8UH

For telephone queries call:  
**07889 681714**

*(Please include your membership fee or completed standing order form with your application)*

### For administration purposes only

Accepted by: ..... Secretary

Seconded by: ..... Chairman

Date: .....

## STANDING ORDER TO N.I. FEDERATION OF CLUBS

This is to authorise the transfer of £50.00 from the club's account:-

A/C No: .....

Sort Code: .....

Bank: .....

To account no: 627 998 63  
Sort code: 95-01-45

**Danske Bank  
Belfast BT1 6JS**

The payment is for the annual membership fee to the Northern Ireland Federation of Clubs. The transaction to be effected now and continue annually in January of each year until further notice.

Club Name: .....

Address: .....

Authorised by: (1) .....

(2) .....

Please sign and return to:

**N.I. Federation of Clubs**

c/o 9 Henly Park

Carrickfergus

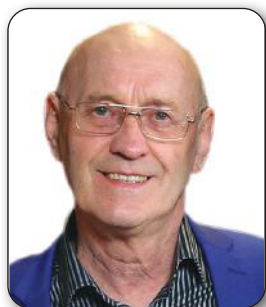
Co. Antrim

BT38 8UH

# A United Voice for the Club Sector



John Davidson BEM  
Chairman, N.I.F.C.



Harry Beckinsale BEM  
Secretary, N.I.F.C.

Dear Colleagues,

As we move into the second month of the year, the scale of the challenges facing government is striking by any measure. Few could have anticipated the events of recent weeks, which serve as a reminder of how quickly circumstances can change.

Nevertheless, it is essential that we remain focused on the issues affecting our own sector. In this context, we are actively preparing submissions on rating and matters arising from the Registration of Clubs Order, ensuring that the interests of our members are clearly articulated and robustly represented.

Meetings with our legal advisers, together with planned engagement with other relevant bodies, will place us in a stronger position to address the challenges ahead and to pursue meaningful reform.

We are pleased to support the Club Institute and Union, our colleagues within the Confederation of Registered Clubs Association (CORCA), who have written to the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves MP, expressing serious concern about the future of the clubs sector. Our own correspondence to the Chancellor reflects similar concerns, highlighting the complex interplay between UK-wide policy and devolved Northern Ireland legislation, and the unique pressures this creates for registered clubs.

There is no doubt that the road ahead will be demanding. This makes it all the more important that we secure some measure of relief through our proposed legislative amendments and policy reforms.

Across the wider leisure and hospitality industry, pressures continue to mount. Restaurants and pubs are facing acute challenges, and Hospitality Ulster, under the leadership of its CEO, Colin Neill, has been at the forefront of advocating for its members. In many respects, our sectors share common concerns and objectives.

The reversal of the recent rating revaluation was a welcome and timely relief for our members, many of whom contacted the Helplines throughout the day. However, this reprieve may prove temporary, and uncertainty remains about what lies ahead.

We are fortunate to benefit from the continued support of our associated suppliers, and we extend our sincere thanks to them for their commitment to the clubs sector.

Recent increases in the minimum wage and National Insurance contributions have added further pressure at a time when many

clubs are already operating under severe financial strain. These measures will inevitably impact costs across the sector, and we continue to press for policies that recognise the social and community value of registered clubs.

While we are understandably concerned about the challenges ahead, you can be assured that we will continue to work tirelessly on behalf of our members, providing support, guidance and representation wherever possible.

As we have said before, our strength lies in unity. That principle remains as true today as ever.

Yours sincerely,

John Davidson BEM - Chairman  
Harry Beckinsale BEM - Secretary

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## New Year Business Health Check

### Make sure you maximise your club's revenue

1. Update all the images on your club's website - and delete any out of date content.
2. Check the last six months of your P&L and highlight your worst selling drinks and menu items. Change them.
3. Search for your club online. Look for any out-of-date information and email the relevant site to get it changed or removed.
4. Draw up a list of your top 5 suppliers - call a competitor for each one and check you are getting the best deal.
5. Dig out your utility bills and note the end of all the contract terms in your calendar, and make a note a month before to shop around for the best price before each contract ends. *You can call MJ Utilities on 077 7699 4807 for assistance.*
6. Do a deep clean of the exterior of your club and car park. It will be noticed.
7. Create a group on WhatsApp for the club's members to join. Use it to engage them and post about topics they are interested in, not just as a promotional tool. You'll then have a willing audience when you ask for feedback on any changes you make, invitations to events, or to try new menus. Ask a committee member to manage the group and provide feedback to your committee meetings.
8. Come up with a plan to promote a specific drink or menu item to members. Call the supplier of that product and ask them to sponsor your promotion/ provide prizes, merchandise or extra stock.
9. Create a mystery customer feedback form, including any areas that are new, or that you have had negative feedback on, and ask someone outside the club to give you an honest view.
10. Talk to your employees - do they have any ideas of where the club could be improved? Would they like to introduce a new product to trial? The bar staff have constant contact with the club's members - this is valuable feedback.
11. Write to your local MP or MLA and invite them to come to an event or pull a pint behind your bar - if they say yes then contact your local media and get a photographer to attend too.
12. Remind your members that they need to help recruit new members. Without constantly recruiting new members your club won't survive. Your existing members are your best form of advertisement. Provide a generous bar voucher to new members and the member who recruited them.



