

Business Plan 2023-24

Board agreed 26 June 2023
DfC approved 2 February 2024

Vision:

Well run and trusted charities making a difference in peoples' lives

Purpose:

'enabling charities to do things right through proportionate regulation, best practice and advice

Values:

| Value | Enabling Behaviours |
|---------------|---|
| Integrity | Honest, open, supportive, fair, trustworthy, respectful, valuing diversity, accountable. |
| Independence | Impartial, fearless, supporting equality, rigorous. |
| Excellence | Striving to be the best we can be, implementing best practice, learning, influencing, leading, seeking continuous improvement, innovating, proactive, targeted. |
| Accessible | Good communications, flexible approach, listening, respectful in tone, reflective, engaging, collaborative, encouraging and positive, visible. |
| Proportionate | Supportive, targeted, being responsive. |

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Foreword

This plan is the first in a new era of charity regulation and will be followed by a strategic plan for 2023-26. Since the Commission's last strategic plan there have been several significant changes, including the passing of the [Charities Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#) which addressed issues arising from the original act. The [Independent Review of Charity Regulation](#) was also progressed resulting in ninety three recommendations for the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Commission. These are referenced throughout this plan.

The Commission embraces the opportunity the Independent Review presents to reset the culture of regulation and develop as an enabling regulator. The Commission, like all public bodies, faces a budget reduction this year. It needs to balance its ongoing statutory remit with the new work introduced by the Independent Review and its recommendations. Individually these have some one hundred and nine actions to be addressed, with over ninety having implications for the Commission. In addition, as a delivery body, many recommendations will only be able to be taken forward as part of a programme of work with sponsor department and when resourcing is in place.

In 2022-23 the Commission completed ten of the review's recommendations. This plan sets out a twelve-month programme of work to advance a further 27 of the review recommendations for the Commission, balanced with delivery of statutory registration and casework, compliance and investigatory work. Managing to deliver a significant amount of the change agenda and maintain regulatory work will be a key challenge. Both are not deliverable in their entirety or at previous levels with the resourcing currently being made available. Cutbacks will have to be made to the scale of areas of regulatory work and response times will lengthen. Work on the strategic plan, which will be published after this plan, is ongoing with the Department for Communities to address recommendation 79 of the review, to ensure a focus on reporting more on outcomes.

Finally, the Commission would acknowledge the work of staff in delivering the results in the previous year which is included in section three.

Gerard McCurdy
Interim Chief Commissioner

Frances McCandless
Chief Executive

Executive summary

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is the independent regulator of Northern Ireland charities, as created by the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 (the "Act"), which was amended by the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2022. The Commission has five statutory objectives under the Act relating to public trust and confidence in charities, operation of the public benefit requirement, compliance by charity trustees, effective use of charitable resources, and enhancing accountability of charities.

At the start of this business plan there are over 7,100 charities on the register of charities on the Commission's website, with a large proportion having uploaded information about their annual accounts and reports for public display voluntarily. The submission of annual reports and accounts has once again become mandatory, following the passing of the Charities Act (NI) 2022. Ensuring a return to previous levels of compliance will be a major challenge for the Commission during the period of this plan.

The Commission has identified four strategic aims for the next three years which will deliver its wider statutory remit, the primary objective of which is increasing public trust and confidence in charities as well as the range of [Independent Review Recommendations](#) (IR recs) which are referenced throughout this plan. In terms of regulatory activity, the Commission has set the following performance targets:

External KPIs

- continue to build the charity register by processing 330 (+/- 10%) new cases to decision by year end, if a sufficient number of applications is received.
- process 60% of registration applications to decision within six months of receiving an application.
- review 150 Annual Monitoring Returns (AMRs) of charities legally required to report to the Commission.
- 60% of enquiry cases concluded within 12 months of receipt of concern.
- 55 engagement events/activities per year.
- Over the life of the business plan complete or substantially progress 27 recommendations from the Independent Review of Charity Regulation.

Internal KPIs

- manage the organisation within 1% budget;
- manage staff sickness absence within 3%; and
- pay 90% of suppliers within 10 days.

The Commission's current source of income is 100% 'Grant in Aid' from the Department for Communities. The overall 2023-24 resource budget allocation is £1,896¹k.

