Plenary Minutes

Monday 19 March 2026 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
	Mr Brian McTeggart
	District Judge (Magistrates' Courts) Anne Marshall
	Mr Mark Mitchell
	Mr Michael Robinson
In Attendance:	Mrs Tonya McCormac
	Mr Duncan Greer
	Mrs April Matchett
	Mrs Rebecca Mayes
	Mr Andrew Millar
	Mrs Collette Quinn

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, Mrs Ann McRoberts and Mrs Deirdre Toner.

1.3 LJ Treacy ("The Chair") welcomed Mr Mark Mitchell to his first Plenary as a NIJAC Lay Commissioner.

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 15 December 2025

4.1 The Chair asked if Members were content with the minutes of 15 December 2025. Mr McTeggart requested that at point 5.7 of the minutes the term inflationary uplift be expanded to encompass both pay and price inflation. The meeting agreed the Minute with this amendment.

Action Point: The draft minutes of 15 December 2025 be amended to include at 5.7 the term pay and price inflation.

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

Agenda Item	Action	Owner
5.9	Briefing document to be circulated to the Board in advance of 21 April 2026.	SLT
7.5	Plenary to hold a further discussion on the legal advice on holding multiple judicial offices at the next meeting.	Plenary March 2026

4.3 In relation to item 5.9 above Mrs McCormac updated the Members that the planned meeting with representatives of the local political parties has now been rescheduled and will take place on 2 June 2026. A briefing document will be circulated before this to allow Members to prepare for the meeting.

Action Point: A Briefing paper be circulated to Members to allow them to prepare for the meeting with political parties on 2 June 2026

4.4 In relation to item 7.5 above Mrs McCormac informed the meeting that the Lady Chief Justice had requested this be tabled for discussion at the next Plenary on June 25th 2026.

Action Point: The legal advice on holding multiple judicial offices to be added to the Agenda for discussion at June 2026 Plenary.

4. Chief Executive's Report

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

5.2 Referring to the Strategic Performance Dashboard 2025 – 26 Mrs McCormac stated that the 2025–26 was a year marked by significant delivery, with all targets in the Annual Business Plan achieved or on track for completion by year end, She added that the organisation had benefited from the hard work and dedication of staff and the continued support and commitment of Commissioners

5.3 Mrs McCormac turned to NIJAC's financial position and as had been previously reported to Plenary the 2025-26 financial situation has settled into an acceptable position mainly because of savings accruing from unfilled vacancies. The current forecast for 2025-26 is for a modest underspend of £5k or 0.45% of our allocation which is within the 1.5% underspend tolerance permitted by TEO.

5.4 Mrs McCormac indicated that as this time TEO is in a position to only provide limit information on the 2026-27 Allocation with an indication that the best-case scenario for the 2026-27 Opening Budget Allocation for NIJAC is that it will match the 2025-26 allocation. Financial modelling of the potential position is underway which will be used to plan for the year ahead. The Board will be kept informed of developments.

5.5 Mrs McCormac noted that in light of the above, Finances for 2026-27 remains a red risk on the Corporate Risk Register especially since 2026-27 will be a unique year with the lease on Headline Building ending in January 2027 and the delivery of the Lay Magistrates (LM) scheme with over 100 posts to be filled. In relation to the lease the draft Accommodation Business Plan will be sent to the Business Committee within the next 2 weeks and to the Board before the end of April. A meeting with TEO Finance is planned for April 2026 to have initial discussions on the potential funding requirements of this. In terms of the Corporate Risk Register she advised that SLT has agreed that the Accommodation Project should be added to the 2026-27 Corporate Risk Register since the timescale to obtain approval at the various stages of the Business Case is uncertain and the end of the lease is only 9 months away. Mr McTeggart agreed that it would seem to be prudent to add this to the first version of the 2026-27 Corporate Risk Register for consideration by the Business Committee.

5.6 Mrs McCormac then handed over to Mrs Matchett and Mrs Mayes for their presentations to the Board. Mrs Matchett would present on the plans being developed for the Communications for the LM scheme and Mrs Mayes would present on the outputs of the data analysis system that has been developed for the reporting of Appointment Scheme metrics,

5.7 During the presentations the Members had an opportunity to ask questions. The Chair thanked Mrs Matchett for her presentation and he indicated that the initial communications material and planning for the LM scheme was an impressive piece of work. He also thanked Mrs Mayes commenting that the data system that has been developed was impressive and would be of great value to the organisation. Members concurred with the Chair's comments.

5. Business Committee

6.1 Mr Colm Donaghy presented the Business Committee updates:

6.2 In relation to the financial position Mr Donaghy reiterated that NIJAC are forecast to come in with a modest underspend of £5k which equates to 0.45% and is within the 1.5% underspend tolerance permitted by TEO.

6.3 Mr Donaghy outlined that the 2025-26 out-turn was really only possible with unfilled staff posts and, since TEO has initially indicated an opening allocation for 2026-27 at the same level as 2025-26, this would mean next year could be a significant challenge. The year ahead brings uncertainties including pay and price inflation, the costs associated with new Accommodation, potential loss of receipts from Co-tenants and the LM scheme.

This scheme is expected to consume most of the allocation of scheme costs in 2026-27 and with a planned launch of June 2026 there is a risk the scheme will commence before certainty exists over the required funding being available. A further risk is that requests will be received to run other schemes in year which will not be possible.

