

**Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland  
Summary Record of Business Meeting  
10.00am, Thursday 21 September 2023  
Erskine House, Belfast**

**ATTENDEES:**

**Commissioners**

Deirdre Toner, Chairperson

Sinead Burns

Dr Lesley Carroll

**Secretariat**

Amanda Martin

Joanne Wray

Heather Caulfield

**APOLOGIES:**

None

**INTRODUCTION AND PRE-MEETING BUSINESS**

1. The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 1a. No items were raised as additional business.

**ACTION MATRIX OF APRIL BUSINESS MEETING (Paper 17/23)**

- 1b. Commissioners agreed the Summary Record and action points from the 12 June 2023 Business Meeting.

**MATTERS ARISING AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

- 1c. No conflicts of interest were declared in relation to September's business meeting agenda and papers.

**SECRETARY'S REPORT (Paper 18/23 Annex A, B & C)**

2. The Secretary presented the Secretary's Report and outlined the key outputs and activities in addition to routine and ongoing activities (key management information presented in Annexes A, B & C) since the last business meeting on 12 June 2023 that included:

- Correspondence on Ministerial Involvement in Recruitment and Selection of Permanent Secretaries and a small number of other posts, followed by the drafting, publication and dissemination of revised Commissioners' Recruitment Code v.15;
- Drafting, overseeing of re-design work and publication of Annual Report 2022-23;
- Redesign of Commissioners' logo;
- Research into redesign of website;
- Completion of the field-work for the Audit of 9 NICS Recruitment Competitions and preparation of the draft report;
- Completion of Article 6 Compliance Audits;
- Drafting and sign-off by departmental Permanent Secretaries of Data Sharing Agreement (Code of Ethics);
- Review of Conflict of Interest provisions within Article 6 Forms – it was reported that the Secretariat was awaiting confirmation that requested changes have been made to the forms and training for panel members adjusted to include reference to this;
- Engagement with People & OD/NICSHR via the Recruitment and Selection Development Group (and Sub-Groups);
- Engagement with NICSHR on proposals to bring DWP permanent jobs to Northern Ireland (Initial meeting held on 18 August 2023);
- Engagement with CPSA and PAS on 7 June 2023;
- Engagement with UK Civil Service Commission on 11 September 2023;
- Engagement with NIO;
- Consideration of correspondence on Derogation of Secondment Policy – Arrangements between DAERA and DEFRA;
- Review and redraft of Commissioners' Complaints Procedure;
- Submission of Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission for NI;

- Consultation with NISRA on Equality Statistics and NICS Equality Report, including meeting on 19 September 2023.

At the meeting, the Secretary reminded Commissioners that NISRA had  
 (i) consulted on Pay statistics;  
 (ii) consulted with Commissioners on Equality related statistics;  
 (iii) had sent a link to a consultation survey on Sickness in the NICS for Commissioners to complete if they so wished; and  
 (iv) was due to launch a consultation exercise on Recruitment statistics at the beginning of October.

NISRA had sent Commissioners the survey questions in a word document format and proposed to meet with them again at a date to be agreed in November 2023 to discuss the Equality and Recruitment statistics further. It was suggested that Commissioners, in advance of the meeting, might wish to review the Appendix C data which it requires from the NICS, to assess how it relates to/compares with the statistics as currently gathered and analysed.

**Actions:**

- 1. A further meeting be set up with Gayle Kennedy, NISRA, on either 22 or 29 November 2023;**
  - 2. Commissioners to review their Appendix C Data requirements at a Commissioners' meeting on 26 October 2023; and**
  - 3. Secretary to send out the link to Commissioners to the consultation survey on Sickness (for completion if they so wish), after the Business Meeting.**
- Consultation on NICS Recruitment Policy on Advertising Posts. Commissioners agreed to respond to this via correspondence.

At the meeting, the Secretary highlighted the information which had been provided by People & OD after the RSDG meeting on 8 September 2023.

This matter was discussed at length and Commissioners expressed concern that the proposed default position of advertising on the NICS Recruitment website was insufficient and risked failing to attract suitable applicants for positions in the NICS.

**Action: Draft a response, for Commissioners' approval and issue to People & OD in relation to the consultation on NICS Recruitment Policy on Advertising.**

- Circulation to Commissioners of feedback on Graduate Management Scheme on 7 September 2023 (*To be revisited at the RSDG Meeting in November 2023*).