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# Help Us Stay Connected

Opposite, you will again find the **Club Information Update Form**, which we are asking all affiliated clubs to complete and return. While some responses have been received, a significant number of clubs have yet to reply, and we are keen to improve this.

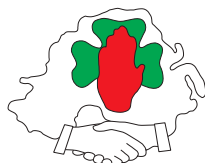
Accurate email contact details are now essential if Club Review and Federation correspondence are to reach the right people. Email is our main way of requesting club news, photographs, charity presentation details, and of sharing updates, events, and important information affecting member clubs. Without a reliable email contact, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep clubs informed or to ensure their activities are properly represented.

Completing the form should take only a few minutes and helps us avoid missed communications, repeated follow-ups, and reliance on social media. If your club does not have a post box, is closed for part of the year, or has recently changed officers, please ensure an alternative email or contact address is provided so that correspondence can continue without interruption.

We would therefore encourage clubs that have not yet responded to complete the form and return it by email, WhatsApp, or post, or to send updated details directly to clubreview@media-marketing.net

Your cooperation will greatly assist the Federation in

maintaining an accurate and effective database of clubs throughout Northern Ireland, and in ensuring that club news and achievements are not missed.



## CLUB INFORMATION UPDATE FORM

Please take a moment to complete the following details for your club. This ensures that future correspondence and copies of Club Review reach you without delay.

**Please complete and send a photograph or screenshot of your completed form by email to: [info@nifederationofclubs.com](mailto:info@nifederationofclubs.com) or WhatsApp to: 07889 681714**

**or post to: N.I. Federation of Clubs, c/o 9 Henly Park, Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim BT38 8UH.**

### CLUB DETAILS

**Club Name:** .....

**Club Address:** .....

..... **Postcode:** .....

**Club Telephone Number(s):** .....

**Club Email Address:** .....

**Alternative Email (Secretary, Manager, etc.):** .....

### CORRESPONDENCE DETAILS

Club is currently open     Club is closed

If your club does not have a post box or is temporarily closed, please provide an alternative mailing address below:

**Alternative Contact Name:** .....

**Alternative Correspondence Address:** .....

..... **Postcode:** .....

**Alternative Telephone Number(s):** .....

**Alternative Email Address:** .....

**Completed by:** .....

**Position in Club:** ..... **Date:** ...../...../.....

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## Busy Start to 2026 for the P&F Team

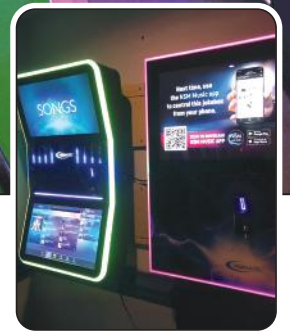
The past few weeks have been particularly busy for the P&F team, with a high volume of new customer installations completed across a wide range of clubs and venues. This continued level of activity reflects the ongoing demand for modern, reliable amusement equipment that enhances the overall member experience.

P&F Amusements prides itself on having brand new equipment available from stock, ensuring clubs can upgrade quickly and efficiently without long lead times. The current range includes the latest gaming machines, popular Supreme Match tables, digital jukeboxes, and other proven favourites that continue to perform well on the club floor.

With technology and player expectations constantly evolving, now is an ideal time for clubs to review their current equipment and ensure they are offering members the best possible experience. Clubs that delay risk falling behind, while those that invest in new equipment often see increased engagement and improved returns.

Clubs are warmly invited to call into the P&F showroom to view the newest equipment currently available on the market.

A free trial can be arranged, allowing clubs to see first hand how the latest machines perform in their own environment before making any commitment.



For further information or to arrange a visit, contact the team at:  
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or telephone 028 9037 0314.



