

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: 2008 – 2011 & BUSINESS PLAN: 2009/10

*Ensuring appointment on merit
& safeguarding ethics*

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CONTEXT

This Business Plan has been prepared by the Northern Ireland Civil Service Commissioners to set-out the strategic direction for Commissioners over the three year period 2008 – 2011. It outlines the Commissioners' 3-year strategic priorities and provides details of the specific actions to be taken during 2009/10 that will contribute to the achievement of those priorities. All of the objectives, targets and actions contained within this Plan have been developed to support Commissioners to fulfill their statutory responsibilities to uphold the principle that selection for appointment to posts in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) should be on merit on the basis of fair and open competition and to safeguard ethics within the NICS.

Successfully achieving the strategic priorities represents a challenging and ambitious programme of work. Commissioners view this Plan as a 'living document' which will need to be monitored and kept under regular review to enable Commissioners to respond appropriately to any changes which occur with the passage of time. Commissioners will evaluate progress towards the strategic priorities and the annual objectives and targets on a quarterly basis and report formally on this in future Annual Reports.

Commissioners are fully committed to working in close partnership with key stakeholders in order to achieve the strategic priorities outlined in this Plan. The NICS, and in particular the Permanent Secretaries of the NI Departments and representatives of Central Personnel Group (CPG) in the Department of Finance & Personnel (DFP), have a shared interest in protecting the Merit Principle, safeguarding the Code of Ethics and promoting public confidence in recruitment to the NICS. Commissioners will continue to work closely with these key stakeholders in order to achieve these common goals. Much can also be learned by sharing experiences with fellow Commissioners in other jurisdictions and this is an area that Commissioners will continue to actively pursue going forward.

STRATEGIC MISSION

To ensure appointment on merit and safeguard ethics by:

- being an exemplary regulator;
- acting as guardians of the Merit Principle;
- promoting public confidence in recruitment to the NICS;
- promoting equality, diversity and good relations; and
- safeguarding the Code of Ethics.

ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES

Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland were first appointed by Royal Warrant in 1923. Commissioners are appointed under the Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 which requires them to uphold the principle that selection for appointment to posts in the NICS should be on merit on the basis of fair and open competition (known as the Merit Principle). Commissioners prescribe and monitor appointments made by exception to the Merit Principle and also have a responsibility to hear appeals made by, and consider taking complaints direct from, existing civil servants under the NICS Code of Ethics.

Commissioners are independent of the NICS and bring to the job wide experience from the public, private and voluntary sectors. The current Commissioners have different backgrounds, careers and interests and none is a serving member of the Civil Service. This diversity helps Commissioners to provide insight into how the NICS can best serve the public.

The current Commissioners are:

Brenda McLaughlin (Chairperson)
Brian Carlin
Joan Harbison
Alan Henry
Tony Hopkins
Ruth Laird
Vilma Patterson

CORE VALUES

In fulfilling their responsibilities under this Plan, Commissioners and the Secretariat will seek at all times to adhere to the core principles of public life, which are:

