



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

Business Plan 2026-27

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Foreword

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's business plan for 2026-27 has been formulated following the UK Government Spending Review. The content of the plan reflects a positive financial settlement for the NIHRC. £3.5 million in additional funding will be made available during the Spending Review period and this will serve to strengthen our position. The year ahead will remain challenging as we prioritise stabilising our staff resource. But looking to the horizon the situation should steadily improve.

2026-27 is the beginning of a process to enhance our ability to operate as envisaged. But at no point over the next three years will we have reached a level considered sufficient to fund the minimum staffing, infrastructure and institutional capacity required to fully perform our functions or discharge our responsibilities. We remain committed however to working constructively with government toward a sustainable solution, whilst recognising the current context of public spending constraints.

The Commission has recently been appointed to the position of European nominee on the governing body of Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) and our Chief Commissioner was elected by the National Human Rights Institutions of 118 UN member states to the position of the Vice Chair of GANHRI. This global leadership role is highly significant and an acknowledgment of our work by the UN and wider international human rights system.

Two years from now, the position of Chair of GANHRI will rotate to Europe for the first time in over a decade. It is the working assumption of its membership and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights that the Commission will be elected to the leadership role. There will then be a spotlight on Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom and the island of Ireland and we are already planning how to maximise this opportunity to protect and promote human rights.



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, are 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 will prioritise work to achieve its strategic objectives for the year April 2026 to the end of March 2027.

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 providing government and other public authorities with advice on policy and practice (upon request or unsolicited).
- (ii) Instances of the Commission providing advice during the legislative process.
- (iii) Instances of the Commission participating in working groups or regular engagement with government, legislatures and other public authorities to advance human rights.
- (iv) Instances of the Commission publishing research.
- (v) Instances of the Commission engaging with civil society on policy.
- (vi) Instances of the Commission providing oral evidence to parliamentary Committees or officials (or analogous e.g. public inquiries).
- (vii) Instances of the Commission reporting to and engaging with the international and regional human rights system.
- (viii) Instances of engagement by public authorities (including department officials) with the Commission's training and education programmes.

The Commission will continue to provide advice to Government on law reform and policy proposals. It will also continue to engage with a range of non-departmental public bodies, including those who perform key roles in regulating government performance related to the protection and promotion of human rights.

The Commission will publish its 2026 annual statement on human rights in Northern Ireland. It will also review how the statement is developed.

The Commission will continue to provide advice on the NI Troubles Bill and the Crime and Policing Bill which are progressing through Parliament. It will also monitor legislative developments which may impact on the Human Rights Act 1998.

At the NI Assembly, the Commission will continue to provide advice on the Justice (NI) Bill, the School Uniform Bill, the Adult Protection Bill and the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill. In addition, it anticipates that the Sentencing Bill, Race Equality Bill and Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill, the Health and Social Care (Control of Data Processing) Bill, the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill and the Employment Bill will be introduced.

The Commission will continue to offer advice to MLAs in relation to the introduction of private members' bills.

The Commission will publish case studies and materials in relation to Frontier Workers and research on the impact of Brexit on human rights and Windsor Framework Article 2 in relation to cross-border criminal justice co-operation. Research will also be undertaken on the interaction between Windsor Framework Article 2 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability. The Commission will continue to monitor EU legislative and caselaw developments.

Alongside the other UK NHRIs, the Commission will continue to meet on a quarterly basis with Westminster and NI government departments that have lead responsibility for human rights. In addition, it will continue to participate in the UK Ministry of Justice Human Rights Stakeholder Forum and in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office sponsored National Baseline Assessment Business and Human Rights advisory group. The Commission will continue as an observer member of the Roma Thematic Sub-Group, Traveller Thematic Sub-Group, the Education Authority's Joint Consultative Forum and Hate Crime Sub-Group. It will also remain a member of the National Preventative Mechanism NI Sub-Group.