¹ Based on budget notified 23/06/23

1.0 Introduction

- 1.0 The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's purpose is to register, regulate and report on the charity sector in Northern Ireland. At the start of this business plan there are over 7,100 charities in law with their charitable purposes and details on the Commission's website, with a large proportion having uploaded information about their annual accounts and reports for public display.
- 1.1 The Commission is a non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB), established by Royal Assent to deliver the statutory provisions of the Act, which was recently amended by the Charities Act (Northern Ireland 2022). It is sponsored by the Department for Communities (DfC), normally with a board of seven Commissioners appointed by the Department for Communities. For most of the duration of this plan there will be only six Commissioners in post.
- 1.2 As an NDPB the Commission is independent in its decision making, acting without fear or favour, in the public interest. Various decisions of the Commission are appealable to the Charity Tribunal or the Courts. The Commission welcomes the opportunity to test and clarify charity law as opportunities arise and also operates an internal decision review process to ensure decisions are robust.
- 1.3 The Commission has five statutory objectives under the Act:
- 1. to increase public trust and confidence in charities.*
 - 2. to promote awareness and understanding of the operation of the public benefit requirement.*
 - 3. to promote compliance by charity trustees with their legal obligations in exercising control and management of the administration of their charities.*
 - 4. to promote the effective use of charitable resources.*
 - 5. to enhance the accountability of charities to donors, beneficiaries and the general public.*

2.0 Commission Vision, Purpose and Values

2.1. The Commission's Vision for the period of this business plan is:

'Well run and trusted charities making a difference in peoples' lives.'

2.2. Our Purpose is:

'enabling charities to do things right through proportionate regulation, best practice and advice.'

2.3. The Commission works with its various stakeholders and provides services which reflect our Corporate Values of being:

| Value | Enabling Behaviours |
|---------------|--|
| Integrity | Honest, open, supportive, fair, trustworthy, respectful, valuing diversity, accountable. |
| Independence | Impartial, fearless, supporting equality, rigorous. |
| Excellence | Striving to be the best we can be, implementing best practice, learning, influencing, responding, leading, seeking continuous improvement, innovating, proactive, targeted, proportionate. |
| Accessible | Good communications, flexible approach, listening, respectful in tone, reflective, engaging, collaborative, encouraging and positive, visible. |
| Proportionate | Supportive, targeted, being responsive. |

3.0 Strategic Aims and Risk Framework for 2023/24

- 3.1 Following publication of the [Independent Review of Charity Regulation](#) (January 2022) and coming into effect of the [Charities Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#) the organisation will focus on the following strategic Aims:
- Aims 1: Progressing charity registration to enhance accountability.
 - Aims 2: Progressing our development as an enabling regulator.
 - Aims 3: Continuing to develop proportionate regulation.
 - Aims 4: Operating as an effective and efficient public body.
- 3.2 In connection with these aims the Commission will face a range of challenges and issues which will be set out fully in PESTEL format in section 3 of the 2023-26 Strategic Plan. These include budget availability and pressures on the charity sector, and are reflected below. The Commission's governance framework incorporates a corporate risk register to address risks in relation to each annual business plan.

Risk Framework for 2023/24

- 3.3. During the 2020 -23 strategic plan period the Board managed risk levels which were much reduced compared to previous plans when the Commission was being set up and assuming new powers². The risks to be managed in relation to this plan include:
- The Independent Review of charity regulation presents an agenda to transition to a more enabling regulator. While the new regulatory policy and legislative framework is developed, Trustees may begin to operate a de facto compliance threshold in non-compliance with the current law and the Commission may have to develop interim risk-based approaches to respond.
 - Stakeholders may not engage with the Commission's plans to achieve increased engagement, reducing the Commission's ability to co-design and deliver change which impacts on the sector's trust in the Commission.
 - Organisational slowness in effecting the culture change to an enabling regulator recommended in the Independent Review could create a lack of visible evidence of change that leads to criticism and complaints.
 - The opportunities for better staff retention and satisfaction, and better work/life balance presented by hybrid working, may not be realised because of HR challenges, budgets and the amount of change, impacting on staff motivation and service outputs.
 - Budget is constrained and it may not be possible to reduce some costs within a year leading to reduced delivery of statutory work

² Refers to risk appetite, see [dfc-risk-management-framework.pdf \(nigov.net\)](#) for guidance

and regulatory decision making and creating difficulties in planning and delivering the Independent Review against the backdrop of increased charity sector expectations.