**Action: Add to RSDG Agenda for November - Feedback on Graduate**

## Management Scheme

### CORPORATE MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

#### 2023/24 Budget Report

3. The Secretary referred Commissioners to the table detailed within the report that provided an overview on the current financial position.
4. The Secretary advised Commissioners that she had recently met with Clare Sloan (NIO Sponsor Deputy Director) who informed that the service costs associated with Erskine House should be communicated to the OCSC by the end of October.

#### 2023/24 Business Planning Documents

5. The Secretary updated the Commissioners on the quarterly progress of the Business Planning documents.

Commissioners noted the following:

- **Business Plan:** on track to achieve all Q2 targets and objectives in the 2023/24 Business Plan.
- **Risk Register:** Commissioners noted the Corporate Risk Register.

Commissioners discussed their statutory duty to uphold the Principle of Merit and one method in which they chose to do so, by chairing SCS competitions, and the risks associated with this. It was agreed to update CR3 of the Risk Register to reflect the risks associated with chairing fewer competitions in terms of their ability to ensure the Merit Principle is upheld and accordingly include pro-active mitigation measures.

#### **Actions:**

1. **Update CR3 of the Risk Register to take account of changing circumstances associated with recruitment, as above;**
2. **Arrange meeting with DoF Permanent Secretary.**

- **Learning and Development Plan:** All Q2 targets and objectives were on track to be achieved with the majority of training sessions being delivered online.

Commissioners suggested that the recently agreed Research, Learning and Development Plan should include:

- a. further discussions with the UK Civil Service Commission on the use of Success Profiles, Values Based Recruitment and related issues; and
- b. research into how different sectors approach recruitment and selection.

**Actions:**

- 1. Arrange virtual meeting with UK Civil Service Commission.**
- 2. Research how different employers approach recruitment in different arenas and other sectors.**

**Register of Recommendations from Reports including NIAO Report on Capacity and Capability in the NICS and PAC Report**

6. The Register was updated to take account of recent actions and Commissioners were content to note the changes.

**Action: Consider, in due course, (subject to updates being provided at the next meeting of the RSDG) writing to People & OD seeking an update on benchmarking completed and lessons learned.**

**Staffing – Update**

7. The Secretary advised the existing staff complement sat at 3.2 FTE.
8. Commissioners were advised that the secondment of the current Secretary has been extended to 31 March 2024. The Secretary will then return to her substantive employer. It was envisaged that a recruitment competition to fill the post would commence in November. The NIO will be in touch with the Chairperson in the near future to discuss this.

**NIO Engagement**

9. The Secretary advised that, as discussed during her meeting with the NIO, a meeting will be arranged between Commissioners and the new NIO Permanent Secretary, Julie Harrison. It is anticipated that this will take place later in the autumn.

**Action: Arrange Meeting with NIO Permanent Secretary later in the Autumn.**

## **2022/23 Annual Report**

10. A hard copy of the Annual Report was issued to His Majesty the King on 14 September 2023 and a link to the document on Commissioners' website was subsequently circulated to relevant stakeholders.

## **REVIEW OF RECRUITMENT CODE – MINISTERIAL INVOLVEMENT**

11. The Secretary referenced the correspondence between Commissioners and the Director of People & OD which resulted in Commissioners publishing an amendment to their Recruitment Code (v.15) on 24 August 2023.

**Action: Subject to legal opinion, Commissioners to write to the Director of People & OD requesting that the position on ministerial involvement is reflected in the NICS Policy and Procedures Manual.**

## **RECRUITMENT & SELECTION DEVELOPMENT GROUP (RSDG)**

13. Commissioners were reminded of the matters discussed at the meetings of the RSDG held on 6 June and 8 September 2023.
14. In relation to the "Use of Merit Lists", Commissioners confirmed that they were content to note the letter received from People and OD dated 5 September 2023 on this matter.
15. The sub-group set up to review policy on Reasonable Adjustments was due to meet next on 22 September 2023. Lesley Carroll provided Commissioners with an update on progress to date and on a meeting held in response to specific concerns she had raised. She advised that the NICS would initially be focusing on reasonable adjustments in the workplace with an emphasis on the importance of training for both staff and managers on how to manage reasonable adjustments.
15. Commissioners provided their availability for the 2024 RSDG meetings.