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

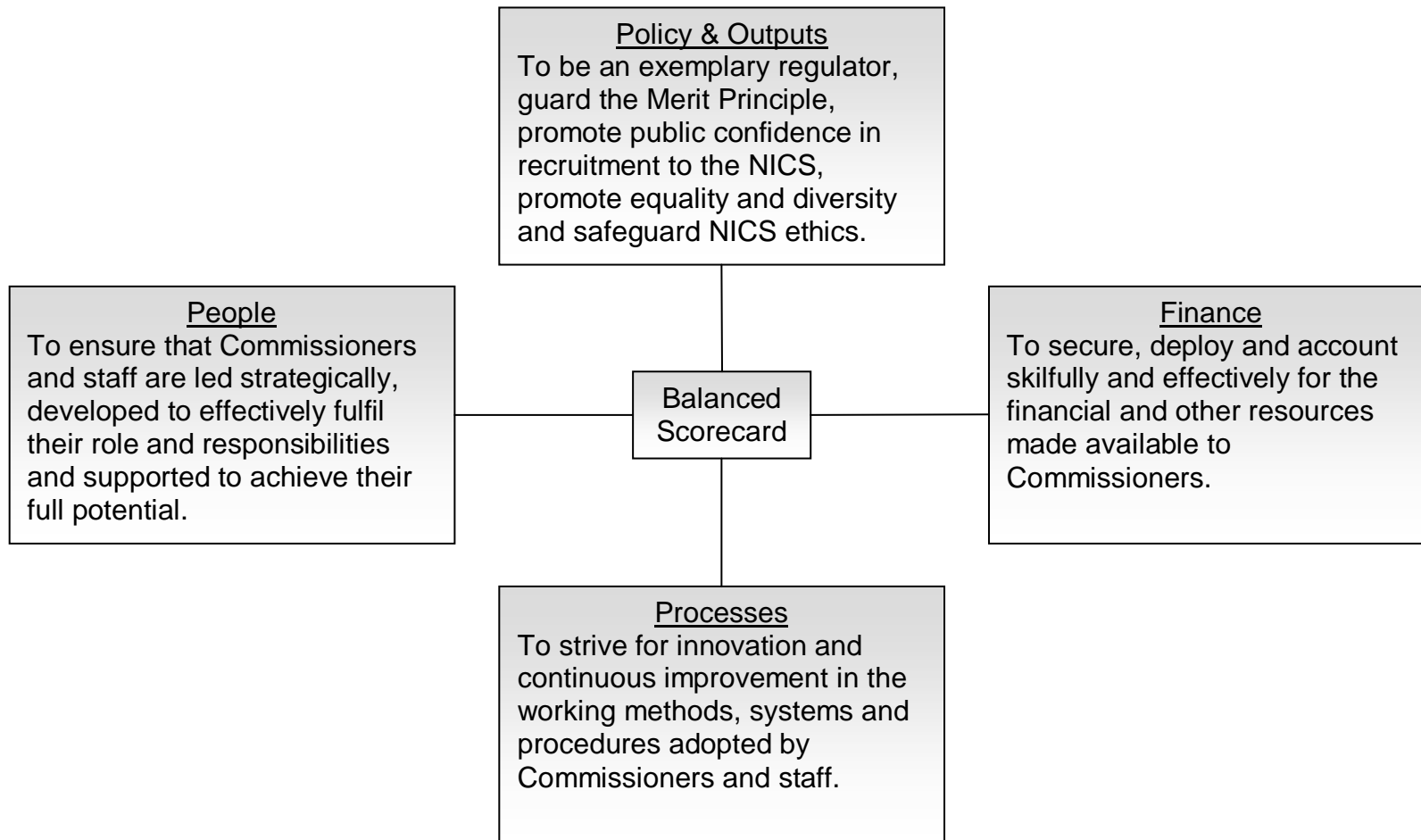
Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example. The Commissioners are fully committed to their role of considering appeals under the NICS Code of Ethics which emphasises the core values of integrity, honesty, objectivity, and impartiality in the civil service.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: 2008 – 2011



ANNUAL OBJECTIVES: 2009/10

1. POLICY & OUTPUTS	2. PEOPLE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To be an exemplary regulator. 2. To guard the Merit Principle. 3. To promote public confidence in recruitment to the NICS. 4. To promote equality, diversity and good relations in line with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. 5. To safeguard the NICS Code of Ethics. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To provide effective strategic leadership and direction. 2. To provide appropriate training and continuous professional development for Commissioners and staff and maintain a well-managed and motivated Secretariat. 3. To ensure line managers fulfil their people responsibilities effectively. 4. To fully comply with the requirements of the Health & Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order and other relevant employment legislation.
3. FINANCE	4. PROCESSES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To make the best possible case to secure the resources needed to enable Commissioners to achieve their 2009/10 business objectives. 2. To shape, steer and challenge the deployment and management of available resources so as to secure maximum efficiency and value for money in the achievement of business objectives. 3. To effectively fulfil responsibilities to account for the expenditure of resources and performance against objectives. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To enable Commissioners to deliver on their statutory responsibilities by providing high-quality, timely support and advice. 2. To facilitate effective corporate governance. 3. To evaluate the Commissioners' effectiveness and learn from other relevant organisations. 4. To facilitate effective communication with key stakeholders. 5. To continually seek to improve internal electronic records management, particularly with a view to responding to requests for information.

