

# **CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: 2008 – 2011 & BUSINESS PLAN: 2008/09**

*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 2008/09 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 both 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 in the Department of Finance & Personnel (DFP), have a shared interest in protecting the Merit Principle, upholding 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.

At the time of preparing this Plan, the Commissioners remain a reserved matter and, as such, do not fall within the remit of the local devolved administration. Commissioners recognise, however, that the political and administrative landscape within Northern Ireland has been changing for the better and that this might ultimately result in their responsibilities transferring to within the Northern Ireland system at some point in the future. In such a scenario, Commissioners will work closely with other relevant stakeholders, including the NI Executive, the Northern Ireland Office and the NICS, to ensure that the independence of the Commissioners' role is firmly protected in any new arrangements.

## **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
- upholding 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 CBE (Chairperson)  
Brian Carlin OBE  
Dame Joan Harbison  
Alan Henry  
Ruth Laird  
Alan Lennon OBE

## **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**

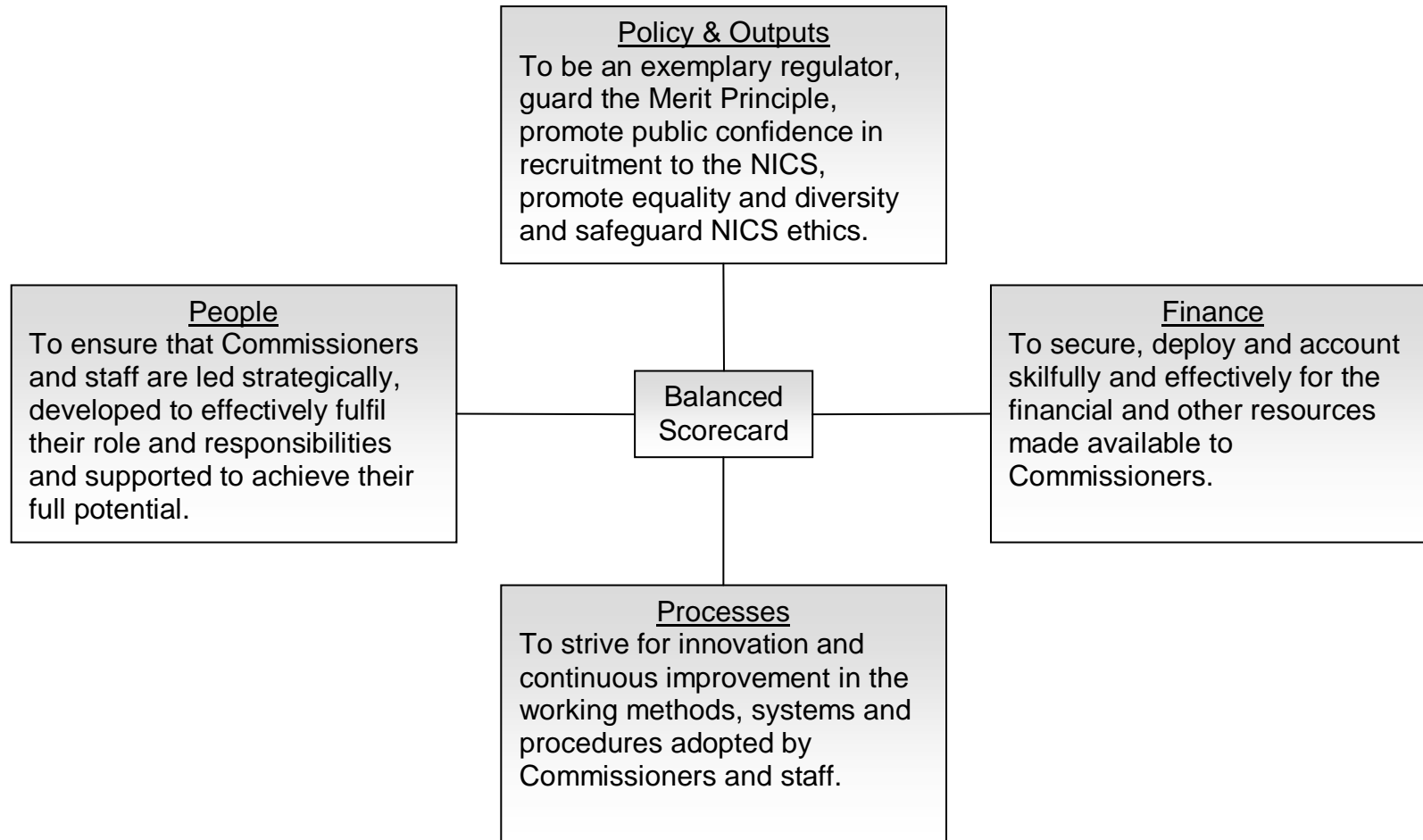
Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