- There may be no scheme of delegation or a scheme may provide for less delegation than the draft scheme consulted upon, reducing the resource released back into the organisation to be applied to service delivery and preventing effective use of limited resources and timely decision making.

Review of performance

3.4. During 2022-23 the Commission achieved five of its seven (71%) key performance indicators (KPIs) and delivered against 45 service-related measures, as detailed below. The two KPIs not achieved related to spend of budget at year end and staff absence levels. In total 69 (91%) of the actions in the business plan were achieved at year end. The remainder included, for example, exploring options for a simplified registration process for smaller organisations, evaluating new online annual monitoring return form and guidance and seeking feedback from users on changes enquiry processes. These were either not started or completed by year end and will be carried forward into subsequent business plans.

External KPIs

- 555 registration application decisions made (target: 550). The results of a streamlined registration pilot were reviewed in June 2022 with the new processes now embedded. This has supported the Commission in speeding up the registration process.
- 75% of registration applications were processed within six months of receiving an application (target: 75%). This rose to 98% processed within six months of receiving a 'complete' application.
- 69% of enquiry cases were processed to closure within nine months of receiving a concern about a charity (target: 60%).
- 17% of annual returns due subject to a basic compliance check (target: 15%).

Internal KPIs

- 98.30% of creditors' invoices paid within 10 working days (target: 90%).
- total budget managed within 97.7% (target: 99%)
- staff absence levels managed within 8.74% (target: 3%).

3.5. In addition to service-related work in 2022-23 the Commission also progressed and completed ten [Independent Review recommendations](#):

- Board members taking active role in Stakeholder Forum and building relationships - IR rec 14.
- Set up a learning opportunity with the Charity Commission for England and Wales - IR rec 20.
- Set up a learning opportunity with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator - IR rec 21.
- The Commission should separate those charities on the Combined list who are awaiting registration call forward from those which are dormant or closed and those that have failed to come forward for registration – IR rec 23.
- The Commission should not list charities that fail to come forward when called as actively applying for registration and once removed, the onus should be on the charity trustees to reapply – IR rec 24.
- The Commission’s main focus should be on registering those charities which have come forward and are actively awaiting registration and that this focus should frame how the Commission’s sets its priorities at this time IR rec 30.
- Complete an MOU with Charities Regulatory Authority - IR rec 33.
- Review operating procedures to ensure that staff are fully briefed on the nature and format of material that Commissioners need to exercise the full scope of their powers effectively - IR rec 60.
- In line with best practice elsewhere, the Commission should revise its approach of automatically naming charity trustees in its statutory inquiry reports - IR rec 63a³.
- Review Terms of Reference for Schedule 1 Committees and consider the staff attendance requirement for such meetings - IR rec 72.

3.6 Work was also commenced on a further eleven recommendations and associated actions, which will continue in 2023/24:

- Introduce new registration and annual monitoring forms to allow collection of additional information to populate the Risk Assessment Framework (IR rec 5).
- Changing the tone of letters (IR rec 13).
- Resourcing or delivering trustee training, both initial and refresher sessions (IR rec 16a).
- Review use of website (IR rec 16b⁴).
- Review how guidance is pitched and communicated to charities. (IR rec 16c).
- More roadshow events and use of virtual platforms Zoom, Youtube and vlogs/videos/recordings of events available online (IR rec 16d).

³ 1st bullet point

⁴ 2nd bullet point

- More front facing engagement by Commission staff (see recommendation 18) (IR rec 16e).
- How communications by letter or email are signed, either by a staff member or the Chief Executive. (IR rec 16f).
- Review Website (IR rec 17a)
- Review of standardised letters, particularly in relation to compliance matters, to improve tone and clarity of content (IR rec 17b).
- Review of how the submission of annual reports and accounts is acknowledged and the level of feedback provided to charities (IR rec 17c).
- Review of how internal review procedures operate and are communicated (IR rec 17d).
- The use of virtual technology for engagement, training, clinics, roadshows and other methods of engagement. New ten minute guidance documents for better accessibility (IR rec 17e).
- Pilot direct contact with Commission staff within limited hours (IR rec 18).
- Introduce traffic light system that allows greater differentiation between filing defaulters (IR rec 38).
- Amend enquiries manual, softening tone, considering use of names in inquiry reports (IR rec 53).
- Adding individual staff names as signatories in correspondence and annually review (IR rec 56a).
- Reviewing and closing some long-running inquiries (IR rec 58)
- Amend decision review process to extend time limit to period longer than 3 months (IR rec 67).
- Call for new members to expand and develop the stakeholder forum to secure additional engagement (IR rec 75).

