NIJAC
Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission

Plenary Minutes
Thursday 19 June 2025 at 9.30am

(via Microsoft Teams)

Present:	The Rt. Hon Dame Siobhan Keegan, the Lady Chief Justice of Northern Ireland (Chair)
	Mr Bernard Brady KC
	Mr Colm Donaghy
	Mrs Maureen Eccles
	Mr Justice Michael Humphreys
	Mr Brian McTeggart
	District Judge (MC) Anne Marshall
	Judge Geoffrey Miller KC
	Mr Michael Robinson
	Lord Justice Treacy
In Attendance:	Mrs Tonya McCormac
	Mr Duncan Greer
	Mr Andrew Millar
	Mrs Collette Quinn
	Mrs April Matchett

1. Welcome/Apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1.2 An apology was noted from Ms Patricia MacBride.

2. Conflicts of Interest

2.1 No conflicts of interest were declared regarding items included on the agenda.

3. Confidentiality

3.1 The Chair reiterated to all the need for confidentiality to be maintained.

4. Minutes of Board meeting of 27 March 2025

4.1 The Chair requested members to approve the minutes of 27 March 2025 which had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Members approved.

4.2 The Chair noted all matters arising from the previous meeting had been completed or would be discussed as part of the agenda.

5. Chief Executive's Report

5.1 This report had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Mrs McCormac welcomed any questions or comments from the Board as she noted the following:

5.2 Plenary papers have been streamlined to avoid duplication. In some areas the CEO Report signposted to other Flagged papers on the agenda which would be covered during the meeting.

5.3 Mrs McCormac referred to the Strategic Performance Dashboard 2025-26. She noted that all measures and actions were in progress in the first quarter of the Business year and on track for delivery.

5.4 Mrs McCormac explained that Finances would be covered under the Business Committee report from Mr Donaghy but remarked that NIJAC was in a better position following correspondence between the Chair and the Permanent Secretary. These letters had also been included with the papers.

5.5 Giving an update on Internal Audit, Mrs McCormac highlighted NIJAC's Complaints Policy and Procedure and NIJAC's Conflicts of Interest Policy had been reviewed as part of the planned programme of work. NIJAC received a 'Satisfactory' rating (the highest available) on its' Complaints Management. Four recommendations and three added value comments were made. The report acknowledged that a number of these had been self-identified by the Senior Leadership Team which was important as this demonstrates good practice. These are being progressed through ARAC. NIJAC are awaiting the report on the audit of NIJAC's Conflicts of Interest Policy.

5.6 Turning to engagement, Mrs McCormac highlighted the significant involvement of Commissioners in outreach despite a challenging financial year. She thanked the Commissioners for their help and support with this.

5.7 Mrs McCormac gave an update on the Public Appointments Process for Lay Commissioners. There was high interest in the scheme with 111 applicants applying, 107 brought through to the paper sift and 22 applicants shortlisted for interview.

5.8 DJ (MC) Marshall asked if skills from the Board Effectiveness discussion had been made known to the Selection Panel. Mrs McCormac responded in the affirmative and that they had also informed the assessment criteria for the process.

5.9 Mrs McCormac noted that Judge Miller KC would be retiring in August 2025 and that a nomination for his replacement had been made to TEO for ministerial approval.

5.10 The Internal Auditors will undertake the periodic externally facilitated review of Board Effectiveness which is required for Public Bodies and is included in the NIJAC/TEO Partnership agreement. It is anticipated that this will take place during September/October 2025.

5.11 Mrs McCormac highlighted that Commissioners will be asked to complete some online training courses over the summer months. On average these courses would take 30 mins to complete. Mrs Mayes (HR Business Partner) will be the staff support on this and will email information in due course. The Chair asked Commissioners to complete any online training asked over the summer months.

Action Point

Commissioners to complete online training courses when made available over the Summer.

5.12 Mrs McCormac gave an update on staff changes:

- The Recruitment Information Officer recruitment failed to provide an appointable applicant. Over the Summer months SLT plan to source a Data Information Specialist through Agency for a fixed period to lead on a Data Management Improvement Project.
- NIJAC's Communications Manager commenced a secondment to TEO on 24 March 2025. SLT have considered the needs in this area and are utilising the opportunity of the secondment period to recruit a Digital Content Creator on a one-year basis initially. This will focus engagement and outreach on website, social media, videos, podcasts and exploration of new digital platforms.

