

**CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
SUMMARY RECORD OF BUSINESS MEETING
23 JUNE 2020 AT 10.00am
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

ATTENDEES

Commissioners

Deirdre Toner, Chairperson

Sinead Burns

Jim Scholes

Secretariat

Sarah Teer, Secretary

Amanda Martin

Heather Caulfield

John Murphy

WELCOME

1. The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting which had been convened using the Webex communications platform due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

SUMMARY RECORD AND ACTION MATRIX OF 7 APRIL 2020 BUSINESS MEETING

2. Commissioners agreed the Summary Record and action points of the 7 April 2020 meeting. Commissioners also noted that the Summary Record would be published on the Commissioners' website in due course.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND MATTERS ARISING

3. No conflicts of interest were declared in relation to the June business meeting agenda and papers. Commissioners agreed to consider additional items under AOB at the end of the meeting.

SECRETARY'S REPORT (PAPER 9/20)

4. The Secretary presented the Secretary's Report and outlined the key outputs and activities since the last Business Meeting. Commissioners noted the following key activities which were in addition to routine activities:-
 - The OCSC Budget for 2020/21 has now been approved by NIO;
 - Exception to Merit Direction relating to Covid-19 was approved by the Secretary of State on 26 May;
 - Introduction of changes to Audit activities, to include audit of recruitment at all grades of NICS and across all Departments;
 - Engagement with NICSHR on revisions to the Article 6 authorisation procedures and templates;
 - Engagement with NICSHR on the use of Casual Employment;

- Finalisation of the Data Sharing Agreement between OCSC and NICSHR;
 - Equality and Disability Awareness training session held with Equality Commission and Disability Action representatives on 20 April;
 - Further research for HOCS competition;
 - Review of the NIO/OCSC Framework Document – awaiting NIO response to suggested amendments passed on for consideration in February/March 2020;
 - Discussions around and preparation for future Review of Recruitment Code; and
 - All Secretariat staff and Commissioners completed their annual performance appraisals during this reporting period.
5. In relation to the Budget, Commissioners were informed that the budget build now approved by NIO for 2020/21 was £333,753.
 6. The Secretary informed Commissioners that Secretariat would issue the first quarter business planning documents to them for approval at the end of June.

ACTION: Secretariat to issue business planning documents to Commissioners at the end of June.

7. Commissioners accepted the report and recommendations on the Internal Audit of the 4 stage authorisation process.
8. Commissioners noted that the NICS Code of Ethics was still in draft form and there had been no further correspondence on this issue.
9. Commissioners noted the draft Annual Report 2019/20 and expressed their appreciation of the Secretariat's work in developing the Report to date. The Secretary commented that work would continue to format and finalise the Report.
10. The Secretary provided Commissioners with an update on casework carried out during the quarter, and reported on developments to the 2020/21 Audit Plan.

EQUALITY COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20 (PAPER 10/20)

11. The Deputy Secretary introduced the draft 2019/20 Annual Progress Report: Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1995 to Commissioners, who approved its submission to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

ACTION: Secretariat to submit Annual Progress Report to ECNI.

INFORMATION ASSURANCE AWARENESS (PAPER 11/20)

12. The Staff Officer introduced the Information Assurance awareness session, and highlighted the NIO guidance on remote working. He requested that Commissioners each complete the information assurance statement, electronically sign and return them to him for OCSC records.

ACTION: Commissioners to complete and sign statement.

REVIEW OF THE RECRUITMENT CODE

13. The Secretary introduced the review of the Recruitment Code, and the letter from Jill Minne on the secondment policy, which initiated protracted discussion on the business needs of the NICS, the policy around lengths of secondments, whether concurrent secondments should be permitted and the potential impact of amendments to the Code on the merit principle.

ACTIONS:

- (a) Secretariat to informally consult on potential changes to the Recruitment Code with NICSHR.**
- (b) Secretariat to await a response from NIAO on likely recommendations from the Capability and Capacity Study.**
- (c) Commissioners to reconsider the Recruitment Code and agree proposed amendments.**
- (d) Write back to Jill Minne accordingly.**

ANY OTHER BUSINESS:

UPDATE ON PROPOSED NEW ARTICLE 6 APPROVAL PROCESS

14. The Secretary updated Commissioners on the meeting held last week between Secretariat, NICSHR and HRConnect to discuss the proposed new Article 6 approval process. The new templates were welcomed, with just a few queries over some specific details. It is planned that the new process will commence from 1 September 2020, with a review to take place around January 2021. Commissioners were content that HRConnect should only inform them of any issues which may need addressed in respect of competition documentation etc, should these impact on merit.

ACTION: Secretariat to prepare Checklist for Commissioners to remind Panel members at interview of the importance of recording justifications for their scores and ensuring paperwork is correctly completed.

REVIEW OF EVIDENCE WHICH UNDERPINS THE DOF PERMANENT SECRETARY STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

15. Commissioners agreed that the draft report from the review of evidence which underpins the DoF Permanent Secretary Statement of Compliance was well written and they were content that the findings should be now be issued to NICSHR for factual accuracy check.
16. Commissioners discussed some differences between their Audit Framework and Annex 1 of the Recruitment Policy and Procedures Manual. It was agreed that in relation to equality of opportunity, Commissioners' role was to ensure that every opportunity was given to under-represented groups and that they therefore would ask for written assurance that the NICS are taking steps to address this. This would be dealt with separately, not as part of the Review.

ACTION: Commissioners to consider further what information they wish to seek from NICSHR in relation to equality of opportunity.

HOCS COMPETITION

17. Commissioners discussed the current position in relation to the competition to recruit the new Head of the Civil Service.

NORTHERN IRELAND AUDIT OFFICE REPORT

18. Commissioners enquired whether the NIAO report into capacity and capability in the NICS had been completed. The Secretary confirmed that OCSC had not received any further information from NIAO but she undertook to find out when the report is expected to be published.

ACTION: Secretariat to ask NIAO when they expect to publish report.