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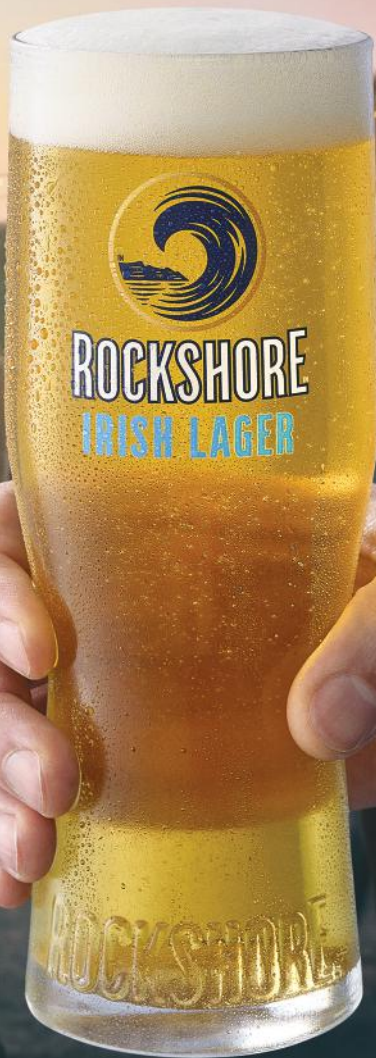
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Since 2014 MJ Utilities have established themselves as a leading commercial energy broker, helping businesses reduce their business electric and gas costs. For most of that time they have also worked with the N.I. Federation of Clubs, helping members who have reached out to them for help and assistance.

## What do they do exactly?

You know the Meerkats you see on television who help find you the best insurance deals? Well, they're a bit like them, only for commercial electric and gas prices. They work with every major electricity and gas supplier in the country to make sure clients get the best deals.

## What benefit is there to using MJ Utilities?

**Expert Knowledge:** They understand and monitor the commercial energy market which means they keep a close eye on gas and electricity prices, helping you make informed energy decisions for your business.

**Impartial advice:** They operate independently of all energy suppliers, providing an unbiased, transparent service.

**Competitive pricing:** By representing multiple accounts each month, they drive suppliers to compete for your business, resulting in margins being lowered and better pricing.



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A thorough review of your business energy costs could uncover substantial savings. A review for one client identified over £14,000 in overcharges from their energy supplier.

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**DRINKS INC.**

## Employment Law Update (NI)

### What Employers Need to Know for April 2026



If you run a business or manage staff, April 2026 is a date worth keeping an eye on. That's when some significant changes are expected to land in Northern Ireland employment law - particularly around sick pay.

And while employment law is devolved here (meaning Northern Ireland doesn't always follow Great Britain automatically), this is one area where NI usually keeps things aligned.

#### The Main Change: Sick Pay Is Being Overhauled

The biggest confirmed change expected from 6th April 2026 is a reform of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) - the minimum level of sick pay that many employers must provide.

At the moment, SSP isn't paid immediately. If an employee calls in sick for a few days, there is usually a gap at the start where no statutory payment is made. That is set to change.

#### No more waiting days

Under the reforms, SSP is expected to be payable from day one of sickness absence. This means the current "three waiting days" rule will be removed.

For employees, this is a major improvement - particularly for short illnesses that currently mean a complete loss of income for a few days.

For employers, it's something that will need planning and monitoring, especially in sectors where short-term sickness is common.

#### More workers will qualify

Another big change is that SSP will no longer depend on employees earning above a set

weekly amount (known as the Lower Earnings Limit).

In practice, this means workers on low hours, part-time staff, and lower-paid employees who may not have qualified before will now be included.

That's particularly relevant in industries like hospitality, retail, clubs, and seasonal employment - where flexible working patterns are common.

#### A new way of calculating SSP

The new SSP model is also expected to work slightly differently. Rather than being a flat one-size-fits-all payment, it will be based on whichever is lower:

- the statutory SSP rate, or
- 80% of average weekly earnings

This approach is designed to stop very low-paid employees from falling through the cracks, while still keeping SSP within reasonable limits.

#### So... Is This Definitely Happening in Northern Ireland?

This is the part that causes confusion.

Northern Ireland has its own Assembly and legal process, so changes made in Great Britain don't automatically become law here. However, SSP is an area where Northern Ireland typically keeps pace, and the expectation is that NI will implement these changes on the same timetable as GB.

In other words: while the legal mechanics still need to be completed locally, businesses should treat this as a change that is coming - and prepare accordingly.