5.13 Mr Millar added that they anticipated filling these roles by the end of June/start of July 2025. Mr McTeggart asked if the delay in filling the Communications role had affected engagement but was advised it had not impacted at this point due to short term period and the planned recruitment underway.

5.14 Mrs McCormac concluded the presentation of the Chief Executive's Report by highlighting upcoming dates for the diary including the opportunity to utilise some dates to celebrate NIJAC's 20th Anniversary (next page):

Business Committee Advisory Committee Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Plenary	Tuesday 2 September 2025 Postponed in Q2 Tuesday 9 September 2025 Tuesday 7 October 2025
Visit of JAC Ireland to NIJAC	October 2025
Politicians Event Please hold dates tentatively until confirmed	November 2025 Monday 3, 10, 17 November 2025
Stakeholder Festive Lunch	11 December 2025
Tripartite Belfast It is anticipated this will take place during the last week of February or within the first two weeks of March	February / March 2026 2 days between 24 February – 12 March 2026

5.15 The Board had no further questions or comments and noted these updates.

6. Advisory Committee – 5 June 2025

6.1 The Chair noted that Judge Miller KC completes his term as a NIJAC Commissioner in August 2025. She explained that he will be invited to attend October Plenary Lunch for his farewell presentation in person. She invited him to provide an update on behalf of Advisory Committee.

6.2 Judge Miller KC referred Members to the Minutes of the Advisory Committee held on 5 June 2025 highlighting the following:

6.3 Belfast Solicitor's Association

6.3.1 DJ (MC) Marshall and Mr Millar attended a Belfast Solicitor's Association (BSA) Event on 12 June 2025. Judge Miller KC invited them to give an update to Plenary.

6.3.2 DJ (MC) Marshall explained the event was online. Mr Millar spoke on the application process, the Person Specification and the assessment methods used in the schemes. She followed giving her experience as both an applicant and assessor. There were between 55-61 attendees from a range of firms and departments. This figure was higher than usual. Attendees asked questions ranging from types of experience needed to the marking of test to assessment methods. DJ (MC) Marshall was of the view that the event was useful and helped to demystify the process.

6.3.3 Mr Millar echoed DJ (MC) Marshall's comments and thought the combination of sharing about the mechanics of the process and personal experience had worked well. Mr Millar noted that he will make an approach to the Bar of NI through Mr Brady KC for a similar event.

Action Point

Mr Millar to approach the Bar of NI to set up an outreach and engagement event.

6.4 Judge Miller KC referred to the anticipated Lay Magistrates' Scheme. He explained the Appointment Scheme Requirement (ASR) is being revised with the scheme(s) anticipated to run over a period of years from 2026-27.

6.5 The Directorate of Appointments & Engagement Report to Advisory Committee (which now includes a new format for scheme updates) was noted as clear, transparent and user friendly. Judge Miller KC highlighted the communications analytics, also within the report, and stated the importance of these in a digital age. Cognisant of the financial constraints NIJAC faces he raised that the Digital Content Creator role should be prioritised.

6.6 Judge Miller KC pointed Members to the 'DRAFT Complaints Policy and Procedure' that had been shared in advance of the meeting. Mrs McCormac had spoken to this earlier in the meeting. He reiterated Internal Audit rated their Review of NIJAC's Complaints Management as 'Satisfactory' (the highest available) and the policy had been reviewed and updated. Advisory Committee recommend this revised Policy be adopted.

Action Point

The Chair asked Plenary to approve Complaints Policy and Procedure. Members approved.

6.7 Judge Miller KC presented the Strategic Engagement Framework, which seeks to ground NIJAC's engagement in the five themes of the Corporate Plan 2025-30, noting an amendment to the wording.

6.8 The Review of the Judicial Profile is complete with a survey showing broad support for the new profile and no negative comments. Judge Miller KC, on behalf of Advisory Committee, made the recommendation to Plenary to adopt The Judicial Profile. Members approved.

6.9 Judge Miller KC explained that a Progress Paper will be provided to Advisory Committee on a regular basis detailing the Annual Business Plan commitments as relating to their remit and progress against such.