4.0 Business Results and Key Performance Indicators

4.1 Dependent on funding the Commission will aim to sustain a range of business results and key performance indicators (KPIs) over the course of the business plan. The key performance indicators will continue to be those reported in 2022/23.

External KPIs

- continue to build the charity register by processing 330 (+/- 10%) new cases to decision by year end, if a sufficient number of applications is received.
- process 60% of registration applications to decision within six months of receiving an application.
- review 150 Annual Monitoring Returns (AMRs) of charities legally required to report to the Commission.
- 60% of enquiry cases concluded within 12 months of receipt of concern.
- 55 engagement events per year.
- Over the life of the business plan complete or substantially progress 27 recommendations from the Independent Review of Charity Regulation.

Internal KPIs

- manage the organisation within 1% budget;
- manage staff sickness absence within 3%; and
- pay 90% of suppliers within 10 days.

4.2 The Commission intends that many of the 27 actions related to priority recommendations to be progressed in this business plan, particularly those to do with the Commission's regulatory approach eg reviewing and developing new guidance, and engagement with stakeholders eg training, are scaleable and modest amounts of work are planned to be done on some. If more resourcing is made available then additional activities could be progressed in relation to these recommendations in future years of this business plan.

5.0 Priorities, Actions and Measures

5.1 The text below outlines the actions that will be undertaken to progress the various priorities for 2023/24

| Strategic aims 1 - Progressing charity registration to enhance accountability. | Actions needed | Performance measures and information |
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| <p>Priority - we will support accountability of the sector through growing the register by:</p> <p>a) Continuing to build the register with a focus on prioritising progression of registration of remaining deemed charities (IR rec 22)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update and revamp Registering your Charity guidance and a range of associated digital/online support materials (IR rec 16c) • Progress complex cases on the Deemed List (IR rec 31a) • Process applications, preparing for Schedule 1 Committee and implementing registration decisions (IR rec 7) | <p>We publish performance information in our annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time taken from receipt of application to decision • Process 60% of registration applications to decision within six months of receiving an application. • Number of new applications for charitable status received. • Number of new Expressions of Intent received. • Number of users accessing pre-recorded online workshop. |
| <p>b) Work with DfC on impact and implementation of a registration threshold</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to work on DfC Introduction of Registration Threshold via Registration and Proportionality in Annual Reporting Working Group (IR rec 26) | <p>We publish performance information in our annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report on participation in meetings and progress of recommendation. |
| <p>c) Phasing out the Combined List</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the purpose of the combined | <p>We will publish performance</p> |

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| and scoping our further simplification of registration process | list and include indication of estimated waiting times for next tranche. (IR rec 25) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Phase out the combined list. (IR rec 25) | information in our annual report on the Board's decision. |
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| Strategic aims 2 - Progressing our development as an enabling regulator | Actions | Performance measures and information |
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| <p>Priority - We will respond to the development of charity regulation by:</p> <p>a) Working with sponsor department and other charity regulators and stakeholders to take forward key regulatory developments.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to contribute to the development of the new Charity SORP through the Charities SORP Committee and engagement with partners and via our role in the charities SORP-making authority (as resources allow). | <p>We will publish information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings: SORP Committee/stakeholder groups |
| <p>b) Enabling and facilitating the better administration and operation of charities through casework.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress casework applications and notifications to closure • Provide legal advice on complex cases as required | <p>We will publish information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of casework decisions. • Number of notifications processed to closure. |
| <p>c) Developing and implementing an effective engagement strategy reflecting a key role for the Stakeholder forum to inform the Commission's thinking across a range of areas.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to act as secretariat to the expanded stakeholder forum. • Ongoing liaison with helper groups. • Refresh and ongoing liaison with critical friends group about how guidance is pitched and communicated to charities. (IR rec 16 c) • Rework key pieces of guidance (including accounting and reporting guidance) and test with Stakeholder Forum and Helper Groups to inform future simpler framework for guidance. | <p>We will publish information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Stakeholder forum. • Number of times Stakeholder forum met. • Number of engagement events/activities (target 55). |

