

**Plenary Minutes**  
**3 June 2021 at 9.30 am**  
**Online**

**Present:** Sir Declan Morgan, Chairman  
Mr Eoin Doyle QFSM  
Mr Colm Donaghy  
Mr Paul Douglas  
Ms Maureen Eccles  
Mrs Justice Keegan  
Ms Noelle McGreenera QC  
Mr Brian McTeggart  
Dr Joan Martin  
Judge Miller QC  
District Judge (Magistrates' Courts) Rosalie Prytherch  
Mr Michael Robinson

**Apology:** Lord Justice Treacy

**In Attendance:**

Ms Adeline Frew  
Mr Duncan Greer  
Mrs Tonya McCormac  
Mr Andrew Millar

## **1. Conflicts of Interest**

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

## **2. Confidentiality**

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

## **3. Minutes of meeting of 11 March 2020**

3.1 The minutes were approved, and it was confirmed that all actions points arising had been completed or were work in progress.

3.2 Having considered the demographics of those who participated in the Bar Council NIJAC webinar there was discussion on the requisite statutory years' legal standing for judicial appointment and the move towards portfolio careers which judicial appointment helps achieve.

## **4. Chief Executive's Report**

4.1 Mrs McCormac delivered her report and there are no actions arising.

4.2 An options paper be drafted looking at working models for staff to reflect new ways of working adopted under Covid restrictions. A further matter which needs to be taken into consideration in terms of future working models is that the current lease on Headline is due to expire in 2027 and NIJAC are to be part of relocation planning for the 2025 phase. Business Cte will be provided with an options paper at their 9 November meeting.

4.3 The status of risks on the Register considered and will be kept under review by Business Cte; the implementation of the Staffing Structure was highlighted as progressing apace, with 2 roles being advertised on 11 June, and a further 2 the following week.

4.4 Financial sustainability remains a high risk, as the opening position does not cover core costs; scheme and staff costs having to be met through in-year bids. A number of single issue meetings are scheduled with TEO to highlight, plus a number of short, medium and long term strategies are being adopted to help secure an opening position that provides funding for core costs, including staff and schemes.

4.5 When discussing finance the Chairman raised the possibility that the County Court and High Court schemes, as with all other schemes, have a default reserve list.

4.6 Another consideration is extending the life of reserve lists from 12 months from the anticipated first appointment to 24 months; this would be in line with JAC England and Wales as well as the NI Civil Service.

4.7 Mrs McCormac shared positive trend in results in terms of engaging with other increases in the use of social media with 10.1K impressions in the last 28 days and that there has been an 25% increase in Twitter followers. It was noted that the 'top Tweet' related to the appointment of Lord Justice Treacy as a NIJAC Commissioner.

4.8 The Politicians Event, if Covid provisions allow, will happen in December, and the tripartite event possibly in January 2022, with NIJAC hosting.

## **5. Selection Committee Scheme updates**

5.1 Ms McGreenera updated Plenary on the success of the Pension Appeal Tribunal legal member x 1 recruitment, interviews having identified 4 appointable applicants.

5.2 Mr Colm Donaghy updated Plenary on the Appeal Tribunals Disability member competition that closes to applications on 14 June.

5.3 Mrs Maureen Eccles updated Plenary on the Appeal Tribunals Medical member x 42 that closes to applications on 7 June 2021.

Queries were raised regarding the differing fees paid for differing types of membership and how this was a matter for the Department, and the different approaches to medical and other recruitment. It was explained that medical recruitment remains challenging and that NIJAC has aimed to remove barriers to application, however the final assessment will be suitably robust. Fees continue to be a barrier to application. There are a number of medical schemes underway or pending and NIJAC will feedback to the Department in due course on degrees of success or otherwise.

**Action Arising:** Engage with DOJ and DfC on medical recruitment upon completion of current schemes, having benchmarked on fee policies in GB and RoI.

## **6. Policy Committee**

6.1 The draft Minutes of 6 May 2021 were presented.

6.2 The Lessons Learnt and various Diversity Reports were noted. The NISRA report will now be hosted on NIJAC's website.

6.3 The Cte's recommendations regarding the review of its terms of reference, ways of working and title were discussed. All Chairs of Cte were consulted and approved the approach. It was emphasised that the Cte is to support and contribute to the strategic direction of the organisation. The role of a committee is to advise, support contribute and monitor, operational matters for the Senior Leadership Team

**Action Arising:** Standing Orders to be changed to reflect new title (Advisory Cte) and terminology in the Terms of Reference to be revised.

**6.4** Options regarding tied scores was discussed and Advisory Cte are to consider the matter further.

**Action Arising:** Advisory Cte to consider Tied Score Options at their September meeting.

## **7. Business Committee**

7.1 Mr Doyle presented the draft Minutes of 4 May 2021, with an emphasis on risk, finance and staffing.

7.2 Mr Donaghy presented on the progress of the Board Effectiveness sub-group and presented the plan so far for comment. Plenary members were content. Mr Donaghy agreed to follow up with members for any further input.

7.3 Mr Millar updated Plenary on the Online Testing Pilot. The Senior Leadership Team and Business Cte have further work to do regarding assessing Value for Money within the Business Case.

**Action Arising:** SLT and Business Cte consider the business case in light of Value for Money, and the potential for a partnership approach.

**Action Arising :** Mr Donaghy to circulate email to all Plenary re any further feedback or input on Board Effectiveness Plan.

**8. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

8.1 Mr McTeggart presented the draft minutes of the 16 March and 11 May 2021.

**9 Any other business**

The Chairman, as this was his last Plenary, shared his gratitude to staff and Commissioners for their dedication in delivering to exceptional standards that have assisted in building confidence in NIJAC within the legal profession and wider society. He shared that his successor will be known in around 2 weeks, and he will be assuring them of the strength of the organisation and high standards consistently delivered. The Chairman hopes that he will be able to introduce the new Chairman in August and say farewell in person.

**Date of next meeting:** 9.30 Thursday 7 October 2021

**Signed:**



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

**Dated:** 07-10-21