6.10 Advisory Committee discussed the Handling of Applicant Withdrawal from Interview, as requested by Plenary. Judge Miller KC updated Members on the discussions. He noted the consensus of opinion was, that in the interests of fairness, if an applicant withdraws from interview any later than 12 noon on the working day prior to their scheduled interview that their place will not be offered to any reserve applicant. Should earlier notification be received (of at least one week) then their place will be offered to the first placed applicant on any reserve of applicants who have met the threshold which may exist. NIJAC staff will notify the Selection Committee and ask them to consider the invitation of the next placed applicant on the list. The Chair invited views with the members agreeing this was a fair and balanced approach.

6.11 Judge Miller KC updated Plenary on its' request for Advisory Committee to consider the matter of ethnic representation with the judiciary. When examining this, the Committee noted a slight increase in ethnic minority representation. However, further work to encourage greater ethnic minority representation in applicant pools would be needed. It was agreed that this was a long-term project which should be kept in the forefront of our minds.

6.12 Judge Miller KC further noted a considerable discussion had taken place around the Holding of Multiple Judicial Offices. It was deemed that once a person took up a salaried role then they should relinquish all fee paid roles unless there are strong grounds to retain. This should be in consultation with the Presider and LCJ. Plenary discussed this agreeing it was a complex area where legal advice may need to be taken, a policy document drafted and updated Terms & Conditions made available.

Action Point

Mr Millar to lead on seeking legal advice around the Holding of Multiple Judicial Offices and progressing this through Advisory Committee.

6.13 Following a request by Plenary in March 2025, Judge Miller KC reported that the Duration of Reserve Lists were discussed by Advisory Committee with agreement that the present arrangements were sufficient. The Chair invited views. Members were in agreement on the matter.

6.14 Judge Miller KC concluded his report by noting that this was his last meeting as a NIJAC Commissioner. He recorded his thanks for the Board Members and Staff. He wished Mr Brady KC well as he takes over as Chair of Advisory Committee in September 2025.

6.15 The Chair thanked Judge Miller KC and asked if Members had any other comments or questions on the Advisory Committee report. Mr McTeggart noted that the new Director of Appointments & Engagement Report reflected that Point of Contact usage was low on schemes. As this is helpful for applicant's performance, perhaps there was potential to promote this more.

7. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) – 10 June 2025

7.1 Mrs Eccles referred Members to the Minutes of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 10 June 2025:

7.2 She highlighted the Corporate Risk Register noting SLT reviewed it for 2025-26 Business Plan with two risks brought forward from last year and no new risks highlighted at this stage and ARAC have accepted this:

(i) The Finance risk remain at RED/HIGH – the 2025-26 position is more settled now, so the Risk is concerned more with the future and the unresolved issue of the Opening Budget Allocation being routinely less than the necessary funding. Discussions with TEO continue.

(ii) The CYBER SECURITY is at AMBER/MEDIUM – no issues but we need to maintain a high level of vigilance. NIJAC have signed up for a DoF provided cloud-based training that will send Quarterly training updates to Staff and Commissioners. This training is mandatory.

7.3 Mrs Eccles highlighted that External Audit will be carrying out fieldwork testing over the summer months starting at the end of July 2025.

7.4 Mrs Eccles noted the Complaints Policy Review by Internal Audit. She reminded Plenary that this had received a Satisfactory rating with four Recommendations. She reported that three are complete, including two that have been incorporated in the revised Complaints Policy that was approved by Plenary. The final recommendation relating to training will be in place by September 2025.

7.5 Internal Audit Programme

7.5.1 Mrs Eccles invited Mr Greer to update Plenary in relation to the Internal Audit Programme for 2024-25 and 2025-26 and the Internal Audit Charter and Mandate.

7.5.2 Mr Greer reported that NIJAC are expected to receive an overall 'Satisfactory Rating' on their Internal Audit for 2024-25 and this will be included in the Annual Report and Accounts. The Programme for 2025-26 will examine:

- Adherence to UKGDPR
- Board Effectiveness
- Operational Resilience

7.5.3 Mr Greer noted that The Revised Internal Audit Standards required NIJAC and the Internal Auditors to discuss the NJAC Internal Audit Charter and the NIJAC Internal Audit Mandate which formalise the aims and key aspects of the IA Function. This took place at the ARAC meeting on 10 June 2025 with all parties' content with the information presented.

