

**civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland**

**Summary Record of Business Meeting**

**10am, Tuesday 30 April 2024**

**Erskine House, Belfast**

Attendees:

Commissioners – Deirdre Toner, Chairperson, Sinead Burns, Dr Lesley CarrollSecretariat – Amanda Martin, Heather Caulfield, Paula Kerr (part meeting)

Apologies: None

# Introduction and Pre-Meeting Business

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting, including the new Deputy Secretary, Paula Kerr.

## Any other business

* There were no items of additional business.

### Action Matrix from Business Meeting of 16 January 2024 (Paper 06/24)

* Commissioners noted the update on the action points from the 16 January 2024 Business Meeting.

#### 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 07/24)

* The Secretary highlighted the activity which had taken place since the last business meeting and drew attention to the workshop on Gender Identity /LGBTQ+ issues relating to recruitment and selection which would take place on 22 May 2024.
* The draft programme for the upcoming visit from the UK Civil Service First Commissioner was discussed and it was agreed to set up a pre-meeting with the Head of the Civil Service and the Department of Finance Permanent Secretary. It was also agreed to set up a pre-meeting with the NIO Permanent Secretary to discuss both the programme for the visit and the transfer of civil servants across jurisdictions.

**Actions:**

* + Pre-meeting to be set up with HOCS and DoF Permanent Secretary.
	+ Meeting to be set up with NIO Permanent Secretary (and Director of HR Policy, People & OD for transfer of civil servants item).
* Commissioners reviewed the application form for Bronze Diversity Mark and agreed it should now be submitted to Diversity Mark for consideration.
* **Action:** Diversity Mark application to be submitted.

# Corporate Management and Governance

## Finance

* The Secretary presented an overview of the year-end financial position, noting the slight underspend for 2023/24 and the reasons for this.

## Stewardship Statement

* The Secretary noted that the Stewardship Statement had been sent to the NIO on 27 March 2024, providing an assurance that policies relating to staff management, financial management, strategic planning, information and data handling and governance had been adhered to and giving details of management systems.

## Business Planning

* Commissioners noted the update on Q4 targets and objectives in the 2023/24 Business Plan. It was agreed that a reminder would be sent to Commissioners on mandatory training requirements and Information Assurance Statements.
* The Business Plan for 2024/25, which had been drafted following the November Business Planning day, was agreed for publication.

**Actions:**

* + Reminder to be sent to Commissioners on mandatory training requirements and Information Assurance Statements.
	+ Business Plan 2024/25 to be published.

## Corporate Risk Register

* It was agreed that Corporate Risk 5, in relation to staffing, has reduced and should be amended accordingly. All other draft changes accepted.
* **Action:** Corporate Risk Register to be amended (CR5).

## Learning and Development

* An update on Q4 targets and objectives on the Learning and Development Plan was provided.
* Commissioners discussed the value of producing a short training video outlining what Commissioners do. It was noted that this may be helpful as a link for NICS Learning and Development in Recruitment and Selection Training. Commissioners also discussed that it could be made available on their website to enhance knowledge of the role of Commissioners.
* It was also agreed that it may be helpful, in particular for Non-Executive Directors, if each Commissioner attended individual Departmental Board meetings to give a presentation on the role of Commissioners (and what is not their role).

**Actions:**

* + Draft presentation on Commissioners’ role for potential inclusion in NICS Recruitment Training offering.
	+ Consider inclusion of presentation as a website feature explaining Commissioners’ role.
	+ Once presentation agreed, consider attendance by Commissioners at Departmental Boards (one Commissioner to attend each Board meeting).
* Commissioners agreed that a workshop should be set up to discuss the barriers to recruitment and selection for young people and adults leaving care and a meeting arranged with the NICS Gender Champion.
* Commissioners also agreed to request the annual meeting of Commissioners with the Head of the Civil Service and the NICS Board.

 **Actions:**

* Set up Autumn workshop on Young People and Adults leaving care.
* Set up meeting with NICS Gender Champion.
* Arrange annual meeting with HOCS and NICS Board.

## Business Continuity Plan

* Commissioners noted that the Secretariat is currently reviewing and updating its Business Continuity Plan in light of recent and ongoing changes to staffing. A paper document will be issued to Commissioners in due course for storage in a secure location.

## Register of Recommendations NIAO Report on Capacity and Capability in the NICS and PAC Report

* It was agreed that the above register of recommendations would be kept up-to-date quarterly on any action which has been progressed with the NICS.

