

**CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND  
SUMMARY RECORD OF BUSINESS MEETING  
TUESDAY 14 JUNE 2022, 10.00AM  
ERSKINE HOUSE, BELFAST**

**ATTENDEES:**

**Commissioners**

Deirdre Toner, Chairperson  
Sinead Burns  
Jim Scholes

**Secretariat**

Amanda Martin Secretary  
Joanne Wray, Deputy Secretary  
Heather Caulfield  
Jayne Logan

**APOLOGIES:**

None

**INTRODUCTION AND PRE-MEETING BUSINESS**

1. The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 1a. It was agreed that the Chairperson's meeting with the First Commissioner, Civil Service Commission (UK) on 21 June 2022 be added as a business item for discussion after the agenda items had been covered.

**SUMMARY RECORD AND ACTION MATRIX OF APRIL BUSINESS MEETING  
(Paper 13/22)**

- 1b. Commissioners agreed the Summary Record and action points of the 26 April 2022 Business Meeting. The Secretary reviewed the matrix and confirmed that all actions were either completed or ongoing.

**MATTERS ARISING AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

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

**SECRETARY'S REPORT (Paper 14/22 and Annex A & B)**

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 Annex A & B) since the last business meeting on 26 April 2022 which included:

- Review of the Commissioners' Disability Action Plan 2018-2022 and public consultation on new Disability Action Plan 2022-2027. Closing date for consultation, 24 June 2022;
- Review of Commissioners' Equality Scheme and preparation of updated Equality Scheme;
- Engagement with NICSHR (Recruitment and Selection Transformation Group) to further the delivery of Recommendation 3.4 of the NIAO Report as outlined below:

*The NICS and the Civil Service Commissioners should work in partnership, taking account of how other models operate, to explore how they can best support the delivery of the transformation agenda and the changes needed to reform the recruitment and selection process throughout the NICS.*

- Engagement with NICSHR on issues relating to:
  - Mechanisms for managing high volume applications for SCS Recruitment Competitions;
  - Apprenticeship Schemes – Reference to same in Recruitment Code;
  - Proposals for a Civil Service Skills Academy and Recruitment Pilot;
  - Amendments to Regulation 3e – Government Programmes and Initiatives;
  - The use of Annex 4 of NICSHR's Recruitment Policy and Procedures Manual v.18 – Protocol for the Use of Consultants in SCS Recruitment Competitions;
  - Request to use consultants in recruitment competitions; and
  - Arrangement of Pre-CIM meeting to discuss forthcoming competition.
- Consideration of the need for consultation on changes to the Recruitment Code;
- Arrangements to meet with new First Commissioner, UK Civil Service Commission in London on 21 June 2022;
- Introductory Meeting with Neil Gibson, recently appointed Permanent Secretary, DoF;
- Virtual Meeting with Chief Executive and Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission;
- Secretariat Engagement with NICSHR on Equality Monitoring Proposal;
- Consideration and Drafting of amendments to the Recruitment Code;
- Revision of protocol for engagement with NICSHR;

- Consideration of options for obtaining information on agency workers;
- Review of Article 6 Templates and engagement with HR Connect and NICSHR;
- Engagement with NIO generally on:
  - Awaiting formal announcement of appointment of new Civil Service Commissioner;
  - Review of NIO Framework Document;
  - Meeting with NIO Permanent Secretary and Commissioners on Commissioners' Sponsorship arrangements and concerns;
  - Meeting with Permanent Secretary and Deputy Director on matters related to finance/budgets and governance; and
  - Subsequent correspondence received and responded to.
- Secretariat workshop to identify 5% contingency savings;
- Engagement with UK Civil Service Commission on a range of issues;
- Updating of Business Continuity/Emergency Response Plan;
- Work on First Draft of Annual Report 2021-22;
- Meeting of Commissioners to discuss Proposals for Civil Service Academy, Amendments to Regulation 3e of Recruitment Code and Use of Consultants in SCS Competitions;
- Harkin International Disability Employment Summit – 7 & 8 June 2022;
- Preparation of New Commissioner's Induction Pack;
- Engagement with Permanent Secretary on upcoming competition;
- Review of Commissioners' Code of Practice;
- Consideration of Declarations of Interest and how they may be recorded within the Article 6 Process;
- Completion of Information Assurance Statement;
- Completion of Annual Progress Report to Equality Commission for NI.

## **CORPORATE MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE**

### **2022/2023 Budget Report**

3. The Secretary referred Commissioners to the table detailed within the report which provided an overview on the current financial position. Commissioners noted that the 2022/23 budget reflected a 5% reduction on the previous year's budget.

### **Requirement to Make Contingency Savings of 5%**

4. An update was provided on a meeting that was hosted by the NIO Permanent Secretary and NIO Deputy Director, which included representatives from each of the NIO's Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs). During the meeting an overview of the challenging financial landscape was given and an outline of the competing pressures for funding. During the meeting all ALBs were asked to set aside 5% of their budget for contingencies.
5. The Secretary referred Commissioners to an attached paper which detailed a number of options which had been identified by the Secretariat in order to make savings. Having reviewed the various options Commissioners acknowledged that cuts in any one isolated area were unlikely to create the 5% savings required and that by implementing any further cuts the OCSC's ability to discharge its statutory functions would be significantly at risk.
6. While acknowledging the competing pressures on budgets, Commissioners instructed the Secretary to draft a letter to the Permanent Secretary setting out the position on budget versus service delivery and to seek a meeting to discuss the issue.