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| | <p>(IR rec 19b)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review new or updated guidance from a legal perspective to ensure legally robust. • Continued engagements across the sector and issues/queries arising outside formal consultation and engagement channels (resource dependent). • Keep the composition of the Stakeholder Forum under review (IR rec 75) | |
| <p>d) Developing and implementing a new communications strategy to change the Commission's communication culture and enhance effectiveness of key communications channels. IR rec 17a)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications strategy reflecting the Board taking the lead in setting tone and direction (IR rec 13). • Annual review of communications specifically with reference to anonymising letters, emails etc. annually and practice amended accordingly. (IR rec 16f, 17b, 56) • Develop acknowledgement email to inform charities of next steps following AMR submission. (IR rec 17c) • Ensure that the phone service helpline allows escalation of a call directly to a Commission staff member if there is not an immediate connection to a staff member. (IR rec 18) | <p>We will publish information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usage of website. • Feedback from users on changes to website. • NI Direct service activity. • Feedback from users on NI Direct and frequency of reporting to SMT /Board and bi-annual Legal Advisory Group. |

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| <p>e) Review and redesign website (IR rec 19a).</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop project plan and communication plan. • Make interim changes to site map – keep, change, remove. • Agree specification and procure new site and hosting. • Develop site with user engagement. • Internal & External User Acceptance Testing. • Launch new site. | <p>We will publish information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project delivery |
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| Strategic Aims 3 - Continuing to develop proportionate regulation | Actions needed | Performance measures and information |
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| <p>Priority - we will support compliance by charity trustees with their legal obligations and address non-compliance by:</p> <p>a) Implementing annual return process including risk based checking, and preparation for automating selection for risk based checking.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to evaluate the new online Annual Monitoring Return (AMR) form and guidance. • Review risk-based parameters for selection of Annual Monitoring Returns for checking. (IR rec 54) • Review a risk-based sample of Annual Monitoring Returns (basic compliance checks) for compliance with reporting regulations. • Continue to monitor failed basic compliance check outcomes relating to accounts re-submission and proportionality, in order to inform potential changes to manual/procedures. • Take appropriate action if annual returns are not submitted by charities as required by the law. • Monitor emerging risk issues as they appear through Commission processes and maintain existing focus on | <p>We will publish information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 150 Annual Monitoring Returns (AMRs) due to the Commission subject to basic compliance check. • 100% of charities checked (BCC's) with 'serious' issues in accounts issued with guidance on how to improve AMR submission. • Report % of charities who failed to submit their accounts on time and marked on register as in default or equivalent status when status switched back on. • Number of concerns about charity accounts. • No of annual monitoring returns received by the Commission voluntarily by charities affected by the judgment and not legally required to submit a return. |

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| | <p>safeguarding issues as they arise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure accuracy of register by updating financial year end dates in the event of change requests or final year end dates following notification of closure. • Reinstate reminders and default notifications to all charities. • Develop Annual Return Regulations 2023/24 if required. • Develop next iteration of online AMR (2020+) | |
| b) Developing monitoring & compliance processes to further incorporate proportionality considerations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review procedures for filing defaulters in terms of proportionality ie tone, guidance etc • Publish bi-annual monitoring review to promote compliance • Work with other regulators to learn actions in relation to compliance cases with a focus on common regulatory guidance issues eg quorum • Review and update policy on “wet signatures” following advice from Counsel • Scope out reporting requirements of a Common Investment Fund | <p>We will publish information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes identified in Monitoring & Compliance processes. • Number of information sessions with sector and advisors. |
| c) Develop, implement and evaluate a traffic light system for filing status display on the register (IR rec 38). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with stakeholders and critical friends on changes to the register. • Implement ICT system that displays the Ministerial review recommendation | <p>We will publish information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes identified in Monitoring & Compliance processes. |

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| | <p>for a traffic light system for filing defaulters and change of language for more positive tone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop comms messaging • Associated guidance to be updated and reviewed by critical friends. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from the sector and site users on the updated filing status. • Number of hits on the register webpage. |
| d) Continue development and testing of Risk Assessment Framework to help inform proportionality criteria to ensure prioritisation for enquiries, compliance and AMR selection. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate Concerns Risk Assessment Template and concerns form to feed into Risk Assessment Framework development. • Review and close long running inquiries based on proportionality criteria. • Explore and develop Risk Assessment Framework in relation to Basic Compliance Check selection. • Test Risk Assessment Framework for proportionality and flexibility in functionality (IR rec 6) • Prioritise completion of the new Risk Assessment Framework and the supporting ICT | <p>We will publish information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress of implementing the Concerns Risk Assessment Template. |
| e) Manage Enquiries programme to ensure risk based and proportionate regulation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued development of enquiries manual. • Continue to process concerns, carry out investigative work and legally review recommendations which invoke statutory powers, as required. • Review and improve written records of the decision-making process in relation to statutory inquiries, record keeping | <p>We will publish information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of concerns received about charities which have an initial enquiry risk assessment within 30 days (Target 50%) • % of enquiry cases concluded within 12 months of receipt of concern (target 60%) |