The Commission will continue to co-host the disabled people's stakeholder forum, in its role as the Independent Monitoring Mechanisms for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD). It will also continue hosting a strategic litigation forum for civil society and statutory agencies advancing human rights litigation and remain a member of the Law Society's Human Rights and Equality Committee. The Commission will continue to participate in the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on North-South and East-West Co-operation and the UK-EU Windsor Framework Civic Stakeholder Group.

The Commission will continue to develop relationships with the NI Affairs Committee, the Women and Equalities Committee, the Joint Committee for Human Rights and the Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee in Parliament. In addition, it will further develop relationships with key NI Assembly Committees, including the Justice Committee, Health Committee and the Executive Office Committee, prioritising advice requests relating to bills.

The Commission will, subject to capacity, offer briefings to public authorities on the scope and implementation of Windsor Framework Article 2. It will update and promote the online Human Rights Interactive Guide in partnership with the Executive Office and deliver two training sessions on policymaking and human rights in collaboration with NICSHR Learning and Development.

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 government departments or 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.
- (vi) Instances of Commission's research being referenced in academic journals or conferences.

In addition to providing advice on NI Assembly and Parliamentary Bills, the Commission will, this year, review inquiries and calls for submissions made by legislative committees and respond where appropriate. It will

also continue to engage with public authorities and offer advice and guidance on the relevant human rights aspects of policies and practices.

The Commission will continue to co-ordinate the Treaty Monitoring Group for NI Executive Departments and promote knowledge sharing relevant to human rights examination processes at the UN and Council of Europe. In this business year, it will also prepare and submit monitoring reports to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and Girls and the Council of Europe European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

The Commission will continue to monitor and, where appropriate, contribute to calls for submissions from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Council of Europe.

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. Levels of engagement with Commission events.
- (iii) Levels of website traffic.

The Commission will strengthen the promotion of its statutory functions, highlighting activities and public services across legal, education, research, and advice to government. It will also review, update, and improve public information and communication materials to ensure clarity, accessibility, and consistency.

The Commission will maintain, monitor, and further develop digital content across its website and social media platforms to support audience engagement. It will also oversee a full accessibility audit of the website and implement required improvements to ensure compliance with accessibility standards.

The Commission will assess requirements for a full redesign of its website and an online annual statement functionality tool.

The Commission will continue to support community festivals and events to promote human rights awareness and increase visibility of its work across Northern Ireland. This will include support and hosting events during the Annual Human Rights Festival, such as the Annual Statement event at Stormont. It will also continue to partner with the legal profession and deliver an Annual Lecture alongside the Lady Chief Justice and Bar of Northern Ireland.

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).

The Commission will assess levels of understanding and awareness of human rights across its education activities and stakeholder engagement, to inform the 2028–2031 strategic planning phase.

The Commission will scope the development of a comprehensive online Learning Hub featuring interactive modules, staff seminars, resource libraries, and self-assessment tools designed for individuals, civil society, businesses, and public authorities. It will also support the development of an Arts and Human Rights Forum with the aim of engaging communities through the creative arts.

The Commission will continue to work directly with schools and deliver at least 20 workshops across each year in post-primary schools. It will also maintain collaboration with CCEA to design and deliver a bespoke workshop tailored for Learning, Life and Work, and Government and Politics teachers.

Existing partnerships with local universities and education providers will be strengthened with a focus on promoting engagement on subjects such as sport and human rights, climate change and climate justice, international human rights norms and standards, and the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The Commission will continue to provide secretariat support to the NI Sport and Human Rights Forum, ensuring it meets at least three times annually and delivers its programme of work in line with the Declaration on Sport and Human Rights.

The Commission will scope the future delivery of a legal human rights conference, to include reference to Article 2 of the Windsor Framework.

The Commission will continue to support the implementation of the NI Executive public procurement policy PPN05/21 in partnership with the Department of Finance and provide advice on business and human rights. It will also continue to engage with staff of the NI Assembly to promote awareness of human rights, including through exploring the delivery of training in conjunction with the Research and Information Service.

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.

