



PARADES COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

BUSINESS PLAN 2024-25

Introduction

This Business Plan is the first plan approved by the current Commission which was appointed on 1 January 2024. It has explicitly taken an ***Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA)*** approach to contribute to the NIO's Draft Outcome Delivery Plan 2023-24, as part of its priority outcome on society:

‘Support greater reconciliation and integration in Northern Ireland.’

The Delivery Strategy for this high level outcome states:

- (i) Agreement, supporting and facilitating positive action on rights and equality issues can contribute to inclusion, tolerance, openness by allowing for the expression of all identities within society, enhancing diversity and facilitating social understanding.***
- (ii) Promote a shared society based on acceptance of commonalities and differences; and***
- (iii) A place where everyone's identity is respected and where people feel free to express their identity in an open, tolerant and inclusive society.***

As a 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 and associated actions together with key indicators and performance measures. The Commission will also consider any updates of the NI Executive's 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 uncertain times not least the potential of critical factors to impact on its work over the period of this plan. These include:

- **Political environment** – The NI Assembly and Executive returned to Stormont on 3 February 2024, following a two year period of absence. It is too early to see how local communities will react to this and we note that some trade unions are continuing to organise strike action, disputing wages. The Commission continues to monitor these political outworkings and any impacts they may have on its work.
- **Conflict in Gaza** – An Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign has manifested in weekly marches and rallies throughout NI since October 2023, due to the ongoing conflict in Gaza. These have been deemed sensitive by the PSNI due to alliances felt by local communities. To date no issues have been observed and the marches have been peaceful, however the Commission will continue to monitor potential conflicts going into the busy parading season.
- **Financial impacts** – The wider financial pressures 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 effectively.

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 representations 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 both to acquire and to 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 2025. 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 be reported on 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	<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 	Secretariat	# of notifications processed and uploaded to PCNI website
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold formal meetings throughout the year for full consideration of sensitive parades 	Commission/Secretariat	# Parades notified to take place
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather information and evidence to ensure all relevant factors are taken into account • Draft determinations/decisions, 	Secretariat/Commission	# Commission meetings held
		Commission	

	<p>where appropriate, following full consideration of all factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue determinations/decisions in a timely manner 	Secretariat	<p># of sensitive notifications considered by the Commission</p> <p>% of sensitive notifications against total parades</p>
			% 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	
Mediation is promoted and used as a means to resolve parading disputes	<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 	Commission/Secretariat	# of sensitive parades in which dialogue/mediation is encouraged by the Commission

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate mediation where appropriate 	Commission	# of parading disputes in which mediation is facilitated
Effective succession planning for the appointment of Commissioners and Secretariat staff	<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 	Secretary Secretary Secretary/Chair Secretary	# and % of secretariat vacancies unfilled for one month or more % of staff and Commissioners who completed mandatory training
High standards of governance and stewardship maintained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit and Risk Committee meets on a regular basis Ensure adequate and appropriate systems are in place Eg Internal Audit, self assessment 	Audit and Risk Committee/Secretariat Secretary/Audit and Risk Committee/Chair	# of Audit and Risk Committee meetings # of Audit Reports with an overall rating of satisfactory

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of audit recommendations • Regularly review and update Risk Register • Regularly review and monitor progress against the Business Plan • Complete Stewardship statements • Attend governance meetings with Sponsor body • Regular monitoring of budget to ensure spend within budget • Completion of Annual Report and Accounts in a timely manner • Annual statements of assurance from IT providers to be forwarded to Audit and Risk committee. 	Secretary/Commission	% spend against budget
		Secretary/Audit and Risk Committee	Completion and publication of Annual Report and Accounts in accordance with HMT guidance and legislation
		Secretary/Audit and Risk Committee	
		Secretariat	
		Secretariat	
		Secretary/Audit and Risk Committee	
		Secretary/Chair	
		Secretary	

Approved by the Commission at its Meeting on 20 March 2024