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| | <p>(IR rec 57)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review long running inquiries with a view to reaching the necessary decisions to close them out in a timely (IR rec 58) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> % of enquiry cases older than 12 months processed to closure. Our risk-based approach to regulation. Number of concerns received / enquiries opened/closed. Number of recommendations brought to Schedule 1 Committee Number of instances self-regulatory and regulatory guidance issued. Number of orders & directions issued. Number of statutory inquiries opened. |
| <p>f) Subject to DfC prioritisation, work with the department on initial scoping for a new Charities Bill and Charitable Incorporated Organisations.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute to DfC scoping work on a Charities Bill. | <p>We will publish information in the annual report on: work in conjunction with DfC.</p> |

| Strategic Aims 4 - Operating as an effective and efficient public body | Actions Needed | Performance measures and information |
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| <p>Priority - We will manage our business and deliver services to our customers in an efficient and effective way while promoting a positive internal organisational culture by:</p> <p>a) maintaining a focus on organisational governance, culture and values.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Commission will embrace this opportunity to reset the culture of regulation (IR rec 3). • Build into values and planning a commitment to proportionate enforcement that allows sufficient resources to be directed towards supporting charities to achieve compliance (IR rec 15). • In tandem with the Department, document the new partnership arrangements, roles and responsibilities for future relationships with the Department in a new Partnership Agreement (IR rec 76). • Review committee structures. • Audit & Risk Assurance committee implement annual agenda. • Human Resources ctte implement annual agenda. • Continue to develop and implement the | <p>We will publish information in our annual report governance section on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit opinions. • Reports on internal compliance. • Results of staff survey. • Compliance with performance management strategy. • People Strategy Action Plan Implementation. • Progress of policy development agenda. • Use of available statutory powers. • Number of tribunal and court challenges. |

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| | <p>People strategy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and refine policy on Hybrid working. • Carry out External Board effectiveness exercise (IR rec 74). • Report on the Independent Counsel Review Action Plan progress. (IR rec 62) • Implement review of retention and disposal schedule. • Respond to and progress litigation as required. | |
| b) reporting reliable information on performance against targets and standards, and on the use of all available statutory powers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting against business plan. • Assurance checks programme. • Regular reports, briefings and updates to SMT, Board and sponsor department. (IR rec 83) | We will publish performance information in our annual report re corporate Key Performance Indicators |
| c) developing the capacity to manage change effectively and identify ongoing improvements to systems and processes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with the Department to develop a workplan for the implementation of recommendations in the Independent Review Report to be delivered in a timely manner (IR rec 2). • Input to work relevant to the Department's future review of its funding model for the Commission (IR rec 9). • Assist the Department to examine the need for short term, interim resources to be provided to the Commission | <p>We will publish information in our annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project/programme team work. • Feedback from critical friends and users on testing new systems. |

