

Office of the
Attorney General
Northern Ireland

BUSINESS PLAN 2022-2023



1. Introduction

The Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 establishes the Attorney General for Northern Ireland as a statutory and independent office holder within the devolved administration of Northern Ireland. The Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland (OAGNI) exists to provide high quality advice and support to the Attorney General to assist her in carrying out her functions. These functions include:

- acting as Chief Legal Adviser to the Northern Ireland Executive in relation to the most complex and important legal matters facing the Executive;
- scrutinising every Bill passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly (both Executive Bills and Bills initiated by individual MLAs) to determine whether the provisions of those Bills are within the legislative competence of the Assembly;
- protecting the public interest in the courts where appropriate;
- the power to participate in litigation where a devolution issue under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 arises;
- producing guidance for criminal justice organisations on the exercise of their functions in a manner consistent with international human rights standards;
- taking decisions on whether or not to direct a coroner to hold an inquest under section 14 of the Coroners Act (Northern Ireland) 1959;
- the protection of the public interest in matters related to charities;
- discharging functions under the Mental Capacity Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, where the Attorney is empowered to refer to the Review Tribunal the question of whether the authorisation of a deprivation of liberty under the 2016 Act is appropriate; and
- discharging responsibilities in relation to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS), including the appointment of the Director and Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions.

A complete list of the Attorney General's functions can be found on our website www.attorneygeneralni.gov.uk

2. Vision

To be an office that is recognised for its culture of integrity, quality and independence in working to support the Attorney General for Northern Ireland in the delivery of her duties and responsibilities.

3. Values

The office is committed to values that reflect the distinctive nature of the role and work of the Attorney.

- a. **Valuing our people** - to achieve the highest standards in all aspects of our work we depend on the skills, knowledge, experience, dedication and hard work of our people. We will provide the opportunity for our people to perform to the best of their ability and to develop their talents and capabilities to achieve these high standards.
- b. **Treating everyone with respect** - we value the individual contribution, diverse experiences and perspectives that all of our people bring to the OAGNI.
- c. **Acting with integrity** - we adhere to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Standards, NICS Code of Ethics and legal professional standards and take personal responsibility for our actions.
- d. **Taking pride in our work** - we strive for the highest standards in all aspects of our work. We will continually look for ways of improving the working practices within OAGNI.
- e. **Working with others** - we engage constructively with other people and organisations and share information, knowledge and good practice. We work with others in order to develop effective relationships and deliver the highest standards in all aspects of our work.

4. Strategic Themes



Providing support and advice to the Attorney General - To ensure that the Attorney has the appropriate high quality advice and support to assist her in effectively discharging the duties and responsibilities of her office.



Communication and engagement - Maintain and develop an outward looking office that effectively communicates and engages with all our stakeholders.



Delivering accountability and high standards of governance - To ensure that corporate governance and resource management within OAGNI is of the highest standard and complies with all statutory and best practice requirements.



Valuing our people - To ensure that our staff are supported and empowered to carry out their roles and to make the office a great place to work.

5. Budget

Under section 22(3) of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 the Office of the Attorney General is to be funded by the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly. The office has been allocated an initial (indicative) resource budget of £1.354m for 2022/23. Most of the expenditure is on salaries and accommodation.

6. People

Subject to the approval of the First Minister and deputy First Minister as to numbers, salary and other conditions of service, the Attorney General may appoint staff to the Office of the Attorney General. As of 1 April 2022, the Office of the Attorney General consists of 5.6 full time equivalent lawyers (one of whom is deployed exclusively on deprivation of liberty cases); 2 trainee solicitors; 3 paralegals (who deal exclusively with deprivation of liberty cases); and 3.8 administrative Staff.