**Action: Secretariat to write to the Permanent Secretary with Commissioners comments and seek a meeting.**

### **Letter of Delegated Authority**

7. The Secretary referred to a letter dated 19 May 2022 received from the Permanent Secretary which set out the Secretary's responsibilities to the Permanent Secretary as Principal Accounting Officer.
8. The Secretary reminded Commissioners that she was the authorised signatory for third party contracts for goods/services and the new delegated authority limit for spend was £15,000 (ex-VAT) and any transactions above this amount would require NIO approval. The purpose of the limit was to enable the NIO to review large spends for the purpose of good financial governance and oversight. The NIO Sponsorship Team and NIO Finance Business Partner will provide support to Secretariat during the financial year to review progress against budget allocations and a new 6-monthly formal review meeting would held with the NIO Finance

Director.

9. The Secretary concluded the update by advising that the OCSC had responded on 31 May 2022 stating that adequate arrangements were in place to provide assurance for the responsibilities as set out within the delegation letter.

### **2022/23 Business Planning Documents**

10. The Secretary reminded Commissioners that the quarterly business planning documents would be circulated to Commissioners in the coming days following the meeting.

11. Commissioners noted the following:

- Business Plan: on track to achieve all Q1 targets and objectives in the 2022/23 Business Plan;
- Risk Register: all risks are currently assessed as 'managed effectively';
- Learning and Development Plan: with the exception of one, all Q1 targets and objectives are on track to be met. The outstanding target, Equality and Disability Awareness training session, is currently being coordinated and will include the new Commissioner when they are appointed.

**Actions: Secretariat to circulate business planning documents to Commissioners.**

### **Commissioners' Strategic Priorities 2020-25**

12. The 2022/23 Business Plan is now available on the website.
13. The Secretariat will continue to review the 2022/23 Business Planning documents at team meetings to maintain clarity around roles and responsibilities, ensuring the successful implementation of the Plan.

### **Staffing – Update**

14. The Secretary provided an overview of the staffing arrangements and advised that secondment of the EO post would end on 30 June 2022 and that this post would not be filled due to budgetary pressures.
15. The Commissioners appreciated the impact the HM Treasury spending review of 2021 had on the OCSC budget and the resulting reduction in staff hours and associated increased workloads.

## **2021/22 Annual Report**

16. Commissioners were updated on the Annual Report for 2021/22 and noted that the first draft of the report would be circulated within the next few weeks for comment.

## **RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION TRANSFORMATION GROUP – REVIEW**

17. This group was set up to address recommendation 3.4 of the NIAO Report on Capacity and Capability in the NICS. Discussions have included the development and implementation of Government Programmes and Initiatives such as Apprenticeships and, Assured Skills Scheme. The group will also consider proposed changes to the Regulations to facilitate these initiatives and any other changes to recruitment competitions.
18. The Secretary and Commissioners discussed the activity of the Group noted the minutes from the previous meetings in March and April and welcomed the forthcoming meeting later in the week which would include Proposals for a Civil Service Skills Academy and Amendments to the Commissioners' Recruitment Code (Regulation 3e).

## **RECRUITMENT CODE**

19. Commissioners continue to engage with NICSHR to expand the range of pathways to employment in the NICS and have considered amendments to their Recruitment Code to facilitate these. Once implemented, the changes will promote positive actions for equality and opportunities for groups of people who have previously experienced difficulty in gaining employment through the normal recruitment process.
20. Details of draft amendments to the Code continue to be reviewed and it was hoped these would be agreed and the revised Code published in the near future.

## **Casework Update**

21. The Secretary updated Commissioners on casework completed and ongoing over the last period. This included:
  - two requests from NICSHR in relation to appointments or extensions under Regulation 3(a) of the Recruitment Code;
  - one request to fill a post from an existing Merit List.

## **Recruitment Code Related Complaints and Queries**

22. Commissioners reviewed the table detailing the complaints and/or queries and noted the actions by the Secretariat.

## **EQUALITY AND DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING AND ENGAGEMENT WITH ECNI**

23. Commissioners were reminded that the above training, which was planned for May had been postponed. It was envisaged that training would take place in September and this change in date would allow the new Commissioner to fully participate in the session.
24. An overview of training topics that would be covered in the session was provided and Commissioners were satisfied with these. They offered a number of dates from September onwards to facilitate the training.

## **RECENT AND FUTURE MEETINGS**

25. Commissioners were referred to the table of recent and future meetings and asked to provide details of their availability in the coming months to facilitate the organising of several meetings.
26. Commissioners expressed their wish to travel to London to meet the UK Civil Service Commissioners and also to meet with the Commission for Public Service Appointments in Dublin. These meetings would enable a discussion of common interests and sharing of best practice.

