



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

Business Plan 2025-26

Table of contents

	Page
Foreword	4
Our vision	5
Our mission	5
Who we are	5
Our principles	6
Our strategic objectives for 2025-28	7
How we will work achieve our strategic objectives	8
Priority 1: We will aim to ensure the Commission’s advice and research influences decision-makers to take actions that progress the protection and enjoyment of human rights.	8
Priority 2: We will aim to ensure law and policy makers at all levels, consider and address the human rights impacts identified through our advice, research, investigations and reports to the United Nations and Council of Europe.	8
Priority 3: We will aim to ensure the Commission’s promotional activities increase understanding and awareness of human rights in Northern Ireland.	9
Priority 4: We will aim to ensure the Commission’s education activities increase the capability of individuals, communities and organisations to promote and protect human rights.	9
Priority 5: We will aim to ensure the Commission delivers effective support to individuals and groups who seek assistance for reported human rights violations and abuses.	9
Priority 6: We will aim to ensure the Commission delivers continuous improvements in accordance with its mandate and the Paris Principles (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 48/134).	10
Priority 7: We will aim to ensure staff and Commissioners gain knowledge and skills that improve effectiveness and efficiency.	10

Priority 8: We will aim to ensure the Commission has good corporate governance, effective systems and arrangements in place to provide assurance on risk management and internal control. **10**

Priority 9: The Commission operates in accordance with HM Treasury guidance on Managing Public Money. **11**

Priority 10: The Commission remains publicly accountable for its services. **11**

Budget 2025-26 **13**

Foreword

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission business plan for 2025-26 has been formulated during the course of a UK Government Spending Review. It reflects therefore a transitional period during which we expect to receive confirmation of a multi-year budget. This settlement will significantly determine our future work. At the same time, we await a formal response from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on two independent reviews.

This year will require a reconsideration of how the Commission operates as a National Human Rights Institution reflecting our new budget settlement. We expect the outcome, in accordance with the two independent reviews, will at a minimum increase our capacity to deliver and place the Commission on the path towards a sustainable footing.

As an interim measure, however, this business plan represents a conscious return to our statutory duties set down in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 having reflected again on our principal role of protecting and promoting human rights. The Commission will prioritise five objectives published in a new strategic plan 2025-28. Our broad aims include influencing decision makers to take action; increasing understanding and awareness; enhancing the capability of individuals, communities and organisations; and, supporting individuals and groups who seek assistance.

In a challenging fiscal environment the Commission will deliver continuous improvements in accordance with its mandate and the Paris Principles (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 48/134). Improving our effectiveness and efficiency remains a core objective, whilst delivering a robust approach to holding to account those responsible for human rights violations and abuses.

Dr David Russell
Chief Executive

Our vision:

A society that respects human rights values and standards to achieve equality, peace and justice.

Our mission:

To protect and promote the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland.

Who we are:

The Commission was established as a result of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. Our governing legislation is the Northern Ireland Act 1998, as amended by the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 and the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020.

The Commission is a National Human Rights Institution with A status accreditation from the United Nations. This recognition means that the organisation operates independently in full accordance with the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 48/134 (the Paris Principles) reporting to UN treaty bodies and exercising speaking rights before the UN Human Rights Council.

The Commission is also a non-departmental public body and receives grant-in-aid from the United Kingdom government through the Northern Ireland Office. We report to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

There are seven Commissioners (a full time Chief Commissioner and six part-time Commissioners) appointed by the Secretary of State. As far as practicable, the Commissioners, as a group, is representative of the community in Northern Ireland.

Chief Commissioner: Alyson Kilpatrick BL

Commissioners: Helen Henderson
Mairead Holder
Jonathan Kearney
Justin Kouame
David Lavery CB
Stephen White OBE

Our principles:

Independence	We value and will protect our independence; we will act professionally and with integrity; we will make all our decisions based on objective evidence.
Participation	We will empower people to participate to the fullest extent possible in decisions that affect their human rights.
Effectiveness	We will work to ensure human rights protections are reflected in laws, policies and practices; we will work to ensure meaningful remedies for human rights violations and abuses.
Inclusion	We will oppose any form of discrimination or prejudice and support victims.
Partnership	We will work to achieve the greatest impact by partnering with communities and our stakeholders.

