



**PARADES COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

**BUSINESS PLAN 2021-22**

## Introduction

This Business Plan is the first plan approved by the current Commission which was appointed on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021. It explicitly has taken an ***Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA)*** approach to contribute to the delivery of the NIO's high level outcome that:

***'Individuals in Northern Ireland feel increasingly free to affirm, maintain and develop their national and cultural identity and linguistic diversity; 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.'***

This high level outcome mirrors two of the draft outcomes published by the Executive in its consultation on its framework published on 25 January. 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 an Arms Length Body, 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 key objectives, associated activities and the indicators and performance measures. The Commission welcomes the adoption of the OBA approach by the NIO which is a shift away from outputs to outcomes and is consistent with that taken by the NI Executive in its *Programme for Government*.

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 such uncertain times not least the potential of critical factors to impact on its work over the period of this plan these include:

- **Covid-19** - the pandemic continues to be felt across all sectors, industries and public life. At the time of drafting, all secretariat staff are working from home, with Commission meetings being held via virtual platforms. The Commission anticipates that the impact of the pandemic and Covid-19 Regulations will continue to have an impact on its work for at least the early part of the reporting period.
- **2021 Centenary** - this year marks the centenary of the creation of Northern Ireland and the Commission recognises that whilst there are mixed views on this centenary, it is of particular significance for the Protestant Unionist Loyalist community.
- **Brexit and the NI Protocol** - the UK left the EU on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 and over the subsequent weeks and months there has been increasing opposition within certain sections of the population to the NI Protocol. The Commission continues to monitor the situation and any impacts it may have on its work.

As with previous plans the Commission will continue to engage with all stakeholders and process notifications in accordance with the *Public Processions Act 1998* (as amended) and the Commission's *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 on behalf of the Commission. The secretariat carries out the administrative and 'on the ground' functions on behalf of the Commission and are 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 who considers the evidence, hears any representation and ultimately makes the decisions on whether a determination imposing conditions on the organiser of 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 stakeholders in a variety of ways.

- 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 be in existence 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 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 activities to be undertaken by the Commission and its staff to discharge these functions and those common to all public sector organisations of good governance and effective use of resources, during the year to 31 March 2022. It should be noted however that the activities noted reflect key activities and not an exhaustive list. An assessment of the Commissions' value for money can be undertaken through analysis of the measures and indicators set out below.

**Parades Commission's Strategic Objective:**

to contribute to the delivery of the NIO's high level 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 linguistic diversity; 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.'***

<p><b>Population level Indicators</b> <b>(in NI Executive draft PfG 2019)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Respect index</b></li> <li>● <b>% of population who believe their cultural identity is respected by society</b></li> </ul>	
<p><b>Key Objectives</b></p>	<p><b>Key Activities</b></p>	<p><b>Performance Measure</b></p>
<p><b>Parades notifications are processed and published on the Commission website in a timely manner</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Process and publish all parade notifications on the Commission website</b></li> <li>● <b>Hold formal meetings throughout the year for full consideration of sensitive parades</b></li> <li>● <b>Gather information and evidence to ensure it takes into account all relevant factors</b></li> <li>● <b>Draft determinations/decisions, where appropriate, following full consideration of all factors</b></li> <li>● <b>Issue determinations/decisions in a timely manner</b></li> </ul>	<p><b># of notifications processed and uploaded to PCNI website</b></p> <hr/> <p><b># of sensitive notifications considered by the Commission</b></p> <hr/> <p><b># of determinations issued within 5 days of the Commission meeting</b></p>

<p><b>A greater understanding by the public of issues concerning public processions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Include context to determinations/decisions to provide background to the decision making process and aid understanding</b></li> <li>● <b>Make ourselves available for engagement with stakeholders and all members of society</b></li> <li>● <b>Respond to media enquiries and other correspondence, as appropriate</b></li> <li>● <b>Initiate survey work with NI Life and Times</b></li> </ul>	<p><b># of determinations which contain context to the Commission's decision making process</b></p>
		<p><b># of media enquiries dealt with</b></p>
		<p><b>trend change in attitude/perception of the general public on the stability of parading in Northern Ireland</b></p>
<p><b>The Commission is kept informed of parading issues, including the conduct of public processions and protest meetings</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Engage proactively with parade and protest organisers, elected and community representatives and other stakeholders</b></li> <li>● <b>Gather information and evidence to ensure the Commission has a comprehensive range of data on which to base decisions</b></li> <li>● <b>Observe identified parades and prepare reports on the conduct of those parades</b></li> <li>● <b>Monitor media reports and statements relating to processions and protest meetings and attend relevant events</b></li> </ul>	<p><b># of sensitive parades which the Commission has engagement with stakeholders</b></p>
<p><b># of parades observed</b></p>		
<p><b># of observer reports prepared</b></p>		

<p><b>Mediation is promoted and used as a means to resolve parading disputes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explore mediation in areas where local agreement has not been reached, to ensure that the parties are made aware of the benefits of dialogue</li> <li>● Facilitate mediation where appropriate</li> </ul>	<p><b># of parading disputes in which mediation is facilitated</b></p>
<p><b>Effective succession planning for the appointment of Commissioners and Secretariat staff</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure staffing levels are adequate to discharge functions</li> <li>● Advertise Secretariat vacancies in a timely manner</li> <li>● Identify when vacancies in the Commission are likely to arise and liaise with NIO with regard to replacements</li> <li>● Ensure a suitable induction programme is in place and is provided to all Commissioners and members of the Secretariat</li> </ul>	<p><b># and % of secretariat vacancies unfilled for one month or more</b></p> <p><b># and % of Commissioner vacancies</b></p> <p><b>% increase in knowledge of staff and Commissioners</b></p>
<p><b>High standards of governance and stewardship maintained</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Audit and Risk Committee meet on a regular basis</li> <li>● Ensure adequate and appropriate systems are in place</li> </ul>	<p><b># of Audit and Risk Committee meetings</b></p> <p><b># of Audit Reports with an overall rating of satisfactory</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Regularly review and monitor progress against the Business Plan</li> <li>● Regularly review and update Risk Register</li> <li>● Complete Stewardship statements</li> <li>● Attend governance meetings with Sponsor body</li> <li>● Completion of Annual Report and Accounts in a timely manner</li> <li>● Implementation of audit recommendations</li> <li>● Training for Commissioners and Secretariat</li> <li>● Completion of Audit Self Assessment</li> <li>● Completion of Commissioners' self assessment audit</li> <li>● Regular monitoring of budget to ensure spend within budget</li> </ul>	<p>% spend against budget</p> <p>% increase in audit and stewardship knowledge</p>
		<p>Completion and publication of Annual Report and Accounts as per statute</p>

*Approved by the Commission at its Meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021*