



PARADES COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

BUSINESS PLAN 2023-24

Introduction

This Business Plan is the third plan approved by the current Commission which was appointed on 1st January 2021. It has explicitly taken an ***Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA)*** approach to contribute to the delivery of the NIO's society sub outcome 2.3:

'Individuals in Northern Ireland feel increasingly free to affirm and develop their national and cultural identity and rights and equality of opportunity are protected and promoted.'

This high level outcome mirrors two of the draft outcomes published by the Executive in its consultation on its framework published on 25 January 2021. These are:

- (i) We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect; and***
- (ii) Everyone feels safe - we all respect law and order and each other.***

As body corporate, operating within specific powers and duties derived from Statute, the Commission's work will support the delivery of the NIO's high level outcome using a set of objectives, associated actions together with key indicators and performance measures. The Commission welcomes the adoption of the OBA approach by the NIO which is a shift away from outputs to measurable outcomes, consistent with that taken by the NI Executive in its *Programme for Government draft Outcomes Framework*.

The Commission, supported and advised by its Accounting Officer, will monitor progress and performance against the Plan on a regular basis and will, where appropriate, modify it or re-allocate resources to take account of changing circumstances.

The Commission recognises the challenges of business planning in uncertain times not least the potential of critical factors to impact on its work over the period of this plan these include:

- **25th Anniversary of Belfast Good Friday Agreement, formation of the Commission and parading anniversaries** – April 2023 marks the 25th anniversary of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement and the formation of the Commission. The Commission notes that there will be events to commemorate the signing of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement however there are conflicting views on its implementation and success. The Commission also recognises there are other significant parading anniversaries during the course of this year including Drumcree Sunday.
- **EU Exit, NI Protocol and political instability** - the UK left the EU on 31st December 2020 and over the subsequent weeks and months there was increasing opposition within certain sections of the population to the NI Protocol. In February 2022 the First Minister resigned from his post in protest to the NI Protocol with the effect of collapsing the Executive and subsequently the Assembly. At the time of drafting there is no functioning Executive or Assembly. After a long period of negotiation the Windsor Framework has been drafted to amend the protocol deal. This is being considered and reviewed by a range of stakeholders. The Commission continues to monitor these political outworkings and any impacts they may have on its work.
- **Financial impacts** – The current financial crisis and increase in costs across the board has the potential to impact on the

work of the Commission. The Commission will keep its financial position under review and work with the NIO as appropriate to ensure it is able to fulfil its statutory duties.

As with previous plans the Commission will continue to engage with all stakeholders and process notifications in accordance with its duties under the *Public Processions Act 1998* (as amended) and have regard to its associated *Procedural Rules and Guidelines*.

The Commission

Who we are

The PCNI was established in March 1997, initially as a non-statutory body. The Commission's powers and duties derive from the *Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998* as amended by the *Public Processions (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 2005*.

The Commission is made up of a Chairperson and five Commissioners who are all publicly appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The Commission is supported by a small secretariat who are authorised to engage with stakeholders and gather information and evidence to support decision making. The secretariat carries out the administrative and 'on the ground' functions on behalf of the Commission and is often the first point of contact for any queries or complaints in relation to a parade or parade related protest. However, it is the Commission that considers the evidence, hears any representation and ultimately makes the decisions on whether a determination imposing conditions on the organiser of a parade or parade related protest should be issued.

What we do

The PCNI's statutory duties are to:

- *promote a greater understanding by the general public of issues concerning public processions;*
- *promote and facilitate mediation as a means of resolving disputes concerning public processions;*

- *keep itself generally informed as to the conduct of public processions and protest meetings; and*
- *keep under review and make such recommendations as it thinks fit to the Secretary of State concerning the operation of the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998.*

In pursuit of the above statutory duties the PCNI may:

- *facilitate mediation between parties to particular disputes concerning proposed public processions and take such other steps as appear to the Commission to be appropriate for resolving disputes;*
- *issue determinations in respect of proposed public processions;*
- *provide financial or other assistance to any person or body on such terms and conditions as the Commission may determine; and*
- *commission and undertake research.*

How we undertake our functions

In accordance with its legislative duties the Commission has drafted and issued:

1. A **Code of Conduct** providing guidance to people organising parades or parade related protests and regulating the conduct of persons at parades or parade related protests.
2. **Procedural Rules** which regulate and set out the procedures to be followed by the Commission in exercising its functions,

and by other persons/bodies in their dealing with the Commission.

3. **Guidelines** as to how the Commission should exercise its functions. These provide a framework to govern the decisions of the Commission.

All three of these documents should be read in conjunction with each other, and are available on the Commission's website or on request.

In order to carry out its functions, it is necessary for the Commission to have access to a comprehensive range of information about the public processions, related protest meetings and the areas in which they are held. In order to acquire this information and evidence the Commission will engage with a broad range of relevant stakeholders.

- The Commission's secretariat will act on its behalf engaging with organisers, supporters, objectors, elected members and the general public to both acquire, and provide as much information as possible. This most often takes the form of phone calls and emails, although on occasion the secretariat may attend meetings or forums.
- The secretariat will endeavour to contact and build relationships with local groups, including public procession, or related protest organisers, residents and community representatives. Through building these relationships the secretariat can encourage resolution through dialogue in areas where there are parading disputes.
- The Commission may hold formal evidence gathering or outreach sessions in order to hear views or clarify issues

surrounding individual public processions or parade related protests.

- The Commission will receive information and representations both orally and in writing from any interested party or organisation prior to the date of the public procession or parade related protest. This system enables the views of both supporters and opposers to the parade, or related protest to be heard by the Commission.