1. POLICY & OUTPUTS

Objectives	Targets	Actions
<p>1.1 To be an exemplary regulator.</p>	<p>During 2009/10, ensure that key stakeholders have a clear understanding of the Commissioners' regulatory role and what this means in practice.</p> <p>During 2009/10, continue to exercise the Commissioners' independence and challenge function.</p> <p>During 2009/10, continue to work closely with the NICS to understand key issues and use the Commissioners' influence to help shape and inform recruitment policy and practice.</p>	<p>By June 2009, establish a short and concise articulation of the Commissioners' regulatory responsibilities and how these are delivered in practice.</p> <p>When the above-mentioned articulation is established, agree how this should be communicated to key stakeholders.</p> <p>Throughout the year, continue to make effective use of the regulatory tools at the Commissioners' disposal including the Recruitment Code; monitoring and, where appropriate, approval of appointments by way of exception to the Merit Principle; the audit programme; and ensuring the publication of relevant information.</p> <p>Facilitate 3 meetings with representatives of Central Personnel Group (CPG).</p> <p>Facilitate 1 formal meeting with the full Permanent Secretaries' Group (PSG).</p> <p>Facilitate 1 formal meeting with the PSG Sub-group.</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
	<p>During 2009/10, continue to build on the relationship between Commissioners and the NI Permanent Secretaries.</p> <p>During 2009/10, promote and encourage partnership working with similar bodies to share knowledge and experience and develop closer relationships with other regulators.</p>	<p>Maintain the regular programme of Links meetings between Commissioners and NI Permanent Secretaries, following the agreed common agenda, to communicate and seek to promote the Commissioners' role as regulator and other relevant key messages.</p> <p>Commissioners to produce a short record of each Links meeting and share with colleagues.</p> <p>Secretariat to scrutinise the records of Links meetings and draw Commissioners' attention to key concerns and any emerging trends.</p> <p>Liaise on a regular basis with GB and ROI Commissioners to share knowledge, experience and expertise on issues of common concern.</p> <p>Arrange a formal annual meeting with GB Commissioners.</p> <p>Arrange a formal annual meeting with ROI Commissioners.</p> <p>Invite representatives of other regulatory bodies to attend Commissioners' business meetings to share experience and knowledge.</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
1.2 To guard the Merit Principle.	During 2009/10, ensure that appointments to the NICS are made in line with the Merit Principle.	<p>Agree and implement the 2009/10 Audit Programme to ensure compliance with the expectations of the Recruitment Code.</p> <p>Liaise with the NICS to ensure implementation of the agreed recommendations contained in audit reports.</p> <p>Monitor and report on (in the Annual Report) all appointments made by way of exception to the Merit Principle and scrutinise and challenge any such requests which require Commissioners' approval.</p> <p>Ensure that the NICS publishes the information required under Appendix C to the Recruitment Code.</p> <p>Commissioners to chair all SCS open recruitment competitions and ensure commonality of approach by using the agreed Chairperson's Checklist.</p> <p>Secretariat to scrutinise all SCS appointments in line with the agreed 4-stage approval process.</p> <p>On an annual basis, monitor trends in SCS appointments, including, for example, timescales and the use of internal – v – external approaches.</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