**Action: Secretariat to coordinate meetings once the availability of the new Commissioner is confirmed.**

## **Harkin International Disability Employment Summit**

27. Commissioners provided a synopsis of the conference and provided detail regarding the benefits and insights gained from attending. They reported the level of engagement from government, private and voluntary organisations was very encouraging and provided background/context to a number of barriers faced by people with disabilities.

## **AUDIT REPORT (Paper 15/22 and Annex A & B)**

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

## **Outstanding recommendations: 2020/21 Audit and Review Plan**

29. The DP referred to the 2020/21 Desktop Compliance Review of Competitions below SCS and provided an update on the work ongoing to resolve the one outstanding recommendation.

30. Commissioners noted the ongoing work to progress the issue and that NICSHR hoped to submit a paper to them in the autumn for their consideration and for discussion at a meeting on both the NICSHR Workforce Review and wider Equality and Diversity. It was agreed the next audit meeting would be separate from this meeting.
31. Commissioners noted that the application and interview process could be more onerous for a person with a disability and agreed to raise this for discussion at the Workforce Review/Equality and Diversity meeting.

**Action: (i) Audit meeting to be a separate meeting  
(ii) Commissioners to raise the experience of disabled people during recruitment/selection at the next Workforce Review/Equality and Diversity meeting.**

### **Outstanding recommendations: 2021/22 Audit and Review Plan**

32. The DP advised that the management response on the outcomes letter from the 2021/22 Review of NICS Processes for Managing and Monitoring the Tenure of Secondments had not yet been received. However Commissioners are aware that NICSHR has advised that it has taken into consideration their recommendations and acknowledged there had been some slippage in relation to the implementation date of the new secondment policy. It is expected that the management response will issue soon.

### **Progress against 2022/23 Audit and Review Plan**

34. The DP advised that the draft terms of reference for the 2022/23 Audit of Competitions below SCS had been forwarded to NICSHR following the business meeting in April. The Secretariat was currently awaiting a response from NICSHR.
35. Commissioners were provided with details of the competitions that would be audited in the coming year. After a discussion regarding the scope and number of audits Commissioners expressed their wish to increase the number of audits in 2023/24, and it was agreed that this should be reflected in the Audit and Review Plan for that year.

**Action: 2023/24 Audit & Review Plan to include a wider scope of audits.**

### **Agency Workers in the NICS**

36. Commissioners were referred to the accompanying annex which provided information on agency workers in the NICS. The DP reminded Commissioners that this information would now be forwarded to the Secretariat on a monthly basis,

replacing the annual update, and a summary would be provided at each business meeting. Commissioners were further asked to note that comparisons between the new data and previous annual updates was not possible due to changes in reporting methodology.

37. Commissioners reviewed the papers and discussed the data contained within. They noted that the NIAO Capacity and Capability Report had made recommendations around the use of temporary staffing solutions and agreed that progress on Workforce Planning should be discussed at the next meeting of the Recruitment and Selection Transformation Group.

**Action 'Workforce Planning' to be added to the next Recruitment and Selection Transformation Group meeting.**

#### **Other outstanding actions**

38. Commissioners were advised that a draft Internal Consultancy Policy would be shared once received by the Secretariat.

**Action: Share the draft Internal Consultancy Policy once received.**

#### **INFORMATION ASSURANCE AWARENESS (PAPER 16/22 and Annex A & B)**

39. The Secretary invited the Staff Officer to introduce the Information Assurance Awareness paper. A synopsis of the policies was provided with particular emphasis placed on the guidance surrounding information/data security in light of the hybrid working model adopted by the OCSC.
40. Commissioners reviewed and signed the Information Assurance Statement.

#### **REVIEW OF COMMISSIONERS' CODE OF PRACTICE (Paper 17/22 and Annex A)**

41. A review of the Code of Practice was tabled and reviewed with the Commissioners. In line with good practice, the Code had been updated to reflect responsibilities in relation to the safeguarding of public funds and the use of social media. Commissioners and the Secretariat discussed these draft additions to the Code and Commissioners advised they were content with the amendments.
42. Discussion progressed to Public Service Values within the Code and Commissioners asked for additional wording regarding the need to ensure any private activity undertaken by Commissioners would not impact upon the work and reputation of the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland.

**Action: Secretariat to update the Commissioners Code of Practice with the agreed wording.**

#### **ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT TO EQUALITY COMMISSION (Paper 18/22)**

43. The Deputy Secretary presented the draft Equality Progress Report for 2021-22 to Commissioners for their consideration and approval. Commissioners' were reminded that OCSC is obliged to complete this annual return to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI). Commissioners reviewed the progress report and advised they were content and gave approval for the Progress Report to be issued to the ECNI.

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

## **HOUSEKEEPING**

44. Commissioners were asked to forward their fees to ensure prompt payment of the same in a timely fashion.

## **REGISTER OF INTERESTS (Paper 19/22)**

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

## **AOB**

46. The Chair raised the forthcoming meeting with the First Civil Service Commissioner (UK) and gave an overview of topics that would be discussed.

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