6.4 Mrs McCormac indicated that Courts and Tribunals had been informed that given both the financial constraints and the staff time required for the LM scheme it is very unlikely NIJAC can run any other new schemes in 2026-27. She added that at this stage, based on current known judicial vacancies and existing Reserve lists, it is anticipated that there are no imminent requests expected for salaried schemes. Mr Donaghy stated it was positive we had managed Stakeholder expectations. Mrs McCormac indicated that we must now await the Opening Budget Allocation and then if necessary engage with the Permanent Secretary to outline the consequences of the LM scheme not being adequately funded.

6.5 Mr Donaghy then moved to the next item – NIJAC's Annual Business Plan 2026-27. He advised that Staff, Members and TEO had had a number of opportunities to input to and shape the Plan and that he would now request Members to approve the final version contained in the Board papers. All Approved.

6.6 Mr Donaghy turned to the last item the Accommodation Project update. He reiterated Mrs McCormac's statement that the draft Accommodation Business Plan would be sent to the Business Committee within the next 2 weeks and to the Board before the end of April. Mr Donaghy added he had advised Mr Greer that the Members of the Business Committee were available on-line to provide any input required to expedite this process in the context of uncertainty over the timescales for final Approvals. He concluded that he had previously in his update noted the risks around the funding of the Accommodation costs in 2026-27.

6.7 Mr Donaghy concluded by extending his appreciation to staff and Members for their support during is time with NIJAC that would come to and end in May 2026.

6. Advisory Committee – Updates

7.1 Mr Brady presented the Advisory Committee updates:

7.2 He referred to the Minutes of the Meeting of 5 March 2026 and the Quarterly Report of the Director of Appointments and Engagement both included in Board papers.

7.3 Mr Brady confirmed progress is on target with the relevant Outcomes in the Annual Business Plan.

7.4 He then brought three particular items to the attention of Members which will require further consideration prior to bringing final recommendations to Plenary. He asked Mr Millar to expand on these for Board Members.

7.5 *Potential for Expansion of Pool of Assessment Methods* – Mr Millar advised that this area is an element of the business improvements plan he is discussing with the Advisory Committee. He advised that the Advisory Committee had discussed some early findings on this and had agreed that he should continue with the scoping exercise and come back to the Committee for further discussion.

7.6 *Review of Rating Scales* – Mr Millar advised that this linked to the objective of Recognising Merit on the Annual Business Plan. He advised that it was timely to again review the rating scales against good practice. Mr Millar further advised that the review is at an early stage and it will require the input of Commissioners to ensure any changes to the current system are well understood and supported. He will be seeking feedback from Commissioners as this review moves forward.

7.7 *Changes to Equality Monitoring* – Mr Millar advised that although not required by Statute Disability is one of the six characteristics of applicants/appointees that NIJAC monitor and report on. However it is generally accepted that disability is acquired over one’s lifetime and as such the collection of data at the point of application may not reflect the level of disability in the current Judiciary. NISRA has previously surveyed the current Judiciary to provide NIJAC with information on this aspect but this should really be done periodically to keep the statistics accurate. Mr Millar advised that he is examining the most cost- effective way of doing this which may involve NIJAC conducting its own survey.

7.8 Mr Millar then advised Members that NIJAC are not required by Statute to collect and report on the characteristic of Sexual Orientation. After discussion it was agreed that NIJAC should add this to its list of characteristics that are monitored and reported on.

7. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee – Updates

8.1 Mrs Maureen Eccles presented the updates for ARAC:

8.2 Two risks continue to be stated in the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) – Finances RED/HIGH, as noted earlier in the Chief Executive's report this highlights the risk around the 2026-27 financial position- and Cyber Security AMBER/MEDIUM.

8.3 In relation to the risk around Cyber Security Mrs Eccles reminded Members that there were strong mitigations in place but NIJAC must continue to remain vigilant and practice resilience in this area.

8.4 Mrs Eccles added that as discussed earlier the risk associated with the Accommodation Project and timescales is being considered for inclusion on the CRR from April 2026.

8.5 Mrs Eccles went on to update Members on a discussion at ARAC on Artificial Intelligence (AI). She advised that the HR Business Partner was drafting an AI Policy that would cover the use of AI by staff and the use of AI by candidates. A scoping paper was also being prepared which would examine potential risks, areas of impact for NIJAC and suggested mitigations. Members of ARAC requested that this paper should be brought to the Committee as soon as possible.

8.6 During discussions on this Members agreed this is an area requiring immediate focus with a Policy and Guidance to Candidates required promptly.

8.7 Mrs Eccles concluded by indicating that this would be her last Plenary as her current term ends in May 2026. She thanked staff and fellow Commissioners for their great support during her tenure at NIJAC and wished all at NIJAC continued success.

8.8 Mr McTeggart took the opportunity at this point to advise Members this was also his last Plenary with an end date of his term in May 2026. He indicated he had enjoyed his time working with staff and Commissioners and he thanked all for their support.

8.9 The Chair thanked Mr Donaghy, Mrs Eccles and Mr McTeggart for their very positive contribution to NIJAC during their terms and he advised that The Lady Chief Justice would like them to attend lunch after June 2026 Plenary to allow her and the Board to say a proper farewell.

8. Any Other Business

9.1 The Chair asked for any other business. Mrs McCormac informed Members that contact was being maintained with JAC Ireland as it continued its development. On behalf of the Board she had extended an open invitation to JAC Ireland to visit NIJAC and meet Members.

9.2 Mrs McCormac also informed Members that, with the support of TEO, NIJAC was pursuing potential opportunities to access grants for relevant projects. Members welcomed this and looked forward to further information on opportunities.

Date and time of next meeting: Thursday 25 June 2026 at 9.30am

These minutes were approved by Plenary on 24 September 2026

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