The Commission will continue to provide human rights advice to individuals through its advice clinic and to support civil society and legal professionals upon request. It will also seek to strengthen engagement with the human rights legal sector, including through its strategic litigation forum and engaging with advice agencies.

The Commission will develop opportunities for collaboration with the legal professions to support continuing development and academic pathways into the profession.

The Commission will continue to support its ongoing litigation and monitor legal and policy developments arising from legal work. It will exercise statutory powers to provide legal assistance or become involved in legal proceedings and consider challenging systemic human rights violations through its own motion powers, in line with its legal criteria and strategic priorities.

The Commission will continue to consider requests for investigations from civil society and members of the public. In addition, it will monitor the implementation of recommendations included in previous investigation reports. The Commission will also begin scoping potential topics for an investigation.

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 GANHRI 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 (ENNHRI) and GANHRI).

The Commission will continue to work in partnership with the NIO toward fully addressing recommendations from GANHRI's Sub-Committee on Accreditation in preparation for its next re-accreditation cycle in 2028, and in accordance with the UN self-reporting obligation.

The Commission will continue to support the work of the Chief Commissioner's role as Secretary of GANHRI and as a board member of the ENNHRI. It will also continue to contribute to the ENNHRI's UNCRPD Working Group, Economic Social and Cultural Rights Working Group, Legal Working Group, AI Working Group, Asylum and Migration Working Group, Communications Working Group, and support the Finance Committee of ENNHRI.

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.

The Commission will prioritise staff training in the following areas:

- the effective exercise of its investigatory powers;
- investigations training;
- mandatory training on Health and Safety;
- Civil Service Expectations;
- Security and Data Protection;
- Government Security Classification Policy;
- Working groups and internal in-house sessions; and
- CIPD training

The Commission will also deliver a programme of induction for its new board members, due to be appointed by September 2026.

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 audits receive a satisfactory rating.

Internal audits due to take place during 2026-27 include:

- Corporate Governance and Risk Management
 - Communications Review
 - Cyber Security and Business Continuity Plan Review
 - Legal Services
- (ii) The Commission's Annual Report and Accounts are completed and certified by the Comptroller and Auditor General with an unqualified audit opinion, without modification in respect of both regularity and the true and fair view on the financial statements.
- (iii) 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) Internal audits receive a satisfactory rating.
- (ii) External audits addressing financial management receive a satisfactory rating.
- (iii) 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.
- (iv) The Commission's Annual Report and Accounts are agreed and signed off by the National Audit Office.
- (v) A majority of required monthly financial and workforce management reports are submitted on time.
- (vi) 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. Subject access requests are responded to within statutory time limits.

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission BUDGET 2026-27

	2026-27 Core Budget £	2026-27 Dedicated Mechanism Budget £	2026-27 Total Budget £
EMPLOYMENT COSTS			
Staff	2,011,070	678,469	2,689,539
Commissioners	213,982	0	213,982
Total	£2,225,052	£678,469	£2,903,521
PROGRAMME COSTS			
Advertising, Publicity and Publications	7,705	18,431	26,136
Conferences, seminars and events	5,962	9,367	15,329
Education and Training	0	15,000	15,000
Legal Casework	41,074	41,074	82,148
Research	0	50,000	50,000
Total	£54,741	£133,872	£188,613
OPERATING COSTS			
Auditor's (NAO) Remuneration	25,473	12,737	38,210
Building maintenance and office expenses	41,689	23,748	65,437
Insurance	8,640	4,320	12,960
Internal Audit	7,220	3,610	10,830
IT	62,522	30,399	92,921
Light and heat	8,597	4,299	12,896
Printing, postage and stationery	2,703	1,351	4,054
Professional fees	22,155	12,812	34,967
Rates	23,996	11,998	35,994
Rentals under operating leases	63,014	31,507	94,521
Staff training and recruitment	4,054	1,000	5,054
Telephone	7,612	3,806	11,418
Travel, subsistence and hospitality	16,873	17,292	34,165
Total	£294,548	£158,879	£453,427
GRAND TOTAL	£2,574,341	£971,220	£3,545,561