### **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: 2008/09**

1. POLICY & OUTPUTS	2. PEOPLE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To be an exemplary regulator.</li> <li>2. To guard the Merit Principle and promote public confidence in recruitment to the NICS.</li> <li>3. To promote equality, diversity and good relations in line with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.</li> <li>4. To uphold the NICS Code of Ethics.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To provide effective strategic leadership and direction.</li> <li>2. To provide appropriate training and continuous professional development for Commissioners and staff and maintain a well-managed and motivated Secretariat.</li> <li>3. To ensure line managers fulfil their people responsibilities effectively.</li> <li>4. To fully comply with the requirements of the Health &amp; Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order and other relevant employment legislation.</li> </ol>
3. FINANCE	4. PROCESSES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To make the best possible case to secure the resources needed to enable Commissioners to achieve their 2008/09 business objectives.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>3. To effectively fulfil responsibilities to account for the expenditure of resources and performance against objectives.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To provide high-quality, timely support and advice to Commissioners to enable them to deliver on their statutory responsibilities.</li> <li>2. To facilitate effective corporate governance.</li> <li>3. To benchmark key policies, processes and procedures against 'best in class organisations'.</li> <li>4. To facilitate effective communication with key stakeholders.</li> <li>5. To continually seek to improve internal electronic records management, particularly with a view to responding to requests for information.</li> </ol>

## 1. POLICY & OUTPUTS

Objectives	Targets	Actions
<p>1.1 To be an exemplary regulator.</p>	<p>During 2008/09, promote and encourage partnership working with similar bodies to share knowledge and experience and develop closer relationships with other regulators.</p> <p>During 2008/09, continue to work closely with the NICS to understand key issues and work in partnership to find and implement effective solutions.</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> <p>Examine the scope for benchmarking key aspects of the Commissioners' functions against other relevant regulatory bodies.</p> <p>Facilitate at least 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 2 formal meetings with the PSG Sub-group.</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
	<p>During 2008/09, continue to build on the relationship between Commissioners and the NI Permanent Secretaries.</p>	<p>Maintain the regular programme of Links meetings between Commissioners and NI Permanent Secretaries and follow the agreed common agenda.</p> <p>Maintain a series of relevant key messages which Commissioners should seek to promote at Links meetings.</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>1.2 To guard the Merit Principle and promote public confidence in recruitment to the NICS.</p>	<p>During 2008/09, ensure that appointments to the NICS are made in line with the Merit Principle.</p>	<p>Commissioners to chair all SCS 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>Agree and implement the 2008/09 Audit Programme to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Recruitment Code.</p> <p>Work with the NICS to ensure implementation of the recommendations contained in audit reports.</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
	<p>During 2008/09, work in partnership with the NICS and other key stakeholders to develop and implement guidance on effective short-listing and assessment methods for use in recruitment competitions.</p> <p>During 2008/09, proactively seek to raise awareness of the Commissioners' role and responsibilities.</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>Liaise with the NICS to consider what role Commissioners might formally have in relation to internal SCS competitions.</p> <p>Monitor trends in SCS appointments, including, for example, timescales and the use of internal – v external approaches.</p> <p>Facilitate a series of workshops with representatives of CPG and Capita to develop guidance which draws on the experience and best practice in other organisations.</p> <p>To work with CPG to ensure the development of appropriate guidance and training in these areas and, in particular, on the effective use of Professional Skills for Government.</p> <p>Maintain the regular programme of meetings with PSG, the PSG Sub-group, CPG and Links meetings with NI Permanent Secretaries.</p> <p>Produce and publish an Annual Report by 31 July 2008.</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
	<p>During 2008/09, examine the need to undertake a review/refresh of the 2005 Commissioners' Recruitment Code.</p>	<p>Contribute to any re-launch of the NICS Code of Ethics. Consider the need to engage direct with the NI Executive and MLAs.</p> <p>By end December 2008, to have considered the need to review/refresh the Code and, if appropriate, schedule into the 2009/10 programme of work.</p>
<p>1.3 To promote equality, diversity and good relations in line with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.</p>	<p>During 2008/09, support the NICS to ensure that equality, diversity and good relations are effectively promoted in NICS recruitment processes.</p>	<p>Through the Commissioners' Diversity Sub-group, work closely with CPG to: (a) support the development of an effective Employment Equality &amp; Diversity Plan for the NICS; and (b) better define the diversity information to be made available to panels at the outset of competitions, particularly with a view to improving the quality and reach of recruitment advertisements to under-represented groups.</p> <p>Work with the NICS to ensure implementation of the recommendations in the Attracting Candidates Audit.</p> <p>Consider NICS Article 55 Review Reports, as submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI), and work with the NICS to improve areas of under-representation, as necessary.</p> <p>Examine the scope for research into the recruitment experiences of SCS candidates with a</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
	<p>Throughout 2008/09, ensure that Commissioners effectively fulfil all their statutory equality responsibilities.</p>	<p>view to understanding their expectations and concerns and, in particular, to identifying barriers for applicants from under-represented groups.</p> <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 August 2008, submit to ECNI an Annual Report on the implementation of the Commissioners' 2007/08 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>
<p>1.4 To uphold the NICS Code of Ethics.</p>	<p>During 2008/09, ensure a considered and timely response to any requests to Commissioners to consider potential complaints under the NICS Code of Ethics.</p>	<p>Establish improved procedures for the handling of potential complaints under the Code of Ethics and, when finalised, arrange appropriate training for all Commissioners and staff.</p> <p>Ensure all potential complaints are dealt with promptly.</p> <p>Identify, and maximise, opportunities to promote awareness of the Code of Ethics, the Commissioners' role in relation to this, and encourage the NICS to promote the core values widely in recruitment literature.</p>