Our strategic objectives for 2025-28:

1. Greater prioritising and embedding of human rights in law, policy and service delivery.

We will aim to achieve this objective by providing advice and research that influences decision-makers to take actions that progress the protection and enjoyment of human rights. We will engage with law and policy makers at all levels, to consider and address the human rights impacts identified through our advice, research, investigations and reports to the United Nations and Council of Europe.

2. More people, communities and organisations understand and respect human rights.

We will aim to achieve this objective by supporting promotional activities that increase understanding and awareness of human rights in Northern Ireland. Through our education activities the Commission will seek to increase the capability of individuals, communities and organisations to promote and protect human rights.

3. Effective access to justice and remedies for people and communities who have their human rights violated or abused.

We will aim to achieve this objective by delivering support to individuals and groups who seek our assistance and successfully exercising the Commission's legal and investigatory powers.

4. To be a learning organisation, improving our skills to achieve the greatest impact.

We will aim to achieve this objective by ensuring continuous improvements when delivering the Commission's mandate and operating in accordance with the Paris Principles (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 48/134). Our staff and Commissioners will be supported to gain knowledge and skills that improve effectiveness and efficiency.

5. Effective and efficient delivery of our corporate obligations as a public authority.

We will aim to achieve this objective by ensuring there is good corporate governance, effective systems and arrangements in place to provide assurance on risk management and internal control. We will operate in accordance with HM Treasury guidance on Managing Public Money and remain accountable for our services.

How we will achieve our strategic objectives

This Business Plan sets out how the Commission's will prioritise work to achieve its strategic objectives for the year April 2025 to the end of March 2026.

Priority 1: We will aim to ensure the Commission's advice and research influences decision-makers to take actions that progress the protection and enjoyment of human rights.

Performance Indicator

- (i) Instances of the Commission participating in working groups or regular engagement with government, legislatures and other public authorities to advance human rights.
- (ii) Instances of the Commission providing government and other public authorities with advice or publishing research (upon request or unsolicited).
- (iii) Instances of civil society organisations seeking advice from the Commission in engagement with public authorities.
- (iv) Instances of the Commission providing oral evidence to parliamentary Committees or officials (or analogous e.g. public inquiries).
- (v) Instances of engagement by public authorities (including department officials) with the Commission's training and education programmes.

Priority 2: We will aim to ensure law and policy makers at all levels, consider and address the human rights impacts identified through our advice, research, investigations and reports to the United Nations and Council of Europe.

Performance Indicator

- (i) Instances of the Commission's advice and recommendations reflected in legislative processes (including amendments to Bills).
- (ii) Instances of UK Parliament and NI Assembly inquiry reports and letters that reflect or cite the Commission's advice.
- (iii) Instances of public authorities adopting advice received from the Commission when developing and implementing policies.

- (iv) Instances of the Commission's treaty reporting recommendations reflected in committees' concluding observations, reports (including United Nations Special Rapporteurs) and activities.
- (v) Instances of international organisations and networks engaging with or seeking advice and input from the Commission.

Priority 3: We will aim to ensure the Commission's promotional activities increase understanding and awareness of human rights in Northern Ireland.

Performance Indicator

- (i) Instances of the Commission represented in print/broadcast media and third-party reports (including academic articles).
- (ii) Instances of social media engagement.
- (iii) Levels of engagement with Commission events.
- (iv) Levels of website traffic.

Priority 4: We will aim to ensure the Commission's education activities increase the capability of individuals, communities and organisations to promote and protect human rights.

Performance Indicator

- (i) Levels of engagement with the Commission's activities (including measurement of satisfaction and reports of increased understanding).

Priority 5: We will aim to ensure the Commission delivers effective support to individuals and groups who seek assistance for reported human rights violations and abuses.

Performance Indicator

- (i) A majority of applications by the Commission to courts and tribunals for leave to appear or provide written submissions are granted.
- (ii) Instances of the Commission's submissions reflected in the judgment of the matter.