The Commission recognises that disputes over public processions are best resolved at a local level. In some locations, structures to facilitate cross-community communication may already exist and these can be used to good effect for the purposes of resolving disputes. In others, civic or community forums may be established to address the issues associated with disputes over public processions. The Commission through the secretariat will **explore the merit and practicality of mediation in areas where local agreement has not been reached, to ensure that the parties are made aware of the benefits of dialogue.** Where there is a desire to create a structure, or establish a process for these purposes, the secretariat can provide advice and support. The secretariat will seek to secure local accommodation in relation to disputes and, where parties agree, will assist in the mediation process. They will also report to the Commission on the potential for achieving such accommodation, and on any steps taken towards securing accommodation by the parties to a dispute.

This Business Plan sets out the key objectives and supporting actions to be undertaken by the Commission and its staff to discharge these functions. It also outlines arrangements common to all public sector organisations for good governance and effective use of resources, during the year to 31 March 2023. It should be noted, however, that the activities reflect key activities and not an exhaustive list. An assessment of the Commission's level of performance and *value for money* can be viewed through

analysis of the measures and indicators set out below and will reported upon in the Commission's Annual Report and Accounts.

Parades Commission's Strategic Objective:

to contribute to the delivery of the NIO's high level society outcome, having regard to its linkage with the NI Executive's Programme for Government, so that:

'Individuals in Northern Ireland feel increasingly free to affirm, maintain and develop their national and cultural identity and to celebrate and express it in a way that takes into account the sensitivities of those with different national or cultural identities and respects the rule of law.'

Population level Indicators (in NI Executive draft PfG 2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect index • % of population who believe their cultural identity is respected by society 		
Key Objectives	Key Activities	Responsible Owner	Performance Measure
Parades notifications are processed and published on the Commission website in a timely manner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process and publish all parade notifications on the Commission website • Hold formal meetings throughout the year for full consideration of sensitive parades • Gather information and evidence to ensure all relevant factors are taken into account • Draft determinations/decisions, where appropriate, following full consideration of all factors • Issue determinations/decisions in a timely manner 	Secretariat Commission/Secretariat Secretariat/Commission Commission Secretariat	# of notifications processed and uploaded to PCNI website # Parades notified to take place # Commission meetings held # of sensitive notifications considered by the Commission

			% of sensitive notifications against total parades
			% of determinations/decisions issued within 5 days of the Commission meeting
A greater understanding by the public of issues concerning public processions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Include context to determinations/decisions to provide background to the decision making process and aid understanding ● Make ourselves available for engagement with stakeholders and all members of society ● Respond to media enquiries and other correspondence, as appropriate ● Initiate attitudinal survey work with NI Life and Times 	Commission	% of determinations which contain context to the Commission's decision making process
		Commission/Secretariat	# of media enquiries dealt with
		Secretariat	
		Commission/Secretariat	trend change in attitude/perception of the general public (inc young people) on the stability of parading in Northern Ireland

			# of Outreach events undertaken by the Commission
The Commission is kept informed of parading issues, including the conduct of public processions and protest meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engage proactively with parade and protest organisers, elected and community representatives and other stakeholders ● Gather information and evidence to ensure the Commission has a comprehensive range of data on which to base decisions ● Observe identified parades and prepare reports on the conduct of those parades ● Monitor media reports and statements relating to processions and protest meetings and attend relevant events 	Secretariat/Commission	# of sensitive parades which the Commission has engagement with stakeholders
		Secretariat	# of parades observed
		Secretariat/Commission	# of observer reports prepared
		Secretariat/Commission	

<p>Mediation is promoted and used as a means to resolve parading disputes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explore mediation in areas where local agreement has not been reached, to ensure that the parties are made aware of the benefits of dialogue ● Facilitate mediation where appropriate 	<p>Commission/Secretariat</p> <p>Commission</p>	<p># of sensitive parades in which dialogue/mediation is encouraged by the Commission</p> <p># of parading disputes in which mediation is facilitated</p>
<p>Effective succession planning for the appointment of Commissioners and Secretariat staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure staffing levels are adequate to discharge functions ● Advertise Secretariat vacancies in a timely manner ● Identify when vacancies in the Commission are likely to arise and liaise with NIO with regard to replacements ● Ensure a suitable training programme is in place and is provided to all Commissioners and members of the Secretariat 	<p>Secretary</p> <p>Secretary</p> <p>Secretary/Chair</p> <p>Secretary</p>	<p># and % of secretariat vacancies unfilled for one month or more</p> <p>% of staff and Commissioners who completed mandatory training</p>

High standards of governance and stewardship maintained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit and Risk Committee meet on a regular basis 	Audit and Risk Committee/Secretariat	# of Audit and Risk Committee meetings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure adequate and appropriate systems are in place Eg Internal Audit, self assessment 	Secretary/Audit and Risk Committee/Chair	# of Audit Reports with an overall rating of satisfactory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of audit recommendations 	Secretary/Commission	% spend against budget
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly review and update Risk Register 	Secretary/Audit and Risk Committee	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly review and monitor progress against the Business Plan 	Secretary/Audit and Risk Committee	Completion and publication of Annual Report and Accounts in accordance with HMT guidance and legislation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete Stewardship statements 	Secretariat	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend governance meetings with Sponsor body 	Secretariat	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular monitoring of budget to ensure spend within budget 	Secretary/Audit and Risk Committee	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of Annual Report and Accounts in a timely manner 	Secretary/Chair	

--	--	--	--

Approved by the Commission at its Meeting on 21st March 2023