

**Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland
Summary Record of Business Meeting
10am, Tuesday 14 April 2026
Via Teams**

ATTENDEES:

Commissioners: Deirdre Toner, Chairperson, Dr Lesley Carroll, David MacAnulty

Secretariat: Amanda Martin, Catherine Kirton, Dawn Molloy, Derek Keilty

Apologies: Don Leeson

Introduction and Pre-Meeting Business

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Removal of Agenda Item

- Deirdre removed one item from the agenda which was Annex D – Link Commissioners’ Draft Terms of Reference

Any other business

- There were no items of additional business.

Action Matrix from Business Meeting of 22 January 2026 and 3 March 2026 (Paper 1/26)

- Commissioners noted the update on the action points from the Business Meetings of 22 January 2026 and 3 March 2026.

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 2/26)

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

Engagement with the Head of the Civil Service (HOCS) and Permanent Secretaries

- Following the recent Permanent Secretary competition, it was agreed that Commissioners will meet with the new Permanent Secretaries when they have been appointed. In time, Commissioners will also meet with already established Permanent Secretaries.

Business Continuity Plan

- Commissioners were informed that the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) has been given a copy of the Office of the Civil Service Commissioners (OCSC) Business Continuity Plan. Hard copies will be disseminated to Commissioners and Secretariat at the next 'in person' meeting.

Recruitment and Selection Development Group (RSDG)

- Commissioners were informed that the OCSC is still waiting on the minutes of the RSDG meeting held on the 12 February 2026. The next meeting will be held on Thursday 21 May 2026 and will be administrated by the OCSC Secretariat.

Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources (NICSHR) and People & Organisational Development (P&OD)

- Proposals for the Administrative Officer (Belfast) competition to be rolled out. A response was received on the 24 March 2026 and then a draft letter of response was sent to Commissioners on 9 April 2026. A recruitment event will be held on the 11 May 2026.
- The Secretary recently met online with the Director of Resourcing (NICSHR) to talk about the new Integr8 system. Commissioners accepted an invitation to test the digital Candidate Information Assessment Booklet (CIAB) on the new Integr8 system. A date for testing is to be confirmed.

Audit

- The Report on Leadership and Resourcing in the NICS was published by the NI Audit Office on 26 January 2026. The Report acknowledged that Recommendation 3.4 of its earlier Report on Capacity and Capability in the NICS had been implemented.
- The Deputy Secretary provided an update on audit work, noting that management responses are still awaited for the 2025/2026 audits, regarding the pre-recorded interview process, and the six competitions below Senior Civil Service (SCS) level.
- NICSHR has been requested to provide a list of closed competitions from which the selection for the 2026/2027 audits will be made. Fieldwork is expected to be completed over the summer. Additionally, there will be an audit of merit lists in 2026/2027. The Deputy Secretary will consult with Commissioners on any issues that arise.
- Audit recommendations on the NICS secondment policy from 2024/2025 remain outstanding and will continue to be followed up.

Diversity Mark

- An application for Diversity Mark reaccreditation was submitted to Diversity Mark on 31 January 2026. On 13 March 2026, the OCSC received correspondence to state that an independent panel had assessed its application and was now seeking re-submission by 30 April 2026.
- A member of the Secretariat and a Commissioner will attend a Diversity Mark event entitled “Becoming a Talent Magnet: Rethinking Hiring to Attract Diverse Talent” which is being held on Tuesday, 21 April 2026.

Equality

- Commissioners’ annual meeting with the Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive of the Equality Commission for NI was held on 4 March 2026 at Equality House.

Diversity & Inclusion

- Commissioners' annual Diversity & Inclusion meeting with People & OD was held on 4 February 2026.

Future Engagement

- Following on from Focus Group meetings held in February 2026 during which it was suggested that Commissioners might wish to speak to the NICS Corporate Services Directorate Group (cross-departmental), Commissioners agreed to engage with this group, to raise awareness of Commissioners' role and the requirements of the Recruitment Code in relation to appointments made by Exceptions to Merit .

Policy Development

Data Protection Policy

- The OCSC last reviewed its Data Protection Policy in 2022 and has since prepared a revised draft policy for Commissioners' consideration. A complaints procedure has to be in place by June 2026 for data protection related complaints. The OCSC's Data Sharing Agreements are also due for review. It is intended that they are reviewed and issued to partners in the Agreements for sign off by 30 June 2026

CORPORATE MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

Finance – 2025/2026

- Commissioners were advised that the OCSC had been asked to identify a 5% Departmental Unallocated Provision in next year's budget. The Secretary responded with a report explaining why there was no scope for this currently.

BUSINESS PLANNING

Internal Workshop (Commissioners' Role and Remit) Facilitated by Innovation & Consultancy Services (ICS) – Action Plan and Update

- Commissioners met on 24 July 2025 and considered the outputs of the above Workshop and next steps. They agreed an Action Plan which remains live. Some of the actions have since transferred into the Communications Strategy and Action Plan and the Business Plan for 2026/27.

