

COMMISSIONERS' BUSINESS MEETINGS: SUMMARY MINUTES

14-Nov-06		Attended: Commissioners: Brenda McLaughlin (Chair), B Carlin, A Henry, Ruth Laird, Alan Lennon, S McDowell. Apology: Dame Joan Harbison. Secretariat: Jim McKeown (Secretary), Joanne Dowling (Deputy), Ena McKnight, Paul Lavery.
Agenda		
1. Introduction		The Chairperson welcomed Ruth Laird and Alan Lennon who were attending their first Business Meeting. She advised that Bob Collins, Chief Executive of the NI Equality Commission, would be joining the Commissioners for a working lunch.
2. Minutes of Meeting held on 19 September 2006		Agreed as drafted.
3. Matters Arising	Matrix detailing action on points arising from the previous meeting	Noted. The Commissioners would like further information on the 3 stage interview process used by the UK Commissioners to appoint the Chief Executive, NHS. Secretariat to obtain details and report at the next business meeting. Action: Secretariat.
4. Meeting with UK Commissioners 18 October 2006		Minutes of the meeting agreed as drafted subject to insertion of an apology from A Henry (unable to attend). The meeting had been extremely useful for both sets of Commissioners. Links between the 2 sets of Commissioners and their respective Secretariats to be maintained and strengthened. Action: Commissioners and Secretariat.
5. Senior Appointments	Protocol on the use of consultants in Senior SCS competitions	DFP content with amendments suggested by the Commissioners.
	Update on Senior competitions	Current status noted. The Chairperson advised Commissioners of developments in a competition she was currently chairing, where two additional forms of assessment were to be introduced alongside the usual interview. Commissioners welcomed this and asked to hear further reports as the competition progressed. Action: Chairperson.
6. Audit Programme	Merit Lists in Volume Competitions	The factual accuracy check had produced no amendments and the report was now due for issue. Commissioners approved a letter to the Permanent Secretary, DFP for issue with the report. Action: Secretariat.
	Attracting Candidates' audit	Noted that the audit had recently commenced and fact finding visits were underway. A draft report should be available by early January 2007.

7. New audit contract commencing April 2007	Agreed the specification for a new audit contract.
8. Secondments to the SCS in the context of RPA and devolved Government	Commissioners agreed to delegate to the Secretariat the authority to approve on their behalf the routine-type secondments arising from the RPA. The Secretariat will report at each business meeting on the applications approved by them. Action: Secretariat.
9. Restriction on internal candidates' eligibility to apply for recruitment competitions	NIPSA raised with the Commissioners the current NICS practice whereby restrictions are applied to internal candidates, excluding them from applying for an appointment through open competition, where they have a poor attendance record. External candidates are not similarly excluded. Commissioners noted that there were issues of fairness surrounding the NICS approach and agreed the matter should be raised with DFP, initially by the Secretariat. Action: Secretariat.
10. Review of the Equality Scheme Implementation Plan	Commissioners noted, and were content with, progress against the Equality Scheme Implementation Plan. They were also pleased to receive a letter from the Equality Commission providing a positive response to the 5-year review of the Commissioners' Equality Scheme.
11. New disability duties	Commissioners agreed that, as appropriate, they would wholeheartedly pursue the new disability duties in carrying out their responsibilities. However, in view of the Commissioners' limited frame of reference in regard to disability, the Secretariat was asked to seek an exemption from the Equality Commission from the need to produce and submit a disability action plan. Action: Secretariat.
12. Launch of the NICS Code of Ethics	Commissioners were pleased to have been invited by NICS to participate in the launch. The Chairperson's speech on the occasion should be posted on the Commissioners' website. Action: Secretariat. The Commissioners were asked to provide comments on draft revised administrative arrangements for handling appeals, a revised appellants' guidance and a draft article to appear in departmental house magazines, by 17 November. Action: Commissioners.

13. Any Other Business	Review of the Publication Scheme	Annual review was conducted by the Commissioners. Five new categories of information were added to the scheme: the Business Plan; Communication Strategy; Training & Development Strategy; 5-year review of the Equality Scheme; and the Good Relations Strategy. Action: Secretariat.
	Meeting with Permanent Secretary Group - 10 November 2006	The meeting was noted as very useful.
	Meeting with Permanent Secretary Sub Group. 15 November 2006	Agenda items noted.
	Commissioners' business planning day, 5 December 2006	Commissioners received their papers for the event. Noted that John Mallon, NISRA, and John McKervill, CPG, would give presentations on the day, focussing on SCS recruitment.
	Budget update	Noted.
	Information Papers	Noted.
14. Dates of future meetings		Secretariat to arrange business meetings for January and March 2007 and a meeting with the PSG Sub Group in February 2007. Action: Secretariat.
15. Working lunch with Mr B Collins, Chief Executive, NI Equality Commission		Mr Collins discussed with the Commissioners implications arising from the new Age Discrimination legislation and updated them on the Equality Commission's ongoing review of the effectiveness of Section 75 of the NI Act 1998. Both parties agreed it would be useful to meet formally on a regular basis to discuss issues of mutual interest. Action: Secretariat.