#### Wage Changes:

##### Another April Headline

As with most years, April 2026 is also expected to bring the annual update to the National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage. These changes apply in Northern Ireland in line with the rest of the UK and often create knock-on effects for payroll budgets, overtime calculations and pay structures.

Even small hourly increases can make a big difference for employers with large teams, shift work, or seasonal staff.

#### What Employers Should Be Doing Now

For many organisations, the SSP changes may have a bigger impact than expected. Paying statutory sick pay from day one could increase costs for businesses that regularly deal with short absences.

It may be worth reviewing:

- payroll systems and SSP settings
- sickness absence reporting procedures
- return-to-work processes
- staff handbooks and sick pay policies (including managing short term absence)
- any enhanced sick pay arrangements already offered

Some employers may also find they need to focus more on absence management and early intervention, simply because the cost of short-term sickness will rise.

#### What It Means for Employees

For employees, the changes are mostly good news. Sick pay from day one removes a long-standing frustration, and widening eligibility means many workers



Ronnie McCullough  
Managing Director  
Tel: 07835 255794



Nicola Curry  
HR Consultant



Alan Hall  
Health & Safety Specialist

who previously got nothing will now receive some support.

It also reflects a wider shift in how workplaces are expected to treat health and wellbeing - not as a personal inconvenience, but as a normal part of working life.

#### Final Word

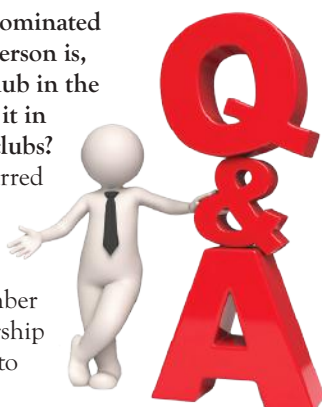
April 2026 is just around the corner and for employers, changes like this arrive too quickly once payroll systems and policies need updating.

The SSP reforms are likely to be a standout employment change for businesses in Northern Ireland, and, it's worth knowing what's ahead.

If you need further information or support please contact us.

**Q. A member of our club has been nominated for election to the committee. This person is, however, also a member of another club in the town and is an officer of that club. Is it in order for him to hold office in both clubs?**

**A.** A member of two clubs is not debarred from holding office in one club due to the fact that he holds office in the other, unless the rules of either club expressly disallow such a right. A member of two clubs is entitled to the membership privileges of each, including the right to hold office. It must be left to the good sense of the members to elect suitable persons to office. If this member is successful in being elected to your committee, then it would be perfectly in order for the chairman to remind him that information he receives as a member of the committee is confidential.



**Q. We have local Trustees who are convinced that they are not personally liable for any of the club's debts and that the club has an insurance policy in place protecting them. The committee, however, have not been able to find any evidence of such a policy. Is there a policy we should have in place to protect our local Trustees from debts?**

**A.** You can certainly investigate with your insurance supplier if they can provide such a policy, although most of the time policies are not available to cover Trustees from every type of eventuality. Losses arising purely from trading losses, for example, are seldom protected by general club insurance policies, although hopefully the club has in place typical public liability policies which offer some protection to the Trustees in the event of one-off injuries and financial events. If in doubt, please discuss with your insurance provider what policies you have in place, what protections these provide to your local Trustees, and what situations the Trustees will not be protected for. It is important that the club's Trustees fully understand what they are signing up for.

As mentioned, losses and debts associated with typical trading are seldom covered under general insurance policies, and so trustees should always be made aware that they could be personally liable for club debts which occur. Whilst the Federation can assist the Trustees by reviewing insurance policies in place, ultimately the club's Trustees must satisfy themselves that they are willing to take on the responsibility of being club Trustees and understand the specific financial risks which they may be exposed to.

**Q. What exactly should our first aid kit contain?**

**A.** The essentials include plasters, bandages, sterile dressings, gloves, and a basic guidance leaflet. For low-risk settings, BS 8599-1 suggests a small kit for under 25 people. Additional items (e.g., foil blankets, shears) can be included following a needs assessment.

**Q. Should we carry out separate fire and general risk assessments?**

**A.** Yes, fire safety is a critical risk in club environments. You should conduct both: a general risk assessment (covering slip, trip, and equipment hazards) and a fire risk assessment, using available templates or guides, including club-specific ones.

**Q. The committee recently suspended a member for a period of three years, which we have been informed may be unlawful. There**

**is nothing specific in our rules concerning suspension and the committee have asked for your recommendations.**

**A.** Most clubs restrict the maximum period of suspension to one year. The reason for a one year limit is due to the fact that a suspended member remains liable to pay his subscription. To expect a person to continue to pay a subscription for a great length of time may be considered unreasonable. It is also considered that any misconduct requiring a suspension period of more than one year should probably be dealt with by expulsion.