	<p>During 2009/10, undertake a review of the 2005 Commissioners' Recruitment Code and consider the extent to which it may need to be refreshed.</p> <p>During 2009/10, encourage the NICS to develop guidance on effective short-listing and assessment methods for use in NICS recruitment competitions and, in particular, on the effective use of the Professional Skills for Government.</p>	<p>Finalise, with the NICS, an agreed protocol governing the Commissioners' role in relation to internal SCS competitions</p> <p>By September 2009, complete a review of the current Code and consider if there is a need to consult relevant stakeholders on any proposed amendments.</p> <p>Continue to encourage CPG to develop appropriate guidance, drawing on the experience and best practice in other organisations, and ensure this is appropriately reflected in relevant training programmes.</p>
<p>1.3 To promote public confidence in recruitment to the NICS.</p>	<p>During 2009/10, encourage the NICS to establish: (a) current levels of public confidence in recruitment to the NICS; and (b) a sound understanding of the recruitment experiences of candidates.</p> <p>During 2009/10, seek to raise awareness of the Commissioners' role and responsibilities.</p>	<p>Encourage CPG to: (a) measure current levels of public confidence; and (b) examine the scope for research into the recruitment experiences of candidates with a view to understanding their expectations/concerns and, in particular, to identifying barriers for applicants from under-represented groups.</p> <p>Produce and publish an Annual Report by 31 August 2009.</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
		<p>Scrutinise and, as appropriate, publically comment on information published by the NICS in line with the requirements of Appendix C to the Recruitment Code.</p> <p>Maintain the regular programme of meetings with PSG, the PSG Sub-group, CPG and Links meetings with NI Permanent Secretaries.</p>
<p>1.4 To promote equality, diversity and good relations in line with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.</p>	<p>During 2009/10 encourage the NICS to ensure that equality, diversity and good relations are effectively promoted in NICS recruitment processes.</p>	<p>Continue to encourage the NICS to define the diversity information to be made available to panels at the outset of competitions (in line with the expectations of the Commissioners' Recruitment Code and the requirements of the NICS Recruitment Policy and Procedures Manual) with a view to improving the quality and reach of outreach measures.</p> <p>Review and, as necessary, comment on progress reports on implementation of the NICS Employment Equality & Diversity Plan insofar as it relates to recruitment.</p> <p>Consider NICS Article 55 Review Reports and, as appropriate, invite the NICS to comment on recruitment-related actions planned to address any areas of under-representation.</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
	Throughout 2009/10, ensure that Commissioners effectively fulfil all their statutory equality responsibilities.	<p>Within the required timescales, undertake a review of the Commissioners' Equality Scheme following the publication of relevant guidance by ECNI.</p> <p>By end September 2009, submit to ECNI an Annual Report on the implementation of the Commissioners' 2008/09 Equality Plan and include a report on the implementation of the Commissioners' Disability Action Plan.</p> <p>Monitor implementation of the Commissioners' Good Relations Strategy.</p>
1.5 To safeguard the NICS Code of Ethics.	During 2009/10, ensure a considered and timely response to any requests to Commissioners to consider potential complaints under the NICS Code of Ethics.	<p>Working jointly with GB Commissioners, establish a clearer understanding of the role of Commissioners in dealing with potential complaints under the Code.</p> <p>Develop and implement improved procedures for the handling of potential complaints under the Code and, when finalised, arrange appropriate training for all Commissioners and staff.</p> <p>Ensure all potential complaints are dealt with promptly.</p> <p>Encourage the NICS to identify, and maximise, opportunities to use recruitment literature to promote awareness of the Code of Ethics, the core values, and the Commissioners' role in relation to Code.</p>

