

**CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
DRAFT SUMMARY RECORD OF BUSINESS MEETING
15 JUNE 2021 AT 10AM
STORMONT HOUSE BUNGALOW**

ATTENDEES:

Commissioners

Deirdre Toner, Chairperson
Sinead Burns
Jim Scholes

Secretariat

Amanda Martin, Secretary
Joanne Wray, Deputy Secretary
Heather Caulfield
John Murphy

INTRODUCTION AND PRE-MEETING BUSINESS

1. The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that it was good to be able to meet in person once again.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 1a. No other business was raised.

**SUMMARY RECORD AND ACTION MATRIX OF APRIL BUSINESS MEETING
(Paper 7/21)**

- 1b. Commissioners agreed the Summary Record and action points of the 26 April 2021 Business Meeting. The Secretary confirmed that all actions in the matrix were either completed or ongoing. In relation to Action Point 6, the Secretary advised Commissioners that NICSHR are currently consulting with TUS in relation to the report on consecutive secondments, and Commissioners will receive a formal reply to their letter once that consultation has completed. On Action Point 7, Commissioners agreed to hold a separate, single-issue meeting to discuss drafting a statement to provide clarity around Commissioners' role in relation to complaints.

ACTION: Secretariat to arrange standalone meeting to discuss the draft policy and procedures on dealing with "Breach of Merit" complaints.

MATTERS ARISING AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

- 1c. No conflicts of interest were declared in relation to the June business meeting agenda and papers, nor any matters arising not already detailed on the agenda.

SECRETARY'S REPORT (Paper 8/21 and Annexes A, B, C, D, E, F & G)

2. The Secretary presented the Secretary's Report and outlined the key outputs and activities (key management information presented in Annex A) since the last business meeting, which included:

- Preparation of the first draft of the Annual Report;
- Preparation of a Conflict of Interest policy statement (Annex C);
- Preparation of a draft Complaints Handling (Breach of Merit Principle) Policy and Procedures and draft Guidance on Bringing a Complaint about a perceived Breach of the Merit Principle;
- Engagement with the GB Civil Service Commission, continuing to build professional relationships with Secretariat staff to share information, promote learning and provide a mutual benchmarking tool – the Deputy Secretary provided a report to Commissioners on key points of interest from engagement so far (Annex E);
- Completion of draft Equality Progress Report (Annex F). Commissioners approved the report and agreed for it to be returned to the NIO;
- Drafting of OCSC Retention and Disposal Schedule following advice and guidance from PRONI, and Secretariat workshop held on 27 May 2021 (Annex G). Commissioners indicated they were content;
- Review of the Recruitment Code to reflect imminent developments, including the finalisation of the NICS Secondment Policy and the publication of the revised NICS Code of Ethics;
- Enquiries made in to the provision of (a) bespoke training programmes on Code of Ethics Investigation skills and (b) ad hoc consultancy services;
- Research carried out and discussions held with Deputy Director and other Arms' Length Bodies in relation to plan for relocation from Stormont House and future office accommodation options;
- Review of Commissioners' Code of Ethics Guidance in preparation for the release of the revised NICS Code of Ethics;
- Consideration and completion of a savings and efficiency exercise at the request of the NIO;
- Engagement with NIO regarding existing procedures in place to record and manage conflicts of interest;
- Engagement with NICS HR on:
 - Secondment Policy (both extensions to secondment periods and consecutive secondments)
 - The use of agency workers and temporary employees
 - Top slicing;
- Engagement with Interim HOCS on NIAO Report on Capacity and Capability in the NICS and consideration of the report and recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee published on 20 May 2021;
- Engagement with Jill Minne and Jenny Pyper in relation to the DoF Permanent Secretary competition;
- Secretariat staff and Commissioners' annual performance appraisals.

Corporate Management and Governance

3. The Secretary updated Commissioners on the budget position for the year 2021-22 so far. She informed Commissioners that NIO Finance had engaged with OCSC over what appeared to be an overspend of c. £38k. Secretariat had identified anomalies in the figures provided by NIO, and discussions remain

ongoing, with Secretariat hoping to receive clarification from NIO Finance shortly. Commissioners asked to be kept updated on this issue.

4. The Secretary informed Commissioners that, under HM Treasury's commissioned Savings and Efficiency Review, OCSC had been asked, along with all NIO Departments and ALBs, to submit proposals for making savings of 5% of allocated budget over the next three year period. In the case of OCSC, that represents savings of £16,733 out of a budget of £334,652 (2021-22). OCSC provided a response to NIO with proposals for efficiencies, however the response warned that such cuts to an already much-diminished budget would undoubtedly negatively affect the ability of Commissioners to satisfactorily fulfil their statutory responsibilities.

Business Planning Documents

5. The Secretary reminded Commissioners that the quarterly business planning documents would be circulated to Commissioners after the meeting.

Action: Secretariat to circulate business planning documents to Commissioners.