## Staffing

* An update was provided on the staffing position and it was noted that when the Staff Officer commences on 1 June 2024 the Secretariat will be back to full complement.

## Communications

* Commissioners noted that an accessibility audit has been carried out on the website and some recommendations have been made which the Secretariat will take action to address. The Secretary also advised that easy-read versions of the Recruitment Code and the Guidance on Raising a Concern under the NICS Code of Ethics have been published.

## Annual Report

* Commissioners agreed that the format of the Annual Report from last year should be retained and agreed on topics which should be highlighted in the Chairperson’s Review.

## Code of Ethics

* Commissioners noted the letter which had been received from the Director of Corporate Services in the Department of Finance on the implications arising from the recent Command Paper on Safeguarding the Union. Commissioners agreed that no further action was required at this stage.

## Competitions Update

* Commissioners noted the ongoing competitions at SCS level which they are chairing.

## Casework Update

* Commissioners discussed the report on the numbers of exceptions to merit approved over the past 5 years. They agreed it was useful and that a narrative summarising the number of exceptions by regulation, the number of extensions, which departments are using exceptions the most etc. would be helpful. It would also be helpful to compare the number of exceptions as a percentage of NICS staff against the same percentage for the UK Civil Service. Secretariat agreed to provide this narrative for the June Business Meeting. Thereafter, Commissioners agreed to an annual report on exceptions to merit, brought to the April Business Meeting each year.
* **Action:** Narrative on exceptions to merit to be presented at the June Business Meeting and thereafter a yearly report to the April Business Meeting.

## Complaints and Queries

* Commissioners noted the complaints and queries which had been received since the last business meeting. They discussed a query which had been received in relation to temporary promotions and agreed to raise the issue of temporary promotions at the next meeting of the Recruitment and Selection Development Group.
* **Action:** Temporary Promotions to be added to the agenda of the next RSDG meeting.

## Requests for Information

* Commissioners noted that one FOI request had been received which was currently being dealt with.

## Future Meetings

* A revised date was agreed for the November Business Planning Meeting.
* **Action:** November Business meeting to be moved to 19 November and diary invitations issued.

# Audit Report (Paper 08/24)

## Progress against Audit and Review Plan 2023/24

## Audit of competitions below SCS

* Commissioners noted that they await the NICS management response to their outcomes letter from the Audit of Competitions below SCS, which was issued on 7 February 2024 and discussed at the Audit and Engagement Meeting on 14 March 2024.

## Audit and Review Plan 2024/25

* Commissioners agreed the draft letter to be issued to NICSHR on their Audit Plan for 2024/25.
* Commissioners agreed the draft Terms of Reference for the Review of Key Stages of Competitions below SCS; these should now be finalised and sent to NICSHR and arrangements made to facilitate the Review.
* Commissioners agreed the approach to the Review of Secondments below SCS and amendments to the draft Terms of Reference which are to be sent to NICSHR for review and comment.
* Commissioners noted the competitions selected for Review of the Article 6 Approval Process.

**Actions:**

* Issue letter to NICSHR with Audit Plan 2024/25.
* Finalise ToR for Review of Key Stages of Competitions below SCS.
* Amend ToR for the Review of Secondments below SCS and send to NICSHR for review.

## Actions from Audit and Engagement Meeting

## Initial Sift and ‘Read Across’

* Commissioners discussed that it may be helpful to understand the background to why ‘read across’ was introduced by the NICS. They discussed that ‘read across’ lends itself well to information on length of experience but can be challenging to apply in terms of competences. It was agreed that a discussion on the application of ‘read across’ should be added to the agenda for the next meeting of the Recruitment and Selection Development Group.
* **Action:** Seek information from NICS on background to ‘read across’ and add ‘read across’ to the agenda of the next RSDG.

## Autumn Audit and Engagement Meeting

* Commissioners provided their availability for an Autumn Audit and Engagement Meeting with the NICS and it was agreed that the Secretariat would agree a date with the NICS.
* **Action:** Agree date with the NICS for next Audit and Engagement Meeting.

Review of Article 6 Procedures (Paper 10/24)

* This item was deferred to the next meeting.

Housekeeping issues

* Commissioners were reminded to update their register of interests or provide a nil return.
* Commissioners were reminded that passes to Erskine House must be swiped at least once a month to remain active.

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