

Governance Board

24 September 2025

Attendees

Initials	Name	Role
KC	Karin Christiansen	Board Chair
HH	Hera Hussain (from end of 'strategic goals update')	Non-Executive Director
KB	Karien Bezuidenhout	Non-Executive Director
LC	Louise Crow	Non-Executive Director
JT	Jeni Tennison	Executive Director

Minutes

Taken by Emily Macaulay, Head of Delivery and Operations. All actions from the last meeting had been completed.

Strategic goals update

Progress over the last six months towards our goals from the [strategic roadmap for 2025-26](#) were presented, alongside an overview of plans for the next six months.

Change the narrative: We will know if we are successful if...

- Influential campaigners and think tanks include recommendations for collective action and/or public participation in their research, white papers and campaigns

There has been some progress in this area particularly around supporting unions to build their voice and message. Further discussion about influencing was discussed at the end of the meeting as a specific agenda item.

Change organisational practice: We will know if we are successful if...

- An(other) organisation is providing high quality union-facing capacity building and action-focused programmes
- Practical guidance on involving the public in data and AI is embedded within at least the Office for Statistics Regulation and National Data Library
- There is a PAIRS event alongside the next global AI Action Summit in India

This is the goal where the most has been achieved and sees the culmination of the previous three years' work. The Board noted particular impact and progress in this area such as having our co-designed toolkit on public involvement by statistics producers due to be published alongside the official Code of Practice for Statistics by the Office for Statistics Regulation this Autumn.

The Board identified the power in the work Connected by Data has done starting with engaging regular people in talking about AI at the first AI Safety Summit through the People's Panel on AI and then building that through measured work into helping people to participate, enabling organisations to listen and getting everyone in the same room. It was suggested that as a legacy piece Connected by Data consider writing up that "journey" creating a playbook for others on how to get people involved. There is an opportunity to use PAIRS as a space to start sharing that story.

ACTION: Jeni to consider how to use PAIRS to share our work

Change public policy: We will know if we are successful if...

- Government Digital Service (GDS) has made investments in public, worker and civil society involvement in their work

We are not yet entirely clear on the new Ministerial leads or areas of interest after the reshuffle. There are also some junior Minister portfolios that have not been replaced like for like. Liz Kendall is the new Secretary of State and has

[appointed Kirsty Innes](#) (formerly Labour Together) as an Advisor. We continue to have good links into the civil service level. Kanishka Narayan is the new Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for AI and Online Safety.

The timelines for the Government bringing an AI Bill is unknown and likely delayed due to the recent reshuffle. The scope is also unknown but is likely to focus on copyright issues and perhaps the AI Security Institute (AISI). It is unlikely to tackle regulation around the “nuts and bolts” (unlike the EU AI Act). Geopolitical political pressure is towards low regulation.

LLMs are not the place to focus energies, not least as there is a likelihood the “bubble will burst”.

However there is a belief a lot can still be achieved around AI deployment on things that mean things to people i.e. in schools, detecting fraud in the public sector.

Build the field: We will know if we are successful if...

- The CSO Network infrastructure is not dependent on Connected by Data existing
- The CSO Network and working groups associated with it continues to meet regularly

Develop the organisation: We will know if we are successful if...

- All our reusable and externally visible work has been archived somewhere for the long term
- We each have fulfilling work and jobs in March 2026

The archiving goal has been slowed due to improved financial future. No questions were raised. The Board shared their thanks to the team for a flexible approach to working hours that had allowed the organisation to continue with embedded staff.

Budget update, forecast and fundraising

The Board were presented with last year’s final spend summary, compared to current year spent (end of August 2025) and the forecast to the end of March 2026. Although our forecast costs exceed our forecast income the gap will be

funded from our reserves and still leave a healthy surplus for the 2026-27 financial year. There is a secure runway to the end of February 2026.

The Board was then presented with a forecast for 2026-27 that includes assumptions of income from fundraising that there is a degree of confidence on receiving. Further funding bids have been submitted but have a low degree of confidence. The forecast has a modest additional income need (£30k grants and £60k commercial) presuming a running down of reserves over the 2026-27 financial year. There were no questions raised.

Discussion: Do you want Connected by Data to continue past March 2027?

The Board was asked to consider: Do you want to continue Connected by Data beyond March 2027? What approach should we take to additional fundraising?

There were a number of framing questions asked by the Board in order to support their discussion, these focused around personal, value and viability.

The Executive Director set some context for the discussion. There is 18 months to go until the end of the five year timeframe (March 2027) which was explicitly set when the organisation was formed. The expectation was that the context in which the organisation operates, as well as progress towards more collective data governance would have changed over that period, and that appears to be the case. The global and national political context is significantly changed (and expected to continue to change), the wide use of generative AI is a new trend, and concerns around copyright rather than personal data are all substantial shifts in the past three years and look set to continue.