If your club has no specific rule precluding a ban of more than one year then there is no reason to suggest that your decision to suspend for a three year period is unacceptable. However, if the person in question does not pay his subscription, his membership will lapse and he will need to re-apply for membership following the three year suspension instead of being automatically re-admitted.

I would suggest that in the future, any member whose conduct warrants a suspension period of more than one year is expelled.

**Q. A few years ago the committee expelled a member. It has now been raised that this person may wish to rejoin the club. Is this acceptable?**

**A.** An expelled member can put in a request to the committee to be allowed to submit a new application for membership. It is up to the committee to decide whether or not to allow such a person to put in a new application. If the committee decides to allow the person to apply for membership, the usual membership application procedure will then apply.

If you have any questions you need answered for your club, then please send them to us at: [info@nifederationofclubs.com](mailto:info@nifederationofclubs.com)



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the Carabao Cup Final at Wembley. A day defined by emotion, storytelling, and national interest, it's a powerful platform for businesses looking to reach audiences at scale.

And beyond football, the return of Formula 1 brings another world-class opportunity. With exclusive rights to the entire season, Sky Sports will take viewers through every race weekend as new rivalries ignite and the grid evolves.

Unmissable football. World-leading motorsport. All live and all exclusive on Sky Sports - giving businesses the perfect stage to make an impact.



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## February and March Highlights

Sunday 22nd February .....	Livingston vs Rangers - 15:00
Monday 23rd February.....	Everton vs Man Utd - 20:00
Friday 27th February.....	Wolves vs Aston Villa - 20:00*
Saturday 28th February.....	Leeds vs Man City - 17:30
Sunday 1st March.....	Rangers vs Celtic - 12:00
	Fulham vs Spurs - 14:00
	Arsenal vs Chelsea - 16:30
Saturday 14th March .....	Chelsea vs Newcastle - 17:30
Sunday 15th March.....	Arsenal vs Everton - 14:00
	Liverpool vs Spurs - 16:30
Monday 16th March .....	Brentford vs Wolves - 20:00
Friday 20th March .....	Bournemouth vs Man Utd - 20:00
Saturday 21st March.....	Everton vs Chelsea - 17:30

\*Subject to Villa's Europa League involvement.

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## Lord Smith Speaks Out On Behalf of Clubs



During a debate in the House of Lords in January, Lord Smith of Hindhead, Chairman of the Association of Conservative Clubs, set forward the case for private members' social clubs: "We are all well aware that the hospitality industry is facing a crisis worse than it has ever seen - astonishingly, even worse than it experienced during the Covid pandemic and lockdown.

"We know this as there are daily articles in the press and coverage in

the media about the plight of pubs and, in particular, the unfair rating increases that are set to cripple many establishments, with eye-watering multipliers which, for many, will be unsustainable over the next three years.

"Putting to one side the increase in wages, which affects all employers, and food inflation and other costs, the proposed increases to business rates have been seen as the final nail in the coffin. I am therefore pleased that noises from His Majesty's Treasury indicate that there may be some re-examination of this issue, with the prospect of some sensible arithmetic being applied.

"My concern, however, is that this appears to be directed towards the plight of pubs alone, and I would like to make a case for the circa 3,000 private members' social clubs. I do not mean just the Conservative

Clubs that I know so well, but the Working Men's Clubs, the Royal British Legions, Miners' Welfare Institutes, Naval and Air Force Clubs, Railway Clubs, Liberal and Labour Clubs - indeed, all the social clubs that make up such a significant part of so many people's lives.

"These clubs are not run for profit or underwritten by a hedge fund or private equity firm, as so many pub companies are, but managed by volunteer officers and committees. Some 12,000 people are employed within the clubs.

"So often, we hear how important pubs are to their communities, which is true, but every one of the members' social clubs that I have mentioned is a community in itself.

"They are part of the fabric of many people's lives, and essential to the social well-being of members, as well

as to the furtherance of the objects for which the clubs were formed.

"As such, I ask the Minister to feed back to the Treasury team that any help or assistance that may be on the way to help pubs should be extended to help clubs in the same way, for the same reasons, and for the same outcome - in other words, a level playing field.

"The society which socialises together is a stronger society, and our pubs, clubs, bars, restaurants and hotels put that into practice every day. As I said in my maiden speech, 10 years ago, virtual friends can never be the same as actual friends."

