

# civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland

# Summary Record of Business Meeting

# 11am, Thursday 19 June 2025

# Erskine House, Belfast

## **Attendees:**

Commissioners – Deirdre Toner, Chairperson, Sinead Burns and Dr Lesley Carroll

Secretariat – Amanda Martin, Heather Caulfield, Dawn Molloy and Clair Hedley

Apologies: None

### **Introduction and Pre-Meeting Business**

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Any other business

* There were no items of additional business.

### **Action Matrix from Business Meeting of 9 April 2025 (Paper 5/25)**

* Commissioners noted the updates on the action points from the Business Meeting on 9 April 2025.

### **Matters arising and Conflicts of Interest**

* No conflicts of interest were declared in relation to the business meeting agenda and papers and there were no matters arising.

# Secretary’s Report (Paper 6/25)

The Secretary’s Report (copy previously circulated) was tabled and the following areas were highlighted:

## **Engagement with NIO, Sponsor Body**

* The closing date for the recruitment campaign for a fourth Commissioner was 23 May 2025. Interviews were scheduled for 20 and 23 June.It was agreed that an induction package would be prepared for the new Commissioner.
* The Secretary met with the NIO Sponsors to discuss outcomes of the internal workshop on the Commissioners’ role and remit. A follow up meeting was due to take place between the Chairperson and the NIO Permanent Under Secretary on 16 June 2025 however this has been postponed due to unforeseen circumstances and is to be rearranged.

## **External Engagement Activity**

### **UK Civil Service Commission**

* Commissioners agreed the draft programme for the visit to London to meet the UK First Commissioner and colleagues on 15 -16 September 2025. It includes a meeting with the Recruitment Lead for the Government People Group and colleagues on the SCS Executive Search function and playbook. **Action: Secretariat to proceed to book travel and accommodation**

### **HOCS and Permanent Secretaries**

* Meetings with the DfE and DE Permanent Secretaries were held (9 and 16 April 2025 respectively), concluding the series of meetings to discuss Commissioners’ draft Strategic Plan in more depth and to seek views on how Commissioners can best deliver on Priorities 2 and 3.

A plenary meeting has been arranged for the afternoon of 19 June 2025 with HOCS, People & OD and NICSHR. Commissioners considered areas for discussion.

### **Recruitment and Selection Development Group (RSDG)**

* The meeting of the RSDG, scheduled to take place on 8 May 2025, was postponed. As it has not been possible to find a suitable alternative date, the next meeting will be held, as scheduled, on 11 September 2025 in Bruce Street.

### **NICS Policy Task and Finish Groups**

* On 12 May a meeting was held between Commissioners and senior officers from DfC, DfI and NICSHR when it was agreed that Commissioners have a critical role to play in the streamlining of recruitment and selection in the NICS. This project is currently in the exploratory stage and it was agreed that the NICS would touch base with the Commissioners at regular intervals for their input into proposals.

### **NICSHR and People & OD**

During this reporting period, Commissioners engaged, via correspondence and face to face, with NICSHR and P&OD on the following matters, as well as on other casework:-

* Amendments to Commissioners’ Recruitment Code
* Five Year Civil Service People Strategy
* NIAO Review of Recommendations on Capacity and Capability in the NICS (Meeting with People and OD officials on 29 April 2025).

### **Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)**

* Commissioners met with Northern Ireland Audit Office officials on 8 May 2025 to review progress on recommendations made in the Report on Capacity and Capability in the NICS, published in November 2020. As requested at the meeting, Commissioners provided a written response to the NIAO on PAC Recommendation 11 and NIAO Recommendations 1 and 3. The response was issued to the NIAO on 30 May 2025..

### **Crown Solicitor’s Office**

* Legal advice was sought from CSO on whether Commissioners’ regulatory functions could be extended by agreement without legislative amendment. Any enhancement of Commissioners’ regulatory functions, even if by agreement, would be ultra vires and require legislative amendment.

## **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

### **Diversity Mark**

* The Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan have been drawn up and the Commissioners’ views are sought on this prior to them being issued for consideration of the OCSC’s accreditation review in October 2025.
* The Secretariat attended online events on “Creating Unity – Practical Steps to Supporting Trans Inclusion in the Workplace” and “Inclusive Insights/Intersectionality in Action: Addressing Challenges and Barriers” on 29 April and 20 May 2025 respectively. Both were hosted by Diversity Mark/Women in Business.

**Action: Secretary to put Diversity and Inclusion Strategy on the Diversity Portal, subject to making suggested changes to terminology.**

### **Equality**

* The Draft Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Annual Progress Report was approved by Commissioners.

**Action: Secretariat to issue the Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission for NI (deadline for submission is 31 August 2025).**

### **Future Engagement**

* Commissioners have agreed that they would like to meet with the Director of the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC) as part of their continued research on recruitment and selection practices.