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| | <p>before legislation has completed (IR rec 10).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the Terms of Reference for Schedule 1 Committees (IR rec 71). • Regular liaison with all teams across the Commission to create a Policy development plan (PDP) to guide prioritisation of work across the Commission. • Continuously monitor, adapt and regularly report on operation of the Policy Development Plan. • Operationalise the Risk Assessment Framework in pilot areas and monitoring scoring/ratios. • Review project/programme teams. | |
| <p>d) monitoring and responding to customer needs and satisfaction.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review customer service standards/charter. • Effectively deal with complaints and identify lessons learnt. • Comply with FOIs/SARs and provide legal review as required. | <p>We will publish performance information in the annual report on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of complaints received about the Commission. • Number of information requests (FoI, DPA, EiR) received and responded to. • Feedback from customer surveys on website. <p>We will publish information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of the Action Plan arising out of Independent Counsel’s final report. |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of stakeholder forum meetings and key issues. |
| e) operate HR policies via people strategy. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retain and develop staff and commissioners. • review new ways of working (Hybrid). • implement staff/commissioner training plan. • undertake Inductions. • review induction process. • Carry out accommodation needs review in preparation for an office move. • Staff survey. • Analysis of staff training. | <p>We will publish performance information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome of accommodation review. • Staff engagement indicators. • Training spend. |
| f) having a commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce and monitor the implementation of new five-year equality and disability plans. • Training and outreach. • Annual equality training for staff. – developed and reported on. • Equality, diversity and inclusion as part of engagement strategy. | <p>We will publish an annual progress report to ECNI on scheme implementation and achievement of the action plan.</p> <p>We will publish ad hoc information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • equality issues identified through project and program teams. • No. of equality scheme complaints. |
| g) Develop and implement a 2023-26 ICT strategy. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT strategy board to meet quarterly. • Future online forms decision. • Cyber assurance. | <p>We will publish performance information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT strategy implementation |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand use of NI direct (text messaging services). • Review accounting software. • Intranet development. | |
| h) Implement the out workings of a potential scheme of delegation. (IR rec 90) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in consultation on potential Scheme of delegation. • Assess how any potential scheme of delegation may impact on current processes and manuals (IR rec 61). • Scope out changes to manuals, guidance and ICT systems and implement, subject to any Scheme being agreed. | <p>We will publish performance information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale of preparatory work • Potential release of resource into other parts of regulatory work. |
| i) Operate a robust internal legal advisory capacity. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide robust advice. • Provide representation of Commission at Tribunal and Court proceedings. | <p>We will publish performance information in the annual report on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels of advice internal provision. • No of Tribunals |

6.0 Resources

6.1 The Commission's current source of income is 100% 'Grant in Aid' from the Sponsor Department. The following table outlines the allocations across the main budget headings. The introduction section of this plan provides a narrative explaining what activities will be reduced and/or stopped.

| Item | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 |
|---|---------------------------|------------------|
| Revenue Costs | £ 000's | £ 000's |
| Commissioners' Remuneration | 67 | 71 |
| Staffing Costs | 1,421 | 1,450 |
| Staff/Commissioner Non-Remuneration Costs | 85 | 62 |
| IT Costs | 66 | 72 |
| Premises Costs | 84 | 98 |
| General Running Costs | 29 | 34 |
| Programme Delivery Costs | 162 | 109 |
| Total Revenue Costs | 1,915 | 1,896 |
| Capital spend | 40 | 97 |
| Capital Leased Asset (accommodation) | 84 | 114 ⁵ |
| Total Capital Costs | 125 | 97 |
| Overall Total | 2,040 | 2,107 |

⁵ Pending outcome of review of Accommodation Lease Q2-2023/24

Budgeting Assumptions

The detailed budget assumptions are as follows.

| | |
|---|--|
| Commissioner costs | It is assumed a full Board will be in place following public appointments by DfC. It is assumed there will continue to be payments for Schedule 1 committee work and additional Commissioner days. Sponsor department are undertaking a review of Commissioner remuneration. |
| Staff Remuneration | It is assumed the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) pay settlement for 2023/24 will be a 1% increase and continue for a further three years, and that employer payroll costs will be fully met and remain unchanged. |
| Staff/Commissioners non-remuneration costs | The existing recruitment budget will be maintained in anticipation of continuing staff turnover of around 10-15% per annum arising from the low pay awards. The training budget will be flat lined to reflect the need to maintain existing staff knowledge and any recruited as part of normal churn. An increase in travel and subsistence is anticipated in light of implementing changes in line with NICS policy. |
| IT costs | Some change is anticipated in ICT support costs related to IT Assist. Minor spend is anticipated in terms of website, preparation for a registration threshold and some on line form software development to meet the requirements of annual monitoring returns for the next two years. |
| Facilities/Premises costs | Facilities/Premises costs are expected to continue to increase. A review of accommodation will be undertaken during the year of this plan with a view to a move in the next business year. |
| General running costs | General running costs are anticipated to increase in line with inflation. |
| Programme Costs (excl legal and professional costs) | Programme delivery costs are anticipated to be reduced to bare minimum in light of budget pressures. |
| Legal and professional costs | Legal and professional fees will remain at levels. |
| Research costs | No spend on research during the year |