7.6 Plenary noted the updates on behalf of ARAC. The Chair thanked Mrs Eccles.

NIJAC
Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission

8 Business Committee – Meeting postponed in Q1

8.1 Mr Donaghy advised Plenary that Business Committee had been postponed in Q1 as a mitigating measure in relation to finances. An electronic update had been circulated on 9 June 2025. Mr Donaghy drew Members attention to the following:

8.2 Finances

8.2.1 On 27 March 2025 the Board accepted the Committee's recommendation to institute contingency measures in order to keep within the 2025-26 Opening Budget Allocation from TEO that represented £165k or 15% less than requirements. Following correspondence between the Chair of NIJAC and the Permanent Secretary, £68k was added to the opening baseline with a further £6k added in June 25 monitoring (the latter is a non-recurring allocation).

8.2.2 The additional allocations have been prioritised to cover the schemes in 2025-26 which were postponed in the contingency arrangements. A re-forecasting exercise is currently underway as a number of recent staff changes could now generate savings available to further bridge any remaining shortfall for 2025-26. However, Mr Donaghy explained future years were uncertain and as explained earlier in the meeting this was why the Risk remains as RED/HIGH on the Corporate Risk Register.

8.2.3 The Chair invited comments or questions noting that although the position is uncertain it is better than it was.

8.2.4 Mr McTeggart commented that the finances continued to be a chronic problem and raised if NIJAC should begin an Issues Log (as per the heating problem in Headline Building) which could be examined by ARAC.

8.2.5 Members considered the idea of an Issues Log discussing the various records NIJAC currently maintain on this matter including various Committees minutes, the quarterly meetings with TEO, the designation of RED/HIGH on the Corporate Risk Register, the correspondence between the Chair of NIJAC and the Permanent Secretary and NIJAC schemes now being categorised as an 'inescapable pressure' with TEO Finance. The consensus of Plenary was that at this stage an Issues Log was not required.

8.2.6 Mrs McCormac gave assurances to the Board that NIJAC have plenty of information on file and if an Issues Log is required in the future this will be progressed with the Chair of ARAC. She highlighted the financial situation is being closely monitored and will continue to be also noting that the main costs for NIJAC are linked to Headline Building and staffing. SLT and the Chair of Business Committee are looking at opportunities to achieve efficiencies within Accommodation and the Service Delivery Model. The Chair of NIJAC will also meet with the Permanent Secretary again in November 2025.

8.3 Accommodation

8.3.1 Mr Donaghy reminded Members the current lease for Headline Building ends on 5 January 2027.

8.3.2 A NIJAC Accommodation project has been established in conjunction with TEO (chaired by Mr Donaghy) and its' aim is to produce a draft Business case by 30 September 2025 with recommendations put forward to Plenary for consideration.

8.3.3 Mrs McCormac added that Mr Greer was attending meetings with TEO over the next few weeks to continue discussions on future needs.

8.4 Corporate Risk Register (CRR)

8.4.1 Mr Donaghy reiterated the two risks on the CRR as Finance HIGH/RED and Cyber MEDIUM/AMBER.

8.5 Staff Changes

8.5.1 Mr Donaghy concluded his report by pointing out there were a number of staffing changes noting Mrs Kelly (Recruitment Manager) leaving NIJAC and Mr Greer (Director of Finance and Corporate Services) going part time from August 2025.

8.6 The Chair thanked Mr Donaghy and the members of Business Committee for their work.

9. Any Other Business

9.1 Mr Greer referred Members to the Annual Board Effectiveness Self Evaluation paper which provided a positive report showing NIJAC continues to exhibit good practice but are not complacent. He noted Members had been informed earlier in the meeting that the Internal Auditors were conducting the required periodic External Independent review of Board Effectiveness and he was confident the external review will also be favourable although work will be done in advance to ensure the information is made available that demonstrates the good work in this area.

9.2 The Chair concluded the meeting thanking the Commissioners, Senior Leadership Team and staff, and wishing them a good Summer.

9.3 Mrs McCormac added her thanks to the Chair for all of her support over the year.

The meeting finished at 11am.

Date and Time of next meeting: Tuesday 7 October 2025 at 9.30am

Signed:

……………………………………………………………………

The Right Honourable Dame Siobhan Keegan, the Lady Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, Chair of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission Dated: 07.10.25