

Plenary Minutes

Monday 15 December 2025 at 9.30am

Present: The Honourable Lord Justice Seamus Treacy (Chair)
Mr Bernard Brady KC
Mr Colm Donaghy
Mrs Maureen Eccles
Mr Justice Michael Humphreys
His Honour Judge Mark McGarrity
Mrs Ann McRoberts
Mr Brian McTeggart
District Judge (Magistrates' Courts) Anne Marshall

In Attendance: Mrs Tonya McCormac
Mrs April Matchett (Secretary)
Mr Andrew Millar
Mrs Collette Quinn

1. Welcome/Apologies

1.1 LJ Treacy welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that he would be chairing the meeting in the absence of NIJAC's Chair, the Lady Chief Justice.

1.2 Apologies were noted from the Lady Chief Justice, Mr Michael Robinson and Mr Duncan Greer.

1.3 LJ Treacy (“The Chair”) welcomed Mrs Ann McRoberts to her first Plenary as NIJAC Commissioner explaining that she has served as a Lay Magistrate for 20 years and has had the opportunity to meet with senior staff and some Commissioners over the last month.

1. Conflicts of Interest

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

2. Confidentiality

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

3. Minutes of Board Meeting of 7 October 2025

4.1 The Chair requested members to approve the minutes of 7 October which had been circulated with the papers in advance of the meeting. Members approved.

4.2 The Chair asked for updates on matters arising from the previous meeting:

Agenda Item	Action	Owner
4.3	Mrs Mayes to follow up with Commissioners on online training.	Mrs Rebecca Mayes Complete
4.4	Mr Robinson to speak to The Law Society about an engagement event.	Mr Michael Robinson Ongoing
4.5	Mr Millar to provide an update at next Plenary on Legal advice	Mr Andrew Millar To be tabled under Advisory Committee Updates

<p>5.9</p>	<p>Mr Millar to draft a brief for Commissioners for the Politician's Event on 17 November 2025.</p>	<p>Mr Andrew Millar</p> <p>Not taken forward – event was cancelled and replaced with individual party meetings. A proposed informal lunch with the Joint Committees is being finalised for 2026.</p>
<p>6.2</p>	<p>Mr Greer to provide an update at next Plenary on the Accommodation Project.</p>	<p>Mr Duncan Greer</p> <p>To be tabled under Business Committee updates</p>
<p>9.2</p>	<p>Mr Millar to publish Annual Equality Monitoring report on website.</p>	<p>Mr Andrew Millar</p> <p>Complete</p>

4. Chief Executive's Report

5.1 The report had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Mrs Tonya McCormac welcomed any questions of comments from the Board as she highlighted the following:

- 5.2** Referring to the Strategic Performance Dashboard 2025 – 26 - measures and actions are on track for delivery. Despite some slippage in year, completion is still expected by end March 2026.
- 5.3** Mrs McCormac turned to NIJAC's financial position noting that in year finances are acceptable. This is in large part due to efficiencies made through staff vacancies. This prudent approach has released funds which have been used to bring in specialist help on a short-term basis to progress certain pieces of work. For example – the Data Analytics role, the Occupational Psychologist for the Lay Magistrates scheme and a Digital Content Creator from January – March 2026 to assist the Appointments Team.
- 5.4** Mrs McCormac noted that holding back on filling roles had been challenging but had allowed NIJAC to bring in additional expertise on a short-term basis.
- 5.5** A new Recruitment Manager will be starting on 5 January 2026 but it is likely that two staff vacancies will continue to be held into 2026-27 financial year.
- 5.6** The current forecast for the remainder of 2025-26 is that NIJAC is on track to meet budget staying within tolerance levels.
- 5.7** Mrs McCormac informed the Board that NIJAC's Chair and her had met with Mr David Malcolm in November 2025 who indicated that the best-case scenario for the 2026-27 Opening Allocation will be a flat cash position which does not take account of potential pay and price inflation and will leave NIJAC 10-11% behind its' operating requirements. Although NIJAC have benefitted from monitoring rounds in the past this is not guaranteed, and they have not taken place this year.
- 5.8** Mrs McCormac noted that in light of this Finance remains a red risk on the Corporate Risk Register. 2026-27 will be a unique year as the lease is up on Headline Building in January 2027 and accommodation options being considered. A business case is currently being

drafted and any move from Headline Building in the 2026-27 financial year will incur additional capital and revenue costs. There is a meeting with TEO Finance planned in January 2026 to discuss the implications of this.