Lord Smith concluded, "Let us do everything we can to ensure that our clubs, pubs and all the places where we socialise remain, so that we can continue to meet friends and make friends in the years ahead."

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# An Evening of Generosity at H&W Staff Club

The strength of our clubs is often measured not only by their facilities or membership, but by their willingness to step forward for those in need. That spirit was clearly evident at the Harland & Wolff Staff Club, Belfast, where a charity evening held in December raised a commendable £1,500 in support of the Cancer Fund for Children.

The event brought members and guests together for an evening that combined enjoyment with a shared purpose. Through generous donations and enthusiastic participation, the club demonstrated how local community effort can make a meaningful difference to families facing the profound

challenges that childhood cancer brings.

Cancer Fund for Children provides vital support services for children and young people affected by cancer, along with their families, across Northern Ireland. The funds raised will help sustain practical and emotional support at a time when it is most needed.

Initiatives such as this highlight the important role clubs continue to play beyond their walls. The Harland & Wolff Staff Club is to be commended for its commitment to charitable causes and for showing how a well-supported club event can translate goodwill into tangible help for others.



(L-R) Mark Harrison and Sandra Gamble from the Harland and Wolff Staff Club, and Federation Secretary, Harry Beckinsale, who accepted the cheque on behalf of the Cancer Fund for Children.

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## KP Re-opens Bank of McCoys in NI

### The Bank of McCoys is back with £125,000 in crisp cash

Northern Ireland snack lovers could enjoy a seriously tasty payday over the next few months as KP Snacks re-opens its popular Bank of McCoy's - offering local consumers and retailers an opportunity to make a crisp cash withdrawal from the bank's £125,000 prize vault.

As the cost of living continues to soar, the on-pack campaign gives fans of McCoy's, the UK's number one ridged crisp, a chance to win instant cash prizes of up to £1,000 from the Bank's £100,000 vault or free crisps.

Local retailers can also cash in, with a dedicated £25,000 prize fund offering them the

opportunity to win up to £1,000 in cash or free stock.

Running across McCoy's popular Price-Marked Packs (PMP) and Grab Bag formats from now until 6th April, shoppers can check their balance very simply by purchasing a promotional pack of McCoy's and following the on-pack instructions to discover if they've won.

One thing that retailers can bank on is that the campaign will again be supported by eye-catching on-pack designs, in-store POS and digital activity, ensuring



Launching the Bank of McCoys campaign, which runs from now until 6th April, are McCoy's bankers Ricky Watts (left) and John Baxter of McCoy's parent company KP Snacks (NI) Ltd.

McCoy's stays front of mind - and in shopping baskets - across the province.

For more information on Bank Of McCoy's, visit [www.bankofmccoys.co.uk](http://www.bankofmccoys.co.uk)

## Coca-Cola Partners Northern Irish football

The Coca-Cola Company, alongside its strategic bottling partner Coca-Cola HBC Ireland and Northern Ireland, has announced a new soft drinks partnership with the Irish Football Association and the NI Football League.

The partnership will bring supporters together to champion both national and domestic teams across Northern Ireland through activations and activities, celebrating the country's passion for football and the spirit of sport.

The partnership announcement signifies its investment in and promotion of grassroots and domestic football while supporting the communities it serves across Northern Ireland.

The Coca-Cola system has a long history and legacy in Northern Ireland, serving local communities for more than 86 years. Currently 1,500 are employed across the island of Ireland, with 550 based in its production facility in Lisburn.

Simon Fitzpatrick, General Manager, Coca-Cola HBC Ireland and Northern Ireland, said, "Football in Northern Ireland is a proudly established and widely supported institution, bringing local talent together through a shared love of the beautiful game."

IFA Chief Executive, Patrick Nelson, said, "It's great to see such a huge global brand supporting football



Pictured (l-r): Amruta Vaidya, Country Manager, Coca-Cola Ireland; Irish FA Chief Executive Patrick Nelson; Simon Fitzpatrick, General Manager, Coca-Cola HBC Ireland and Northern Ireland, and NIFL Chief Executive Gerard Lawlor.

in Northern Ireland, and we are delighted Coca-Cola has become the official soft drinks partner of the Irish FA. I have no doubt Coca-

Cola's involvement will help to promote football among a wider audience in Northern Ireland - and that's always good for the game."

# Billy Bingham

## A Northern Ireland Footballing Legend

Billy Bingham holds a unique place in Northern Ireland football history, having achieved the rare feat of both playing in and managing at the FIFA World Cup finals.