**Action: Secretariat to arrange a meeting between Commissioners and the Director of LGSC.**

## **Corporate Management and Governance**

### **Finance**

Commissioners noted the final budget position for year end 2024/25, acknowledging that the Office had remained within budget. The position as at Q1 or 2025/26 was presented and Commissioners were advised that, while the letter of delegation has not yet been received, there is unlikely to be a change in the budget for 2025-26. Further, the Secretariat has been advised that inflationary rises and any additional costs will need to be absorbed. The number of requests for Commissioners to chair SCS competitions increased significantly in 2024.

### **Business Planning Documents**

## A full day strategic workshop, with Commissioners and Secretariat was held in Erskine House on 30 April 2025, facilitated by Innovation & Consultancy Services (ICS).

* The purpose of the Workshop was to explore how Commissioners’ role and remit could be delivered differently or enhanced to better support the NICS and the transformation of recruitment and selection in the NICS.
* The final report has now been received and the Commissioners have agreed that a separate meeting to discuss the identified outcomes of the workshop and the next steps would be beneficial.

### **Action: Meeting to be arranged.**

### **Commissioners’ Strategic Plan 2025-2029**

* Consultation on the Commissioners’ draft Strategic Plan 2025-2029 has now ended with the final meetings with Permanent Secretaries in April.
* Commissioners were content with the Strategic Plan 2025-2029 and agreed that it can be published on the OCSC website.

**Action: Strategic Plan 2025-2029 to be published on the website.**

## **Commissioners’ Business Plan 2025-26**

* A draft Business Plan was provided to Commissioners which incorporated proposals for improved communications under the new priority headings. Commissioners adopted the Plan.

**Action: Commissioners’ Business Plan 2025-26 to be published.**

### **Learning and Development Plan 2025-26 – Q1**

* Commissioners were advised that the Learning and Development Plan that was agreed at the Commissioners’ January meeting is currently on track for all targets.

### **Corporate Risk Register**

* The Secretariat has further reviewed the Corporate Risk Register on 9 June 2025 and the format has subsequently been amended to for ease of comprehension. Changes to mitigation measures were agreed by the Commissioners. There is no change to the risk status of any of the Corporate Risks.

**Action: Tracked changes to be accepted and updated.**

### **Staffing**

* Commissioners were advised that a member of the Secretariat has been offered a new role on promotion with a release date of 4 July 2025. The vacancy will be advertised from Monday 23 June for a period of 3 weeks.

### **Recruitment Code**

* Following stakeholder consultation, Recruitment Code v.16 was published on Commissioners’ website on 30 May 2025 in an accessible format. The Secretariat has notified key stakeholders in the NICS of the publication and asked them to ensure that their staff are advised of/signposted to the most recent version.

### **Exceptional Appointment Requests (EAR)**

* Commissioners agreed that Exceptional Appointment Requests should be considered and approved by the Commissioner who chaired the panel for the respective competition, unless they or the Secretariat deem it appropriate to seek the views of all Commissioners.

### **Future Engagement**

* Commissioners provided their availability to enable meetings to be scheduled with the New Zealand Commissioner; LGSC; SIB; and the CPSA/PAS.

**Action: Secretariat to arrange Meetings**

## **Audit Report (Paper 7/25)**

* The Audit Report (copy previously circulated) was tabled and the Deputy Secretary drew attention to the following:
* Commissioners’ feedback to the NICS from their observation of key stages of competitions below SCS, which will be included in Commissioners’ Annual Report;
* The Management Response to Commissioners’ recommendations from the Review of Secondments has not yet been received but is expected soon;
* Initial findings from the Review of the online interview platform (AO competitions), the remaining fieldwork due to be completed during the summer months; and
* Agency workers now account for 17% of the available NICS workforce. Commissioners discussed that they had written to the DoF Permanent Secretary regarding the level of Agency workers and the response they had received. They noted that if levels continue to rise they may need to raise this matter again.
* A date was also agreed for Commissioners’ Audit meeting and potential dates for agreement with the NICS for the Audit and Engagement meeting.

## **Annual Report 2024/25 (Paper 8/25)**

* The initial draft of the Annual Report 2024/25 was shared with Commissioners. Commissioners agreed to review the content and forward any comments to the Secretariat, after which draft V2 will be circulated. It is hoped that the publication target of 31 August 2025 will be met.

**Action: Commissioners to review and provide comments on the draft Annual Report**.

### **Housekeeping**

* Commissioners were reminded that security passes must be swiped at least once a month to keep the pass active. They were also reminded that while in Erskine House they should wear their passes at all times however when leaving the building they should remove them.
* Commissioners’ Register of Interests was circulated on 2 June 2025 and Commissioners were asked to update any relevant information.

**Action: Update Register of Interest on Website**

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