- Commissioners will re-visit the idea of having Link Commissioners at the Business Planning Meeting in November 2026.

Webinar – Next Steps

- Commissioners noted that the outcome from Focus Group meetings convened in February have been incorporated into a Report (previously circulated). It was decided a workshop should be arranged to agree the design and delivery of the Webinar.

Commissioners' Business Plan 2025-26 – Q4

- The Business Plan for 2025-2026 was discussed. Most objectives have been completed with the exception of the Webinar which will most likely be held in September 2026.

Commissioners' Draft Business Plan 2026-27

- A draft outcomes-based Business Plan for 2026-2027 was tabled at Commissioners' Business Meeting on 22 January 2026 and later considered at an Ad Hoc Business Meeting on 3 March 2026. It was decided at that stage to include the objectives for 2026-2027 which were included in the Diversity Mark re-accreditation application. Since this was not approved by Diversity Mark and since the OCSC has been asked to re-submit its application, these have not yet been included.
- It is suggested that in pursuance of Business Plan and Learning and Development objectives, Commissioners consider meeting with Employers for Disability; and FDA representatives (Union covering SCS)
- LinkedIn was discussed as a social media presence that might be more suitable than Twitter/X. The NIO are providing training on LinkedIn and it was proposed that the secretariat could avail of this and come back with recommendations.

Draft Communications Strategy and Action Plan 2026-27

- The draft Communications Strategy and Action Plan, approved at the Business Meeting on 22 January 2026, was discussed.

Learning and Development Plan 2025-2026 – Q4

- Commissioners were invited to note the Learning and Development Plan 2025 - 2026 at end of year.

Learning and Development Plan 2026-2027

- The Learning and Development Plan 2026-2027, which was agreed at the Business Meeting on 22 January 2026 was discussed. Progress will be reported on at the end of Q1 (2026-2027).

Corporate Risk Register

- There are currently nine corporate risks listed in the Corporate Risk Register, along with associated mitigation measures. The Secretariat reviewed the Risk Register on 25 March 2026, and changes are tracked for Commissioners' consideration and approval.
- Commissioners are asked to note the proposed change to the Risk Status of Corporate Risk 6 (CR6) – "If the make-up of the OCSC workforce continues to be primarily by way of secondment there will be continual staff turnover and a risk to corporate memory resulting in ineffective or inadequate support to Commissioners, which in turn will impact on their ability to discharge their statutory duties". This takes into account the recent and future changes in staffing.

Equality Action Plan & Disability Action Plan 2025 - 2026

- It was reported that the Secretariat has reviewed the Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan at year end. Both plans contain objectives relating to annual training in equality and diversity and disability awareness. Given the changes to Commissioners and Secretariat staffing, Secretariat has contacted the Equality Commission to arrange a training session on the equality and disability duties. Whilst the level of knowledge amongst Commissioners and Secretariat will vary, it is envisaged that this session will be an informal recap of the statutory duties and will include discussion on case law and emerging issues. All other objectives are on track.

Equality Action Plan & Disability Action Plan 2026-2027

- Commissioners were invited to consider the Equality Action Plan & Disability Action Plan for 2026 - 2027 and asked to approve the Action Plan for the year ahead or indicate any additional actions for inclusion.

Commissioner Update

- Sinead Burns completed her 10-year term as a Commissioner on 7 March 2026.

Staffing – Update

- A new Deputy Secretary took up post on 19 January 2026.
- The OCSC currently has a full staffing complement of four staff members (3.4 FTE). However, the Secretary’s post will become vacant later in 2026.

2025/26 Annual Report

- A timeline for the preparation and publication of the 2025/2026 Annual Report was approved in January 2026.
- Commissioners were asked to provide profile details and their signature for inclusion in the report.
- Commissioners were asked to consider, comment on and select a cover option from the designs in Annex N or suggest an alternative design.
- The Secretary tabled draft text for the “Exceptions to Merit” section of the Annual report to enable Commissioners to consider the approach they would like to take in relation to their obligation to report on appointments which did not meet the requirements of their Recruitment Code. Commissioners’ views were sought on the tone and content of the text.
- The Secretariat will provide Commissioners with an outline of the Annual Report (developing the identified key themes) by 1 May 2026.
- At the time of writing, the Secretariat expects to receive Appendix C data from the NICS by the end of April 2026 which will inform much of the content of Commissioners’ Annual Report.
- Commissioners were reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure that the Register, which is published on their website, is kept up to date. Accordingly, Commissioners were invited to notify the Secretariat of any changes required to the Register since it was last updated in January 2026.

Report on Agency Workers in the NICS

- Commissioners were reminded of the Report on Agency Workers in the NICS.

FUTURE MEETINGS

- Commissioners were invited to note the following meetings which will be scheduled for upcoming months: to include, Equality training with the Equality Commission, and meetings with new Permanent Secretaries.

The meeting ended at 12.50