2. PEOPLE

Objectives	Targets	Actions
<p>2.1 To provide effective strategic leadership and direction.</p>	<p>By April 2009, ensure that the strategic priorities and annual objectives for 2009/10 are finalised and effectively communicated to all Commissioners, staff and other key stakeholders.</p> <p>Ensure regular and effective monitoring of progress towards agreed 2009/10 targets.</p> <p>Ensure effective and timely forward planning beyond 2009/10.</p>	<p>Publish the Business Plan on the Commissioners website no later than 1 April 2009.</p> <p>Ensure that all staff fully understand the commitments in the Plan and their role in contributing to its effective delivery – this should be appropriately reflected in all Forward Job Plans.</p> <p>Establish and implement quarterly reviews of progress towards in-year targets for consideration by Commissioners.</p> <p>Facilitate a business planning day in Autumn 2009 to review and refresh the strategic priorities and develop annual objectives for 2010/11.</p>
<p>2.2 To provide appropriate training and continuous professional development for Commissioners and staff and maintain a well-managed and motivated Secretariat.</p>	<p>By end April 2009, develop and begin to implement an appropriate training and development plan to meet the needs of Commissioners and staff.</p>	<p>By June 2009, implement an appropriate induction programme for new Commissioners and make arrangements for any specific training requirements, as necessary.</p> <p>By April 2009, identify training needs of Commissioners and staff and develop a Plan to address these during 2009/10.</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
		<p>Monitor in-year changes in training needs and adjust Plan accordingly, paying particular attention to any emerging issues in relation to equality / legislative responsibilities.</p>
<p>2.3 To ensure line managers fulfil their people responsibilities effectively.</p>	<p>Throughout 2009/10, ensure that all managers and staff effectively fulfil their responsibilities in line with NIO performance management processes.</p>	<p>Establish Forward Job Plans by 15 April 2009, then undertake in-year reviews and complete annual appraisals within agreed NIO timescales.</p> <p>Facilitate regular team meetings to review progress and provide guidance and support to staff in the delivery of their responsibilities.</p> <p>Line managers to provide support, recognition and guidance to individuals, as appropriate.</p> <p>Ensure staffing levels are maintained and any necessary succession planning is effectively managed.</p> <p>Any new staff joining the team should be provided with effective induction training and have Forward Job Plans agreed within 2 months.</p> <p>The Chair should undertake regular reviews of performance with individual Commissioners in line with agreed procedures.</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
<p>2.4 To fully comply with the requirements of the Health & Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order and other relevant employment legislation.</p>	<p>To provide a safe and healthy working environment for all staff and visitors.</p> <p>To ensure safe access and egress to and from the place of work.</p> <p>To ensure compliance with relevant employment legislation.</p>	<p>Ensure that all operational and emergency procedures are in place and effectively communicated.</p> <p>Ensure that staff are adequately trained, fire drills are practised and safety procedures are circulated to staff and publicly displayed.</p> <p>Ensure that staff are aware of all relevant employment legislation and attend appropriate training in line with NIO requirements.</p>