## 2. PEOPLE

Objectives	Targets	Actions
<p>2.1 To provide effective strategic leadership and direction.</p>	<p>By April 2008, ensure that the strategic priorities and annual objectives for 2008/09 are finalised and effectively communicated to all Commissioners, staff and other key stakeholders.</p> <p>Ensure regular and effective monitoring of progress towards agreed 2008/09 targets.</p> <p>Ensure effective and timely forward planning beyond 2008/09.</p>	<p>Publish the Business Plan on the Commissioners website no later than 1 April 2008.</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 2008 to review and refresh the strategic priorities and develop annual objectives for 2009/10.</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 2008, develop and begin to implement an appropriate training and development plan to meet the needs of Commissioners and staff.</p>	<p>Identify training needs of Commissioners and staff and develop a Plan to address these during 2008/09.</p> <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>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
<p>2.3 To ensure line managers fulfil their people responsibilities effectively.</p>	<p>Throughout 2008/09, 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 2008 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>Provide appropriate support to colleagues in the NIO to ensure effective succession planning for the appointment of 2 new Commissioners by April 2009.</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> <p>Consider, and agree with Commissioners, an appropriate mechanism to evaluate their effectiveness as a body.</p>

Objectives	Targets	Actions
<p>2.4 To fully comply with the requirements of the Health &amp; 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
<p>3.1 To make the best possible case to secure the resources needed to enable Commissioners to achieve their 2008/09 business objectives.</p>	<p>Throughout 2008/09, secure the necessary resources to support delivery of the Commissioners' 2008/09 Plan.</p>	<p>Establish resource requirements.</p> <p>Submit timely bids in appropriate NIO financial monitoring rounds in line with the Comprehensive Spending Review process.</p>
<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>	<p>Throughout 2008/09, to live within baseline allocation.</p> <p>Throughout 2008/09, 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>
<p>3.3 To effectively fulfil responsibilities to account for the expenditure of resources and performance against objectives.</p>	<p>Throughout 2008/09, monitor progress against achievement of objectives and report quarterly to Commissioners.</p>	<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
4.2 To facilitate effective corporate governance.	Throughout 2008/09, establish and implement effective corporate governance arrangements.	<p>By April 2008, develop, and agree with Commissioners, a 2008/09 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>Review effectiveness of protocols for internal and external engagement at alternate business meetings.</p>
4.3 To benchmark key policies, processes, procedures and performance against 'best in class organisations'.	During 2008/09, seek to ensure that key policies, processes and procedures are sufficiently robust and fit for purpose.	<p>Ensure that all existing policies, processes and procedures are properly documented.</p> <p>Select key policies, processes, procedures and performance indicators and, in consultation with Commissioners, identify appropriate organisations against which to benchmark.</p> <p>Arrange benchmarking exercise and report findings to Commissioners.</p>
4.4 To facilitate effective communication with key stakeholders.	To ensure effective lines of communication with key stakeholders are established and maximised throughout 2008/09.	Implement the agreed annual schedule of meetings with PSG, the PSG Sub-group, Permanent Secretaries (via Links meetings), CPG and GB and ROI Commissioners.

Objectives	Targets	Actions
	<p>Throughout 2008/09, ensure that Commissioners effectively fulfil their obligations in relation to a Publication Scheme.</p>	<p>Seek opportunities to engage with Capita representatives so as to establish a good working relationship with key players as the new HR arrangements 'bed-in'.</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; the Public Service Commission; NIO; other public bodies (for example, the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA), the ECNI, the Human Rights Commission); the media and the public.</p> <p>Within the required timescales, undertake a review of the Commissioners' Publication Scheme following publication of relevant guidance.</p>
<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>Proactively keep up-to-date with developments in relation to the Oasis filing system and effectively manage and maintain the system.</p> <p>Maintain efficient monitoring and information retrieval arrangements.</p>

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Actions</b>
4.6 Review files in line with NIO requirements	To ensure all paper and electronic files are updated and disposed of as necessary	Periodically review / dispose of files in line with NIO guidelines

## OFFICE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS – SECRETARIAT SUPPORT

It is envisaged that the Secretariat support available to Commissioners during 2008/09 will be as follows:

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

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

**Iris Lovell (Mrs)**  
B1

**Paul Lavery**  
B2

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

**Mae Hamilton (Mrs)**  
D1 (Part-time)

**BUDGET ALLOCATION: 2008/09**

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