5.9 The Board discussed the implications of cuts, including the pressures that carrying vacancies bring and the potential for recruitment schemes to be delayed, which has a knock on effect on the governments' 'Speeding Up Justice' programme. It was agreed that the meetings with various political parties and the proposed event with the Joint Committees were timely and would give opportunities to flag this. A briefing document was requested in advance of the 21 April 2026 event.

Action Point:

SLT to prepare a briefing document to be circulated to the Board in advance of 21 April 2026.

5.10 Mrs McCormac noted that the second risk on the Corporate Risk Register is Cyber Security. Two other risks remain and are being monitored closely by SLT on the functional risk registers – Accommodation Project and Staff Vacancies – they do not need to be escalated at the present time but will be kept under review.

5.11 Moving on, Mrs McCormac informed members that the Annual Report and Accounts were laid before the Assembly on 12 November 2025. The First and deputy First Ministers had written to NIJAC's Chair to communicate this and to congratulate the Commission on its' 20-year anniversary.

5.12 The Lay Commissioner appointments are under consideration by the First and deputy First Ministers for approval of the two current vacancies and a reserve list which will be held for 12 months. It is hoped that the appointments will be confirmed soon. Time is needed for the new Commissioners to shadow the existing Lay Commissioners and be upskilled before their departure in early 2026.

5.13 Mrs McCormac gave a report of the meeting that took place with the First and deputy First Ministers on 3 November 2025. It was a positive meeting where discussion took place on the work of NIJAC, successes over the past 20 years, opportunities and challenges facing the Commission moving forward. It was agreed the outcome of the meeting was positive for all involved.

5.14 Mrs McCormac briefed Commissioners on upcoming training:

January 2026 – Complaints Training for those involved in handling Complaints

February 2026 – EDI Training and a Business Planning Session for all Commissioners

Mrs Mayes will contact Commissioners with dates in due course.

5.15 Mrs McCormac acknowledged the difficulties with Commissioner iPads and explained that an alternative solution is being explored with opportunity for the iPads to be redeployed for staff use.

5.16 Mrs McCormac gave an update on NIJAC's Diversity Mark submission. Positive feedback has been received from Diversity Mark external assessors on our recent assessment submission, feedback is that NIJAC have made a strong application with only some minor additional information required on one target, we are anticipating full approval in regards of the assessment outcome shortly which will allow NIJAC to work towards silver accreditation.

5.17 Over the past year Mrs McCormac has engaged in a structured mentoring programme with April Matchett, Rebecca Mayes and Collette Quinn, as part of supporting woman in leadership. Part of this of this approach is that each staff member will give a presentation at the next Plenary on a specific piece of work that they have led on during the year.

5.18 Mr McTeggart asked about NIJAC's 20-year anniversary and if there was any opportunity to do something to mark it. A discussion followed considering a stakeholder event, wider public perception of NIJAC and the opportunity to use the Lay Magistrates Scheme to address this.

5. Business Committee – 25 November 2025

6.1 Mr Colm Donaghy presented the Business Committee updates:

6.2 Sharing further detail on the financial figures Mr Donaghy highlighted that NIJAC are forecasted to come in with a modest underspend of £6k. This equates to 0.65% which is within the 1.5% underspend tolerance permitted by TEO.

6.3 He reiterated that the financial outlook for 2026-27 is bleak which may lead to the possible restriction of schemes. It will be important for NIJAC to plan and engage stakeholders who benefit from the work of NIJAC.

6.4 The Accommodation Project will also bring a number of further financial pressures. Mr Donaghy referred to the paper that had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Four broad options are being considered with two possible front runners.

6.5 Mr Donaghy highlighted that this project is time-dependent and a decision needs to be made fairly quickly. Mrs McCormac added one of the challenges can be the approvals process and this creates the potential for slippage.