Born in Belfast in 1931, he began his senior career with Glentoran (1948-50) before a £10,000 move in 1950 to Sunderland, where he made over 200 appearances in eight years. Bingham was a lively, hard-working outside-right with pace, bravery and an eye for goal. He later played for Luton Town (1958-61) and Everton (1961-63) winning the English First Division title with Everton in 1962-63 before finishing his club career at Port Vale (1963-65). At Luton he scored in every round of the 1959 FA Cup, helping the club reach the Wembley final.

He earned 56 caps (scoring 10 goals) for Northern Ireland between 1951 and 1964, playing in all five matches of Northern Ireland's historic 1958 World Cup campaign, which saw them reach the quarter-finals. He was an important member of that 1958 team which eliminated Italy en route and became one of the smallest nations ever to reach a World Cup quarter-final. Northern Ireland had famously finished ahead of Argentina and Czechoslovakia in their group to qualify for that tournament.

After retiring from playing (a broken leg ended his career in 1964), Bingham moved seamlessly into management. In 1965 he took over as manager of Fourth Division Southport and immediately delivered success, winning the division title in 1966-67. By October 1967 he had been appointed part-time Northern Ireland manager, and in the following years he also managed Plymouth Argyle (1968-70) and Linfield. His single season with Linfield (1970-71) yielded the Irish League title.

In 1971 Bingham left Northern Ireland to coach Greece's national team. Two years later he returned to England to manage Everton (1973-77); his sides finished 7th, 4th and 11th in the First Division, narrowly missing the title in 1974-75. After a brief stint at Mansfield Town, he was reappointed Northern Ireland manager in 1980 and was made MBE in 1981. This began the most celebrated chapter of his career.

Under Bingham's stewardship Northern Ireland enjoyed a renaissance. In 1982 he guided the team back to the World Cup finals - the first time since 1958 - with a series of inventive tactics. The 1982 finals in Spain were a watershed: Northern Ireland famously upset the hosts 1-0 in Valencia, propelling them into the second phase (a quarter-final group). Bingham's bold decision to play 17-year-old Norman Whiteside paid off, as the squad topped a group that included Spain, Yugoslavia and Honduras. Ultimately



*A youthful Billy Bingham pictured with Sid Owen, who was Football Writers' Association (FWA) Footballer of the Year for the 1958-59 season, having captained Luton Town to FA Cup glory that year.*

a draw with Austria and a loss to France ended their run, but the victory in Valencia remains one of Northern Ireland's greatest football achievements.

Bingham then steered Northern Ireland through qualifying for a second successive World Cup. His team won four and drew two of eight qualifiers in 1985-86, including home and away victories over Romania, to secure a place in the Mexico 1986 finals. In the Mexico tournament Northern Ireland earned a 1-1 draw with Algeria but were eliminated after matches with Spain and Brazil. Alongside these World Cup campaigns, Bingham's era also brought British Home Championship titles in 1980 and 1984.

By the time he stepped down in 1993, Bingham had firmly cemented his legacy. He had become the country's most successful football manager, remembered for guiding Northern Ireland to two World Cups and multiple Home Championship titles. He was unique in having been both a World Cup player (1958) and World Cup manager (1982, 1986) for Northern Ireland. As one obituary noted, no one "did more for Northern Ireland in World Cup football" than Billy Bingham. His contributions as a player and manager are woven into the fabric of the nation's footballing history. He is an inductee of the Irish FA Hall of Fame, honouring his unique achievement of three World Cups with Northern Ireland (one as a player, two as manager).

Billy died in 2022 at the age of 90, and tributes hailed him as Northern Ireland's greatest footballing figure. He is fondly remembered by the clubs he served and will always be remembered as a true giant of Northern Irish football.

## Ulster GAA Annual Awards

Honouring the Best of the 2025 Season

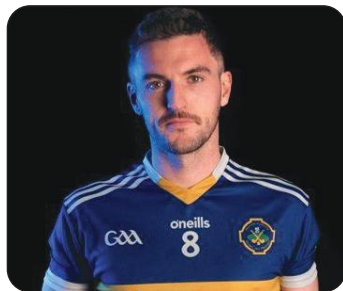


**ULSTER GAA**

### Award Winners



*Finnbar Roarty, Naomh Conaill & Donegal - UGAA Footballer of the Year.*



*Matthew Conlan, Portaferry GAC & Down - UGAA Hurler of the Year.*



*Anthony Harkin, Donegal GAA - UGAA Coaching Award winner.*



*Seamus McAleenan - UGAA Service Through Education Award winner.*



*Sheila Kearney - UGAA Special Recognition Award (Camogie).*



*Fiachra Ó Dúill - UGAA Special Recognition Award (Handball).*

The Ulster GAA President's Awards, held on Friday 6th February at the Slieve Russell Hotel in County Cavan, provided a fitting and dignified tribute to the outstanding contributions made across the province during the 2025 season.

