

**civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland**

**Summary Record of Business Meeting**

**10am, Tuesday 28 January 2025**

**Erskine House, Belfast**

Attendees:

Commissioners – Deirdre Toner, Chairperson, Sinead Burns and Dr Lesley Carroll

Secretariat – Amanda Martin, Heather Caulfield, Dawn Molloy and Clair Hedley

Apologies: None

# Introduction and Pre-Meeting Business

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Any other business

* There were no items of additional business.

Action Matrix from Business Meeting of 17.09.24 (Paper 25/24)

* Commissioners noted the update on the action points from the 17th September 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 21/24)

## Engagement with NIO, Sponsor Body

* On 8 November correspondence was received from the NIO Permanent Secretary suggesting the appointment of a further commissioner. The recruitment process is to be launched in April/May 2025 and the competition will create a reserve list that will remain valid for 12 months. This will mean that the expected future vacancy can be filled quickly and cost effectively without the need for a further recruitment exercise. The recruitment panel will include the Chairperson who will help develop the recruitment documentation.
* The Secretary provided an update on procuring a workshop facilitator for commissioners to explore enhancing their role. Three suitable individuals had been approached but had declined to provide a quotation. Further suggested facilitators were identified and it was agreed to approach them.

External Engagement Activity:

### UK Civil Service Commission

* On 4October there was a debrief of the visit on 18 September 2024 from the First Commissioner, Baroness Gisela Stuart and Kate Owen, Chief Executive of the UK Civil Service Commission and the feedback was positive with discussion about future engagement. A virtual meeting was arranged to take place on 28 January however this was postponed. Commissioners provided their availability in March 2025 with a view to rescheduling the meeting.

### Permanent Secretary, TEO

* On 20 January 2025, the Commissioners met with David Malcolm, Permanent Secretary, TEO to discuss the ongoing Review of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB). It was agreed to seek a meeting with the recently appointed Chief Executive of SIB in due course.

### Recruitment and Selection Development Group (RSDG)

* The most recent meeting with the RSDG group was held on 21 January 2025.

### NICSHR and People & OD

* The draft version of the Commissioners’ Training video has now been shared with NICSHR, People & OD and HR Connect with some minor amendments to the script being agreed. It was discussed whether an additional video could be made for the Commissioners website and what the costs may be.
* Commissioners discussed the amended application form for SCS recruitment and agreed to revert to NICSHR expressing contentment with the amendments but asking if the form could be trialled and reviewed after it had been in use for a reasonable period.
* There was a further discussion around the recent AO online recruitment competitions. It was agreed that these be discussed with NICSHR at a forthcoming meeting scheduled to enable Commissioners to meet the recently appointed members of the Resourcing team and discuss future plans.
* A meeting will also be set up (27 February 2025) with NICSHR to review the Article 6 process.

## Equality and Diversity

### Diversity Mark

* On 26 November 2024 the Office of the Civil service Commissioners was awarded Diversity Mark accreditation. The independent awarding panel had offered to meet with the secretariat and the Chair to provide feedback and support in the coming year. No date had been confirmed for the meeting.

### Equality Commission for NI

* The annual meeting with the Chief Executive and the Chief Equality Commissioner has been arranged for Thursday, 6 February 2025. Commissioners provided topics that they wished to have included on the agenda.

## Corporate Management and Governance

### Finance

* Commissioners’ attention was drawn to a separate submission sent to them on 24 January 2025 on the CSC’s budget for 2025-26 and the potential requirement to make savings in line with HM Treasury’s spending review The Secretariat had highlighted in the return template that any budgetary reduction would present a risk to Commissioners’ ability to carry out their statutory functions.
* The commissioners noted the budget position as shown in the Secretary’s Report (point 28).
* It was noted that the number of SCS competitions that Commissioners have been asked to Chair has increased from 7 in 2020 (Covid-19) to 22 in 2024.

## Business Planning Documents

### Commissioners’ Business Plan 2024-25

* The Secretary noted that all Q3 targets and objectives in the 2024/25 Business Plan **(Annex A)** were largely met.

### Commissioners’ Strategic Plan 2025-2029

* At the business meeting on 19 November a reviewed strategic plan 2025-29 was discussed. The plan was subsequently drafted, agreed and circulated for targeted consultation for an 8 week period commencing on 6 January 2025. The closing date for comment is 12 noon on 3 March 2025.

### Commissioners’ Business Plan

* The Commissioners noted that their business plan 2025-26 will come from the draft Strategic Plan when that has been finalised.

### Learning and Development Plan

* As of Q3 Commissioners have completed all mandatory training as outlined in the Learning and Development Plan 2024-25.
* On 29th January the Commissioners and secretariat are to host a Gender Diversity workshop along with the NICS Women’s Champion and a representative from Women in Business.
* It was agreed that Commissioners would attend the NI Leadership and Governance Conference on 2nd April at La Mon House Hotel.
* The draft Learning and Development Plan 2025-26 (Annex B) was agreed.

