

**Plenary Minutes**  
**11 March 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
- Judge Miller QC
- District Judge (Magistrates' Courts) Rosalie Prytherch
- Mr Michael Robinson

**In Attendance:**

- Ms Adeline Frew
- Mr Duncan Greer
- Mrs Tonya McCormac

**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 3 December 2020

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

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

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

4.2 The Chairman discussed the process and timing of appointment of his successor. The name will become public once the Crown has confirmed the appointment, which may not be until July/August 2021. To aid the induction of NIJAC's new Chairman it was suggested that October 2021 Plenary be an all-day 'away day'.

4.3 It was shared that regarding TEO and the Partnership Agreement, all matters are finalised and is with the Ministers for sign off. The Chairman touched on NIJAC's independence of government, and the role TEO has with regard to NIJAC's sponsorship – being that of oversight of finance and governance.

Chris Stewart is replacing Mark Browne, TEO's Accounting Officer on an Interim basis.

4.4 There remains no progress on the two new Commissioner appointments (one being the Chairman's Lord Justice of Appeal nominee, the other a Lay Commissioner) and one renewal of a Lay Commissioner appointment.

**Action Arising:** consideration to be given to adding Commissioner vacancies on to the Risk Register.

4.5 It was noted that TEO, who are responsible for the lease on Headline Building, will be following up with the landlord regarding replacement of the heating system, which is near obsolescence.

4.6 There was discussion on the demographics of the webinar audiences as NIJAC is keen that judicial office, in particular fee paid opportunities, is promoted to early career lawyers. Ms McGreenera QC undertook to find out if the Bar Council had this level of information that may be shared.

**Action Arising:** Ms McGreenera to enquire if Bar Council is able to share demographic information on webinar audience.

4.7 Due to Covid all face-to-face engagement was postponed, including the annual Politician's event.

**Action Arising:** Covid dependant, consideration is to be given to inviting 5 justice representatives of the 5 main parties to an afternoon session of Plenary.

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

5.1 Ms McGreenera updated Plenary on the success of the District Judge x 1 competition which resulted in a reserve list, and that swearing in is on target for 12 April 2021.

5.2 Mr Eoin Doyle updated Plenary on the County Court judge competition. After two rounds of shortlisting a number of applicants are being interviewed w/c 22 March 2021.

5.3 Ms McGreenera updated Plenary on the Pensions Appeal Tribunal competition which is due to launch on 26 March 2021.

## **6 Policy Committee**

6.1 The draft Minutes of 26 January 2021 were presented.

The advice to Plenary regarding the practice, with the exemption of the High Court that all members of Selection Ctes will individually score before moderation, was accepted.

## **7. Business Committee**

7.1 Mr Doyle presented the draft Minutes of 28 January 2021, with an emphasis on risk, finance and staffing.

## **8. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

8.1 Mr McTeggart presented the draft minutes of the 21 January 2021.

There was discussion on the need for compliance on a proportionate basis.

**Action Arising:** CEO and Chair of ARAC to follow up with NIAO regarding proportionate governance for smaller ALBs.

## **9. Key Discussions**

9.1 Board Effectiveness

Mr Donaghy presented the findings and recommendations of the Board Effectiveness Working group. Plenary agreed to the next steps proposed.

**Action Arising:** Board Effectiveness implementation to be presented and agreed at June 2021 Plenary.

## 9.2 Review of Standing Committees

Each of the Committee Chairs presented each Committee's preliminary findings. Their remains work to be done, acknowledging the ongoing work around the Annual Business Plan and Board Effectiveness. Each Committee will refine proposals ahead of June Plenary.

Across each of the key discussions was the debate on the Plenary's strategic role, namely enhancing confidence in the judiciary, bringing influence to bear relating to e.g. where under-representation exists such as women in senior legal roles, and innovating how we do our business, should that be through the use of technologies or working differently.

**Action Arising:** For June Plenary each Committee to present suggested wording for Terms of Reference, informed by work on Annual Business Plan and Board Effectiveness.

## 10 Any other business

10.1 Post Retirement Appointment DJ (MC) Judge Copeland and Post Retirement Appointment DJ Brownlie were agreed.

10.2 Covid dependant, as the vaccine programme is rolled out and as restrictions ease, there is a hope that a return to face to face (with controls) may be re-introduced.

**Date of next meeting:** 9.30 Thursday 3 June 2021

**Signed:**



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**The Right Honourable Sir Declan Morgan, the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, Chairman of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission**

**Dated: 11-03-21**