



PARADES COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

BUSINESS PLAN 2025-26

Introduction

This Business Plan is the second plan approved by the current Commission, which was appointed on 1 January 2024. As the Commission is a Non-Departmental Public Body of the Northern Ireland Office, this plan takes cognisance of the NIO's Departmental Business Plan for 2025-26.

One of the NIO's four Departmental Aims is "Building a safer, more reconciled society" which is intended to contribute to a Northern Ireland society in which current and future generations feel safer and more reconciled. In order to achieve this aim, a range of deliverables and outcomes have been determined. The milestone for the Rights and culture workstream includes "supporting a strong human rights framework in Northern Ireland and the respect/tolerance of cultural identities."

The Commission will maintain its relationship with the NIO and assist it in monitoring community tensions and disputes around parades and associated protests in Northern Ireland.

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 aims using a set of objectives and associated actions together with key indicators and performance measures.

The Commission also takes cognisance of the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2024-27, entitled "Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most." One of the Programme's nine priorities is Safer Communities, which includes a commitment to keeping communities safe and to making sure that residents feel confident and secure to live their lives to the fullest.¹ The Programme for Government contains three missions, one of which is People. One of the Proposed Actions to achieve this mission is that everyone benefits from a fair and inclusive society where everyone flourishes, no one is left behind, and everyone is made to feel welcome.²

¹ Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government 2024-27 "Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most" at page 48.

² Ibid. at page 71.

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 Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive returned to Stormont in 2024 and continue to deal with a wide range of challenges facing society. International events can have an impact on the political situation in Northern Ireland, sometimes resulting in public processions and protests. The Commission will continue to monitor the political situation in Northern Ireland and internationally in order to assess the impact on its work.
- **Financial impacts** – The Northern Ireland Executive and United Kingdom Government face well-publicised financial pressures. Increased costs, for example related to staffing, continue to pose challenges and the Commission will continue to ensure that it adapts to these financial constraints. It will continue to engage with the Northern Ireland Office regarding the Comprehensive Spending Review and advocate for sufficient funding to allow it to discharge its functions.

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 (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 and its Procedural Rules and Guidelines.

The Commission

Who we are

The Parades Commission 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 Commission'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 Commission 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:

- 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.
- **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.
- **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 in printed form 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 facilitate 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 2026. 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:

Through the implementation of its statutory functions, to contribute to the delivery of the NIO's aim of "Building a safer, more reconciled society", having regard to its linkage with the NI Executive's Programme for Government by "supporting a strong human rights framework in Northern Ireland and the respect/tolerance of cultural identities."

Population level Indicators	● 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	● Process and publish all parade notifications on the Commission website	Secretariat	# of notifications processed and uploaded to PCNI website
	● Hold formal meetings throughout the year for full consideration of sensitive parades	Commission/Secretariat	# Parades notified to take place
			# Commission meetings held
	● Gather information and evidence to ensure all relevant factors are taken into account	Secretariat/Commission	# of sensitive notifications considered by the Commission
	● Draft determinations/decisions, where appropriate, following full	Commission Secretariat	% of sensitive notifications against total parades

	consideration of all factors ● Issue determinations/decisions in a timely manner		% of determinations/decisions issued within 5 days of the Commission meeting
A greater understanding by the public of issues concerning public processions	● 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	Commission	% of determinations which contain context to the Commission's decision making process
		Commission/Secretariat	# of media enquiries dealt with
		Secretariat	trend change in attitude/perception of the general public (inc young people) on the stability of parading in Northern Ireland
		Commission/Secretariat	# of outreach events undertaken by the Commission

The Commission is kept informed of parading issues, including the conduct of public processions and protest meetings	● 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	● Explore mediation in areas where local agreement has not been reached, to ensure that the parties are made	Commission/Secretariat	# of sensitive parades in which dialogue/mediation is encouraged by the Commission

parading disputes	aware of the benefits of dialogue ● Facilitate mediation where appropriate	Commission	# of parading disputes in which mediation is facilitated
Effective succession planning for the appointment of Commissioners and Secretariat staff	● Seek to 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	● Audit and Risk Committee meets on a regular basis	Audit and Risk Committee/Secretariat	# of Audit and Risk Committee meetings

stewardship maintained	● Ensure adequate and appropriate systems are in place	Secretary/Audit and Risk Committee/Chair	# of Audit Reports with an overall rating of satisfactory
	Eg Internal Audit, self assessment ● Implementation of audit recommendations	Secretary/Commission	% spend against budget
	● Regularly review and update Risk Register	Secretary/Audit and Risk Committee	Completion and publication of Annual Report and Accounts in accordance with HMT guidance and legislation
	● Regularly review and monitor progress against the Business Plan	Secretary/Audit and Risk Committee	
	● Complete Stewardship statements	Secretariat	
	● Attend governance meetings with Sponsor body	Secretariat	
	● Regular monitoring of budget to ensure spend within budget	Secretary/Audit and Risk Committee	
	● Completion of Annual Report and Accounts in a timely manner	Secretary/Chair	
		Secretary	

	● Annual statements of assurance from IT providers to be forwarded to Audit and Risk committee.		
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Approved by the Commission at its Meeting on 7 May 2025