- (iii) The Specialised Committee on issues related to the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland of the European Union Withdrawal Agreement (the Windsor Framework) accepts referrals and reflects advice provided by the Commission.
- (iv) Instances of support provided to individual clients.
- (v) Instances of investigations by the Commission resulting in actions by the UK government, NI Executive or public authorities to improve respect and protection of human rights.

Priority 6: We will aim to ensure the Commission delivers continuous improvements in accordance with its mandate and the Paris Principles (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 48/134).

Performance Indicator

- (i) The Commission retains its United Nations accreditation with Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and effectively seeks to address any recommendations.
- (ii) Instances of the Commission benefitting from learning and good practices of other National Human Rights Institutions delivering their mandates or through the initiatives of regional and international bodies (including the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions and Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions).

Priority 7: We will aim to ensure staff and Commissioners gain knowledge and skills that improve effectiveness and efficiency.

Performance Indicator

- (i) Instances of facilitating ongoing learning opportunities for staff and Commissioners.

Priority 8: We will aim to ensure the Commission has good corporate governance, effective systems and arrangements in place to provide assurance on risk management and internal control.

Performance Indicator

- (i) Relevant internal and external audits addressing corporate governance receive a satisfactory rating.

- (ii) A majority of governance matters and risks reported to the Audit and Risk Management Committee are mitigated or resolved.

Priority 9: The Commission operates in accordance with HM Treasury guidance on Managing Public Money.

Performance Indicator

- (i) Relevant internal and external audits addressing financial management receive a satisfactory rating.
- (ii) The Commission operates within the limits of its statutory authority and any delegated authority, as well as in accordance with any other conditions or HM Treasury guidance relating to the use of public funds.
- (iii) The Commission's Annual Report and Accounts are agreed and signed off by the National Audit Office.
- (iv) A majority of required monthly financial and workforce management reports are submitted on time.
- (v) The Commission meets the Government target of paying 90% of undisputed invoices within five working days.

Priority 10: The Commission remains publicly accountable for its services.

Performance Indicator

- (i) Instances of non-compliance with any open government or transparency policies, initiatives and guidance issued by the Northern Ireland Office, HM Treasury or Cabinet Office.
- (ii) The majority of Freedom of Information Act requests are responded to within statutory time limits.
- (iii) The Commission complies with its equality and good relations duties and meets any reporting requirements.
- (iv) The Commission responds promptly and engages transparently in response to any complaints made to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

- (v) All personal data held by the Commission is retained in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation as it applies in the United Kingdom, tailored by the Data Protection Act 2018 and personal data related incidents reported formally to the Information Commissioner's Office, if applicable.

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

BUDGET 2025-26

	2025-26 Core Budget £	2025-26 Dedicated Mechanism Budget £	2025-26 Total Budget £
EMPLOYMENT COSTS			
Staff	1,598,227	635,246	2,233,473
Commissioners	181,633	0	181,633
Total	£1,779,860	£635,246	£2,415,106
PROGRAMME COSTS			
Advertising, Publicity and Publications	9,090	35,782	44,872
Conferences, seminars and events	5,667	19,601	25,268
Education and Training	0	25,000	25,000
Legal Casework	82,742	115,062	197,804
Research	0	52,413	52,413
Total	£97,499	£247,858	£345,357
OPERATING COSTS			
Auditor's (NAO) Remuneration	25,473	12,737	38,210
Building maintenance and office expenses	31,132	16,984	48,116
Insurance	7,629	3,855	11,484
Internal Audit	9,288	3,956	13,244
IT	50,914	26,152	77,066
Light and heat	9,114	4,379	13,493
Printing, postage and stationery	3,558	2,034	5,592
Professional fees	20,148	7,877	28,025
Rates	23,530	11,717	35,247
Rentals under operating leases	63,014	31,507	94,521
Staff training and recruitment	7,297	13,021	20,318
Telephone	10,766	5,603	16,369
Travel, subsistence and hospitality	11,777	9,325	21,102
Total	£273,640	£149,147	£422,787
GRAND TOTAL	£2,150,999	£1,032,251	£3,183,250