2021-22 Business Plan

6. The Secretary confirmed to Commissioners that the 2021-22 Business Plan is now live on the CSC website.

Staffing Update

7. The Secretary confirmed that the Secretariat is currently at full staffing complement, with John Murphy's period of secondment due to end on 1 January 2022. Arrangements for a replacement will commence in Autumn 2021.
8. The Secretary advised that she has engaged with NICSHR to establish the current policy on extensions to outward secondments from the NICS, and also to seek an update on the embargo on secondments from the NICS, as both issues could have a serious impact on the filling of OCSC vacancies in the next few years. There would also be a negative impact on the knowledge and experience of the NICS within OCSC if secondees to posts can only be sourced from outside of the NICS.

2020/21 Annual Report

9. The Secretary invited comments from Commissioners on the first draft of the Annual Report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Commissioners were happy with the draft, with a few minor suggestions. The Secretary confirmed the timetable for completion of the Annual Report.

Action: Secretariat to incorporate Commissioners' suggestions to next draft of Annual Report which is due to be circulated by 22 July 2021.

Casework Update

10. The Secretary updated Commissioners on casework completed and ongoing over the last period. This included:
- four requests from NICSHR in relation to appointments or extensions under Regulation 3(a) of the Recruitment Code,
 - two ongoing pieces of casework,
 - one Freedom of Information request.

Conflicts of Interest Policy Statement

11. The Secretary advised Commissioners that at the April Business Meeting, the Secretariat had been asked to carry out some research into best practice in identifying and dealing with conflicts of interest. The Secretary presented a paper (Annex C) including research findings and a proposed Policy Statement for Commissioners' consideration and comment. After discussion, Commissioners agreed, subject to some minor changes of wording in order to provide clarity on roles and responsibilities, to adopt the conflicts of interest policy statement.

Action: Secretariat to make amendments as per Commissioners' suggestions, and arrange for publication of the policy statement on the OCSC website.

Review of the Recruitment Code

12. The Secretary informed Commissioners that a review of the Recruitment Code had been undertaken and a draft updated version was ready for Commissioners' consideration and comment, however, it was subject to NICSHR agreeing to amendments to the Secondment Policy. It was proposed that once the Secondment Policy has been agreed, Commissioners would meet to consider the draft amendments and revisions alongside proposed changes to the Audit Framework. Commissioners agreed to this proposal.

Action: Secretariat to arrange meeting for Commissioners to discuss proposed revised Recruitment Code and Audit Framework once NICS has agreed revised Secondment Policy.

Relocation/Office Accommodation – Update

13. The Secretary provided Commissioners with an update on the NIO's proposed relocation to Erskine House, Belfast. She shared photographs of the premises, having visited them the previous week. Other relocation options were discussed and Commissioners expressed the view that it was important for the OCSC to have a suitable base.

Engagement with GB Civil Service Commission

14. The Secretary invited the Deputy Secretary to update Commissioners about the ongoing engagement with the Secretariat for the GB Civil Service Commissioners over preceding months. The Deputy Secretary presented a report detailing the

learning and discussion points from the engagement to date (Annex E). Commissioners noted the report and agreed that it would be useful to arrange a face to face meeting with GB Commissioners, when current restrictions allow.

Action: Secretariat to arrange face to face meeting between Commissioners and GB Commissioners, when current Covid restrictions allow.

Draft Equality Progress Report 2020-21

15. The Secretary presented the draft Equality Progress Report for 2020-21 to Commissioners (Annex F). She reminded Commissioners that OCSC is obliged to complete this annual return to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. Commissioners noted the content of the return and approved its issuing to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Action: Secretariat to send Equality Progress Report to Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

OCSC Retention and Disposal Schedule

16. The Secretary explained the legislative requirement for OCSC to comply with the terms of the Public Records Act (NI) 1923, which includes having and implementing a retention and disposal schedule, and have it signed off by the Information Asset Manager (OCSC Secretary), NIO Permanent Secretary, PRONI and the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Communities.

17. The Secretary presented the draft retention and disposal schedule (Annex G) to Commissioners, who agreed it could be circulated to PRONI for further comment.

Action: Secretariat to submit OCSC Retention & Disposal Schedule to PRONI for further comment.

AUDIT AND REVIEW UPDATE (PAPER 9/21 and Annexes A, B & C)

18. The Secretary invited the DP Audit to provide the audit and review update. The DP Audit presented to Commissioners the draft Terms of Reference for compliance audits of the new Article 6 Approvals Process (Paper 9/21 Annex A). Commissioners agreed the draft Terms of Reference for the review of NICS processes for managing and monitoring tenure of inward secondments (Annex B). The DP Audit also shared a draft questionnaire for reviewing procedures for the management and monitoring tenure of inward secondments (Annex C).

Action: DP to issue the TOR to NICS HR for agreement.

INFORMATION ASSURANCE AWARENESS (PAPER 10/21)

19. The Secretary invited the Staff Officer to introduce the Information Assurance Awareness session, highlighting the NIO guidance on remote working in particular. He invited Commissioners to complete their individual Information Assurance Statements, sign them and return to him for record keeping.

Action: Commissioners to complete and sign Information Assurance Statements.

AOB

20. There was no other business.

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