3. FINANCE

Objectives	Targets	Actions
3.1 To make the best possible case to secure the resources needed to enable Commissioners to achieve their 2009/10 business objectives.	Throughout 2009/10, secure the necessary resources to support delivery of the Commissioners' 2009/10 Plan.	<p>Establish resource requirements.</p> <p>Submit timely bids in appropriate NIO financial monitoring rounds in line with the Comprehensive Spending Review process.</p>
3.2 To shape, steer and challenge the deployment and management of available resources so as to secure maximum efficiency and value for money in the achievement of business objectives.	<p>Throughout 2009/10, to live within baseline allocation.</p> <p>Throughout 2009/10, report in line with monitoring timescales and participate in efficiency reviews to achieve savings where possible.</p>	<p>Monitor expenditure in-year through analysis of reports and monthly meetings.</p> <p>Monitor current and future resource requirements and provide early warning of potential problems.</p>
3.3 To effectively fulfil responsibilities to account for the expenditure of resources and performance against objectives.	Throughout 2009/10, monitor progress against achievement of objectives and report quarterly to Commissioners.	<p>Review expenditure on a monthly basis.</p> <p>Comply with all appropriate financial monitoring requests from NIO within agreed timescales.</p> <p>Provide Commissioners with a quarterly report on progress towards annual business plan.</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
	To ensure that an appropriate contract is in place to facilitate the 2009/10 Annual Audit Programme.	Consider extending the current contract for one year, as permitted, or, if required, liaise with Central Procurement Division to tender for a new contract.
4.2 To facilitate effective corporate governance.	Throughout 2009/10, establish and implement effective corporate governance arrangements.	<p>By April 2009, develop, and agree with Commissioners, a 2009/10 Risk Register.</p> <p>Review the Risk Register, in terms of completeness and the status of risks, and report to Commissioners on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Ensure that all staff are trained in, and effectively operate, all appropriate NIO financial management procedures.</p> <p>Undertake an annual review of the effectiveness of the protocols governing internal and external engagement.</p>
4.3 To evaluate the Commissioners' effectiveness and learn from other relevant organisations.	During 2009/10, seek to ensure that key policies, processes and procedures are sufficiently robust and fit for purpose.	<p>Maintain regular engagement and exchanges with GB Commissioners to continue to learn from shared experiences and best practice.</p> <p>Consider the need to consult key stakeholders regarding the Commissioners' effectiveness and to better understand their perceptions and expectations [following stakeholder analysis at 4.4]</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
		Ensure that all existing policies, processes and procedures are properly documented.
4.4 To facilitate effective communication with key stakeholders.	<p>To ensure effective lines of communication with key stakeholders are established and maximised throughout 2009/10.</p> <p>Throughout 2009/10, ensure that Commissioners effectively fulfil their obligations in relation to a Publication Scheme.</p>	<p>By 30 June 2009, undertake a stakeholder analysis exercise to inform potential consultation during 2009/10.</p> <p>Implement the agreed annual schedule of meetings with PSG, the PSG Sub-group, Permanent Secretaries (via Links meetings), CPG and GB and ROI Commissioners.</p> <p>Maintain a professional web presence, regularly reviewing and updating content to ensure relevance, appropriateness and ease of access.</p> <p>Engage with other relevant key stakeholders as and when the need / opportunity arises including: the NI Executive; MLAs; trade union representatives; NIO; other regulatory and public bodies (for example, the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA), the ECNI, the Human Rights Commission, the NI Consumer Council); the media and the public.</p> <p>Undertake an annual review of the Commissioners' Publication Scheme.</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
<p>4.5 To continually seek to improve internal electronic records management, particularly with a view to responding to requests for information.</p>	<p>To continue to develop branch information processes to make best use of OASIS.</p> <p>To deal effectively with any Freedom of Information requests within agreed NIO timescales.</p> <p>To comply fully with NIO data handling requirements.</p>	<p>Proactively keep up-to-date with developments in relation to the Oasis filing system and effectively manage and maintain the system.</p> <p>Establish and ensure staff are effectively trained in the management of FOI requests.</p> <p>Maintain efficient monitoring and information retrieval arrangements.</p> <p>Ensure appropriate use of protective markings on all data (both electronic and hardcopy) and ensure it is stored and transmitted securely in line with the relevant classification.</p> <p>Maintain a high level of awareness among both Commissioners and staff of the importance of this issue and, as required, provide NIO encrypted laptops and confidential storage facilities.</p>
<p>4.6 Review files in line with NIO requirements</p>	<p>To ensure all paper and electronic files are updated and disposed of as necessary</p>	<p>Periodically review / dispose of files in line with NIO guidelines</p>

OFFICE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS – SECRETARIAT SUPPORT

It is envisaged that the Secretariat support available to Commissioners during 2009/10 will be as follows:

Rosemary Crawford (Mrs)
Grade 5 (Part-time)

Joanne Dowling (Mrs)
Grade A (Part-time)

Iris Lovell (Mrs)
B1

Declan Leonard
B2

Maureen Tipping (Mrs)
Grade C (Part-time)

Mae Hamilton (Mrs)
D1 (Part-time)

BUDGET ALLOCATION: 2008/09 – to be updated following allocation from NIO

ITEM	ALLOCATION
Commissioners' Fees	£60k
Staff	£225k
Training	£10k
Accommodation & Overheads	£107k
Capital	£8k
TOTAL	£410k