### Corporate Risk Register

* The risk register was reviewed on 14 January (see Annex C) and the tracked changes were agreed by the commissioners. A new Corporate Risk Register will be prepared to align with the Commissioners’ Strategic Plan when it has been finalised and it is hoped that this will be approved prior to the Commissioners’ business meeting to be held in April 2025.

Register of Recommendations from Reports including NIAO Report on Capacity and Capability in the NICS and PAC report.

* Commissioners’ noted the update to the register, which was reviewed by the Secretariat on 14th January and agreed to accept the tracked changes.

## Staffing

* Commissioners noted the update on staffing.
* Commissioners were reminded that all Secretariat staff are currently seconded through the Interchange Scheme for a limited period. The OCSC had approached the NIO in December 2024 about the possibility of appointing at least one member of staff on a permanent or fixed term contract. Unfortunately, this is not possible and steps to attract a broader candidacy were discussed with a view to increasing workplace diversity.

## Communications

* The “explainer guide” video is almost complete. After consultation with NICSHR, People & OD and HR Connect the final adjustments have been made. It is currently with the production company for the final voiceover. It was agreed to ask NICSHR if it would be possible to get participant feedback on the video in due course.
* It is hoped that a further short video can be commissioned for use on the website. This may be accommodated in the 2025-26 budget.

## Records Management

* The Secretariat is awaiting an update from PRONI on who signs off the Schedules of NIO sponsored ALBs.

## 2023-2024 Annual Report

* Commissioners’ 2023-24 Annual report has now been published on the website, circulated to local press and acknowledged by the King.

## 2024-2025 Annual Report

* The timeline for the preparation and publication of the annual report 2024-2025 was agreed. There was further discussion around what should be included in the report.

## Housekeeping

* Commissioners were reminded to swipe their security passes at least once a month so they remain active. They were also reminded to have their passes visible at all times in line with the building requirements.
* Commissioners were also reminded to submit fees to the Secretariat in a timely manner

## Recruitment Code

* Amendments to the Recruitment Code (v.15) are to be discussed at the dedicated Audit meeting on 31st January, with a view to publishing v.16 by 31 March 2025

## Competitions Update

* An update on live SCS competitions being chaired by Commissioners was noted.

## Casework Update

Appointments Approved by Way of Exception Regulation 3a

* A list of appointments approved by Way of Exception for Q3 reporting period was noted.

## Code of Ethics

* The Secretary explained that one concern that was dealt with in Q2 under the Code of Ethics was raised again with new concerns in Q3. In both instances it was agreed that the concerns failed to meet the eligibility criteria for further investigation.

## Complaints and Queries

* Commissioners noted that three recruitment related queries had been received, two of which were referred to the NICS. The third was to be discussed.

## Requests for Information

* Commissioners noted that there was one request for information under the FOI Act 2000 during the reporting period. The request was for information relating to the use of social media management platforms and associated contracts. A response was issued within the statutory timeframe.

## Future Meetings

* Commissioners noted all recent and future meetings which have been scheduled for 2024/2025. Commissioners have provided dates when they are available in March 2025 for possible meetings with the UK Civil Service Commission and also with the Permanent Secretaries.

# Audit Report (Paper 19/24)

## Progress against Audit and Review Plan 2024/25

### Review of Key Stages of Competitions below SCS

* Commissioners noted the update on plans to enable them to observe interviews – due to the timing of interviews, arrangements are being made to potentially facilitate Commissioners observing interviews from two of the six competitions. NICSHR has sought and obtained permission from both the panels. It is also seeking permission from the candidates – wording around this has been agreed for inclusion with the invites to interview and the interviews of those candidates who respond that they are content can potentially be observed by Commissioners. Secretariat is due to meet with NICSHR on 24 February to discuss arrangements further and will provide an update to Commissioners after this meeting.
* Commissioners agreed that they would discuss the presentation of their observations to date at their dedicated Audit Meeting on 31st January.

### Review of Secondments below SCS

* Commissioners were advised that the NICS has agreed the draft findings from the Review of NICS Appointments below SCS made under Regulation 3(a) of the 2007 General Regulations (“secondment review”). The draft findings are due to be discussed with the NICS at the upcoming Audit and Engagement meeting.

### Outstanding actions from the last Audit and Engagement meeting

* Commissioners agreed that, given the pilot of the new application form for SCS competitions, the outstanding action for Commissioners in relation to read-across could be closed. Commissioners noted that the action in relation to recruitment and selection training was now complete as the NICS task and finish group on this matter includes Commissioner representation.

### Agency Workers in the NICS

* Commissioners noted the summary of Agency Worker information (Paper 22/24 – Annex A) and agreed to write to Neil Gibson on this matter.

Matters for discussion

* There was discussion about G7/G6 posts being filled by internal competition rather than open competition. Commissioners agreed to write to Neil Gibson on this matter.

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