THEMES	OUTCOMES (Description of intended impact)	ACTIONS (How we will achieve our outcomes)	MEASURES (How we will measure success)
<p>Support & Advice</p>	<p>High quality advice provided to the Attorney, rule of law supported, public interest protected and devolution supported.</p>	<p>OAGNI will provide or secure specialist research, analysis and advice for the Attorney on constitutional and administrative law matters (including EU exit), human rights law, mental capacity law, coronial law, contempt of court, the law of charities and litigation strategy.</p>	<p>Percentage of the Attorney's requests for advice and support met within agreed timescales. (Target 100%)</p> <p>Percentage of deprivation of liberty cases considered within 7 days of notification. (Target 100%)</p> <p>Percentage of bills passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly assessed for legislative competence within 14 days of final stage. (Target 100%)</p> <p>Percentage of court or tribunal deadlines met. (Target 100%)</p>
<p>Communication and engagement</p>	<p>Increased understanding of the role of the Attorney and enhanced confidence in the office.</p> <p>The fostering of effective working relationships with others, enabling the office to provide well informed advice to the Attorney.</p>	<p>OAGNI will support the Attorney to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Attend speaking engagements at conferences and events. -Deliver information sessions for MLAS, Assembly staff, NI departments, legal professional bodies, law students and other groups and bodies. <p>OAGNI will maintain a quality accessible website.</p> <p>OAGNI will treat those engaging with the office with courtesy and respect, responding to correspondence and queries within a reasonable timescale.</p>	<p>Percentage of respondents reporting an increase in awareness of the role of the Attorney General measured through a survey taken following information sessions and events. (Target 80%)</p> <p>Number of "hits" on website.</p> <p>Responses received through feedback link on website.</p> <p>Percentage expressing satisfaction with their interaction with the OAGNI in an annual survey of stakeholders. (Target 80%)</p>

THEMES	OUTCOMES (Description of intended impact)	ACTIONS (How we will achieve our outcomes)	MEASURES (How we will measure success)
Accountability and Governance	<p>Corporate governance and resource management within the OAGNI is of the highest standard and fulfils all statutory requirements and takes account of best practice, thereby ensuring that public money is effectively, efficiently and appropriately used in supporting the Attorney to discharge her functions.</p>	<p>OAGNI will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - implement effective, efficient and accurate budgetary and financial management processes; - process all payments in a timely and accountable manner; - produce an annual business plan; - ensure the continuous identification and regular review of business risks, and implement mitigating actions where necessary; - provide accurate Quarterly Assurance and Performance Statements to TEO; and - ensure all procurement is compliant with DoF and TEO Guidance. 	<p>We will deliver within +/- 1.5% of planned spend.</p> <p>Percentage of payments properly authorised and processed within specified TEO timescales. (Target 100%)</p> <p>Percentage of financial management and governance information returned to TEO in line with required timeframes. (Target 100%)</p>
Valuing our people	<p>Staff are engaged, feel supported and equipped to carry out their roles; making the office a great place to work.</p>	<p>OAGNI will support staff to develop individually as lawyers or administrators and collectively as colleagues by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing an OAGNI learning and development plan that meets the needs of staff and the office; - Supporting staff to attend CPD training and mandatory training; - developing a staff knowledge sharing portal; - providing staff with opportunities to experience different areas of work across the office. <p>OAGNI will support communications between staff by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - holding weekly staff meetings; - holding monthly team briefings; - establishing working groups to take forward change projects within the office. <p>OAGNI will support staff health and well-being by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - implementing the NICS health and well-being policies; - holding a “whole office” event each quarter to ensure that staff have an opportunity for face to face contact with all colleagues; - having the appropriate number of skilled staff in post to undertake the work of the office. 	<p>Percentage of professionally qualified legal staff meeting CPD requirements. (Target 100%)</p> <p>Percentage of staff training needs met in line with learning and development plan (Target 80%)</p> <p>Existence of portal by end March 2023.</p> <p>Achievement of outcome measured through staff surveys and face to face discussions as appropriate.</p>



Attorney General
for Northern Ireland