6.6 The Board had a thorough discussion on this. Business Committee members indicated they can meet to work through things before their next planned meeting in March 2026.

6.7 Mr Donaghy presented the TEO Partnership Agreement for Plenary approval. Members approved.

6. Advisory Committee – 27 November 2025

7.1 Mr Bernard Brady KC presented the Advisory Committee updates:

7.2 Mr Brady KC referred to the Quarterly Report which had been circulated in advance of the meeting and explained the Committee has asked for a further breakdown for 2022-23 where shifts were seen to be occurring in gender and community background. Mr Millar confirmed this will be available for the Committee's next meeting in March 2026.

7.3 Mr Brady KC confirmed progress is on target with the annual business plan.

7.4 It was noted that a discussion had taken place on the recency of examples being used by applicants – examples of some age being noticed by a number of Commissioners. This discussion had concluded by agreement that this should be left to the judgement of each Selection Committee with feedback sessions being used as an opportunity to address this with individual applicants.

7.5 Legal Advice on holding multiple judicial offices had been received and circulated in advance of the meeting. The Board engaged in a detailed discussion on this matter. It was agreed in the Chair's absence that this would be added to the Agenda of NIJAC's next Plenary.

Action Point:

Plenary to hold a further discussion on the legal advice on holding multiple judicial offices at the next meeting.

7.6 Mr McTeggart talked about digitalisation work that has taken place as a result of the data analytics roles. He asked if there would be an opportunity for Plenary to see this. Mrs

McCormac confirmed that it would be part of staff presentations at the next Plenary meeting.

7. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee – 2 December 2025

8.1 Mrs Maureen Eccles presented the updates for ARAC:

8.2 Two risks continue to be stated in the Corporate Risk Register – Finances RED/HIGH and Cyber Security AMBER/MEDIUM.

8.3 THE IA Report on the Review of UK GDPR and Data Protection was received with NIJAC receiving a satisfactory rating (the highest available) with two Priority three recommendations and three AV Comments. These will be tracked through ARAC.

8.4 The Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25 were laid in the Assembly on 12 November 2025 - the next action for NIAO will be planning for the 2025-26 audit in January 2026.

8.5 ARAC have approved a review of the Risk Management Handbook which incorporates all HM Treasury and NIAO guidance.

8.6 Mrs Eccles invited Mrs Matchett to share an update on the Annual Data Breach Response Test. Mrs Matchett informed the Board that a number of staff and Mr Brady had been invited to respond to a hypothetical scenario of a data breach test. She reported that this had been a successful exercise both in terms of assurance on the readiness of NIJAC to respond to an actual data breach and in terms of identifying next steps to improve systems and process. Mr Brady KC echoed this saying it had been very informative.

8. Any Other Business

9.1 The Chair asked for any other business. Mr Justice Humphreys referred to the recent online engagement session which took place on 4 December 2025. He reported there had been good attendance and presentations and a confidential approach. It was noted that there were some technical issues and the time frame was tight although future events would take this into account. A discussion followed with agreement that this was a good model for NIJAC to use and the use of a Q&A function would be helpful.

9.2 The Chair reminded Commissioners of the following upcoming dates:

Dates for your Diary	
Committees for Q4	
Business Committee	Tuesday 3 March 2026
Advisory Committee	Thursday 5 March 2026
Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	Tuesday 10 March 2026
Plenary	Thursday 19 March 2026
Upcoming Events	
The Executive Committee and Justice Committee NIJAC Staff and Commissioners to be invited to an informal lunch at Parliament Buildings.	21 April 2026
JAC Ireland Visit to NIJAC (pending outcomes of discussions between the Chairs of the respective bodies)	Planned for early 2026
Annual Business Planning and EDI Session	Anticipated February 2026
Tri-Partite Belfast	Autumn 2026

The meeting finished at 11.30am.

Date and time of next meeting: Thursday 19 March 2026 at 9.30am

Signed: x *Lord Justice Treacy*

**The Honourable Lord Justice Treacy, Acting Chair of the Northern Ireland Judicial
Appointments Commission on 15 December 2025**