**Action: Dates to be confirmed with People and OD and NICSHR.**

## **EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT – LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **Meeting with Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA) and Public Appointments Service (PAS) (Republic of Ireland)**

16. Commissioners noted the summary of this meeting contained in the Secretary's Report.

## **Meeting with UK Civil Service Commission**

17. Commissioners noted the summary of this meeting contained in the Secretary's Report.
18. Commissioners agreed a draft letter of thanks to Baroness Stuart which included a reciprocal invitation and further information on the Article 6 process which had been requested at the meeting.

**Action: Letter of thanks to be sent to Baroness Stuart.**

## **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

### **New Chief Executive – Equality Commission for NI**

19. Commissioners noted that Amanda Logan had been appointed as Chief Executive of the Equality Commission for NI on 1 August 2023, replacing Evelyn Collins.
20. Commissioners were keen to meet with the new Chief Executive along with Geraldine McGahey (Chief Commissioner) who they had previously met with in October 2022.
21. Potential items for discussion could include the review of the NISRA Equality Statistics and Agency Workers.

**Action: Meeting to be organised with the Chief Executive and Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission.**

## **CASEWORK UPDATE**

### **Appointments by Way of Exception**

25. Commissioners noted that there were two appointments made by way of exception during the reporting period.

### **Code of Ethics**

26. The Secretary advised that two Code of Ethics concerns had been received during the reporting period.
27. Both concerns fell outside the scope of Commissioners' statutory remit. The complainants had been duly notified and the next steps outlined to them.

## **Complaints and Queries**

28. Commissioners noted the update on complaints/queries.

## **Requests for Information**

29. Commissioners noted that one Freedom of Information request had been received and responded to within the statutory timeframe.

## **RECENT AND FUTURE MEETINGS**

30. Commissioners noted the table of recent and future meetings and provided details of their availability in the coming weeks to facilitate additional meetings.

## **AUDIT REPORT (Paper 19/23 and Annex A)**

31. The Chairperson invited the DP Audit to present the Audit Report.

32. The DP Audit referred to the Audit Report and Commissioners noted the current position in relation to the Audit plan of 2023 - 24 and that papers will be issued shortly for their audit meeting. It was agreed that recommendations could be prioritised without a formal priority rating system.

## **RECENT AND FUTURE MEETINGS**

30. Commissioners noted the table of recent and future meetings and provided details of their availability in the coming weeks to facilitate additional meetings.

## **NICS DRAFT POLICIES**

34. The Secretary referred Commissioners to two draft policies that had recently been provided by People and OD in confidence - the Internal Staff Mobility Policy and the Ring fencing Scheme. Commissioners asked for more time to fully consider the policies in detail and requested the item be included on the agenda for the next RSDG meeting in November. It was agreed that Commissioners would meet to discuss this beforehand and provide a response to People and OD in advance of this meeting.

**Action: Policies to be re-sent to Commissioners for review and to enable a response to be drafted in advance of the next RSDG meeting.**



## **REVIEW OF OCSC COMPLAINTS POLICY**

35. Commissioners discussed a draft policy which was reviewed in line with NIPSO's recently published Model Complaints Handling Procedure. The Secretary had discussed with the NIO DD Sponsor options for escalating complaints relating to the Secretary and the Chairperson / Commissioners.
36. Commissioners discussed the draft and agreed on the next steps as reflected in the Actions below.

### **Actions:**

- 1. Draft Policy (Section 7) to be amended as suggested by Commissioners;**
- 2. Compare with other ALB's Complaints policy and ascertain escalation Arrangements;**
- 3. Policy to be sent to NIO for agreement;**
- 4. Policy to be sent to NIPSO for review.**

## **HOUSEKEEPING**

38. Commissioners were reminded that mileage should be calculated via the AA route planner and car parking and/or public transport receipts forwarded to the Secretariat for record keeping purposes.
39. The Secretariat requested that all fees and expenses were submitted in a timely manner to ensure prompt payment.

## **REGISTER OF INTERESTS (Paper 23/23)**

40. Commissioners were reminded to provide any updates to the Register of Interests in writing/by email to the Secretariat.

**Action: Issue Register of Interests to Commissioners for update**

**Office of the Civil Service Commissioners  
for Northern Ireland**