The annual ceremony remains one of the most important dates in the Ulster GAA calendar. It brings together county representatives, club delegates, administrators and invited guests to recognise excellence that has defined the previous year. While medals and trophies are tangible markers of success, the President's Awards provide a broader acknowledgment of individual distinction, leadership and sustained contribution within the provincial game.

Among the headline honours on the night was the Ulster GAA Footballer of the Year Award, presented to Finnbar Roarty of Donegal and Naomh Conaill. His performances throughout the 2025 inter-county campaign marked him out as one of Ulster's standout players. In a championship environment renowned for its intensity and tactical discipline, Roarty's consistency, work rate and influence proved decisive across the season. Recognition at provincial level is never lightly earned, and the award reflected a year in which his contribution resonated beyond individual statistics.

Equally significant was the presentation of the Ulster GAA Coaching Award to Anthony

Harkin. Coaching remains the foundation upon which long-term success is built, and this honour acknowledged decades of commitment to player development and preparation. From grassroots engagement to higher-level involvement, Harkin's contribution illustrates the sustained effort required to cultivate talent, instil standards and maintain competitive structures across clubs and counties. The award served as a reminder that the progress visible on match day is rooted in countless hours of unseen work on training fields and in planning rooms.

The evening also reinforced the collective nature of Gaelic games in Ulster. Behind every accolade lies a network of volunteers, administrators and club officers who ensure that fixtures are fulfilled, facilities maintained and young players encouraged. While the spotlight rightly falls on individual recipients, the President's Awards celebrate a culture of shared responsibility that remains central to the Association's strength in the province.

As Ulster GAA turns its attention fully to the 2026 season, the awards night provided both reflection and direction. By honouring excellence in performance and coaching, the Association reaffirmed the standards to which it aspires. In doing so, it underscored the enduring values of dedication, community and sporting integrity that continue to define Gaelic games throughout the nine counties.

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# NI Football Writers' Association Awards



Carrick Rangers boss, Stephen Baxter, has been named as Manager of the Month for January.

Carrick Rangers boss Stephen Baxter is the NIFWA Manager of the Month for January, despite making a dreadful start to the new year with a 7-0 loss to Glentoran at Taylors Avenue. However, Baxter's men fought back in spectacular style with league wins against Cliftonville, Dungannon Swifts and Portadown. Rangers also made history by winning the Toals Senior Shield during the month, defeating the Reds in a nail-biting decider at Seaview.

A delighted Baxter said, "I'm sure I'm the first manager to win this award despite losing the first match of the month 7-0. I believe the key to our recent success is that we did not panic or get too down on ourselves when we were losing games. I always knew we had the quality to be competitive in this league. Winning the Shield was a great moment for everyone at the club, particularly the supporters who waited 33 years for a senior trophy."



Glentoran striker Patrick Hoban is the Sports Direct Player of the Month for January.

Patrick Hoban scored a remarkable nine goals in the month, including a stunning six-goal haul against Carrick Rangers.

The Glentoran star said, "As a striker I've always backed myself to score goals. I'm obviously delighted to have 20 in 25 games, although I feel like I probably should have more. I've missed a few chances in certain games, but that's the nature of the job.

"Overall, it's been a good return so far. These awards are nice to receive and it's good recognition for the work you're doing, but I wouldn't be in this position without my teammates. They're the ones putting balls into the box and creating chances for me."

Carrick Rangers striker Adam Lecky was runner-up with Glentoran midfielder Cameron Palmer third.

Harland and Wolff Welders striker Ethan Devine has been named Championship Player of the Month for January. Devine scored an incredible nine goals in the month, including a six-minute hat-trick against Armagh City. He is the third Welders player to win the award this season, following in the footsteps of Brian Healy and Lewis Patterson.



H&W Welders striker Ethan Devine is the Championship Player of the Month.

Devine said, "I'd like to thank the Football Writers' Association for this award. It's rare to win an individual award in football, so this means a lot. I've had some ups and downs in my career, so I'm delighted to be back playing

and scoring goals consistently. I'm really enjoying my football at the Welders and I want to help the club kick on and push for promotion this season."

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