Value: If Connected by Data was to stop there is strong work by others (e.g. Ada Lovelace Institute) taking forward the theoretical and policy work. There is a high level of confidence that policy positions we would align with would continue well without Connected by Data.

There is less confidence that our work around supporting organisations to do public engagement practically would continue but there are still some good individuals and organisations with those skills and passions. Mechanisms such as PAIRS help to spread that good practice and we plan to work over the next 18 months to develop that. We will also work to increase support for unions and other organisations to build their skills (e.g. the work we have done for

Knowledge Industries in the Peabody Housing Association can be scaled to other housing associations).

The area in which there is a gap without Connected by Data is our narrative theme and a campaigning focus on public involvement, worker voice and engaging civil society. Many other organisations recognise the importance but talk about it as one small message among many others. Our experience over the past three years has shown this to be a difficult message to campaign around due to the complexity of the issues but also still having to do the work to convince around public engagement generally, as well as specifically in data and AI. Part of our plan for a final 18 month period would be to do as much as possible around reducing the gap we would leave through building up other organisations to talk about this more and higher up their list of priorities.

Personal: The Executive Director set up the organisation believing that in addition to the context changing over five years, that fundraising and focus can shift after this period into sustaining existence rather than energy and impact. There are passions and opportunities developing that the Executive Director will want to take in 18 months time and if Connected by Data was to continue past that time with its current focus it would need a new ED.

Viability: Whilst we now have some financial stability there was recently a period where that wasn't the case and fundraising was challenging. There is potential for follow-on funding from new grants. However if Connected by Data didn't exist that same money could usefully go to other organisations delivering aligned work (TUC, PAIRS and CSO Network as a decentralised entity).

The Board asked if there is any match between prospective funding and the identified gap of campaigning and whether Connected by Data is the right structure to do the campaigning work.

There is no current funding focused on the campaigning/narrative related gap and Connected by Data's current structure would not be the best response to progress the campaigning work. We struggle in part due to lack of capacity to maintain connections for parliamentary and political campaigning and don't have the capacity to build in that area.

Following discussion there was broad agreement that Connected by Data would not continue in its current form without the current Executive Director.

However there were outstanding questions on whether Connected by Data could re-brand and adjust into a new structure to deliver either the potential campaign gap, or a new passion of the current Executive Director. It was agreed that there is a lot of cost (time and effort particularly) in establishing infrastructure of a new organisation and shutting down would mean losing that, and require others to reinvest that to set up a new organisation(s). Fundraising is often also easier with an established organisation with a reputation and track record of evidence of impact.

The Board requested that the team consider:

- What is the problem that will exist in 18 months time?
- What is the solution needed to address that problem?

This thinking in itself will be part of the legacy of Connected by Data. The outcome will be discussed by the Board during 2026 to make final decisions on the organisational entity of Connected by Data.

ACTION: Jeni (and team as needed) to consider potential new focus and present to the Board in six to twelve months

Influencing the policy influencers

The Board then had a discussion on Connected by Data's current thinking, aims and how to embed our influencing goals in think tanks and other policy influencers.

[A recent report shows the Tony Blair Institute becoming more open to the idea of public participation](#) which is an opportunity, but there are also [reports that are critical of the organisation](#). This leads us to question how we can improve our efforts to have our messages heard by policy influencers.

The Board suggested that the most useful first step is to spend time and effort on mapping where the actual influence is and not presuming it is with think tanks. Relatedly, it may not be organisations but specific individuals. There should be an element in the mapping of considering the new Ministerial/related appointments and working out the connections and internal politics. It was noted that more time on the mapping (influence and power) and less on the actual influencing may be most beneficial for the sector. Industry for example may be an important player.

ACTION: Karin and Jeni to discuss mapping the influence and power on policy

There was discussion about the risk to reputation of seeking to speak with/influence organisations (or individuals) that are not in favour with civil society. It was agreed this was a low risk and that having an eighteen month timeline to wind up created some freedom to do the work that others can't risk. Connected by Data may be uniquely positioned for the coming year and a half. The risk within civil society can be mitigated by explaining our reasoning, but also avoiding being co-opted and "whistle-blowing" if necessary.

It is essential to create mini "surround sounds" around influencers. They need to hear the organisation's name and message four different times to create the nudge into listening.

In addition to Connected by Data attempting to directly influence there was a link to the earlier discussion about creating a Playbook for "how to engage people" and empowering the public/unions/workers to be demanding to be at the table and heard; and knowing what questions to ask and the talking points to make.

Close

The Board all extended their thanks to the Connected by Data team for their continued hard work and impact in this area. The Board offered ongoing support - both practical and as "sounding boards" to anyone in the team during the next eighteen months and into the future.

Actions

Action	Important	Urgent	Who
Jeni to consider how to use PAIRS to share our own work			JT
Jeni (and team as needed) to consider potential new focus and present to the Board in six to twelve months	✓		JT

Action	Important	Urgent	Who
Karin and Jeni to discuss mapping the influence and power on policy	✓		JT/KC