

# **Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland**

## **Business Plan – 2026 - 2027**

**“Guardian of the Public Appointment Process”**

### **Vision**

The CPANI vision is to ensure that all public appointments are made on merit, in a fair and open manner and that opportunities to serve on the boards of public bodies are open to the widest possible field of candidates.

## **Commissioner for Public Appointments (CPANI)**

The post of Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland was established in 1995, in response to the first report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Nolan Committee).

The Commissioner is independent of Government.

This is the Business Plan of CPANI covering the period April 2026 - March 2027. It sets out the statutory duties of the Commissioner and the approach that the Commissioner and the office (CPANI) will take to fulfil those duties during the coming year.

### **Core Values**

The core values of CPANI reflect the seven key principles of public appointments. They are that public appointments should be made on the basis of:

- Merit
- Diversity
- Equality of Opportunity
- Openness, Transparency and Independence
- Integrity
- Proportionality
- Respect

### **Mission Statement**

The CPANI mission is to regulate and monitor public appointments to ensure that every Government Department operates systems that allow every person who wishes to contribute to the working of public bodies, who has skills or experience to contribute and who has the motivation and integrity to serve, to put his/her self forward for appointment and be

treated, throughout the public appointment process, in a manner that is fair, consistent, open and transparent, with the goal of selecting the best candidates, on merit, for public appointments.

The operation of this type of public appointment system supports the building and maintenance of high functioning public boards and other public appointments.

### **Statutory Duties of the Commissioner**

CPANI was established to regulate and monitor the compliance of the Departments with the Commissioner's 'Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments in Northern Ireland' (the Code). The Commissioner also provides advice and guidance, in the context of the Code, on processes of selection for public appointment, and considers and investigates complaints.

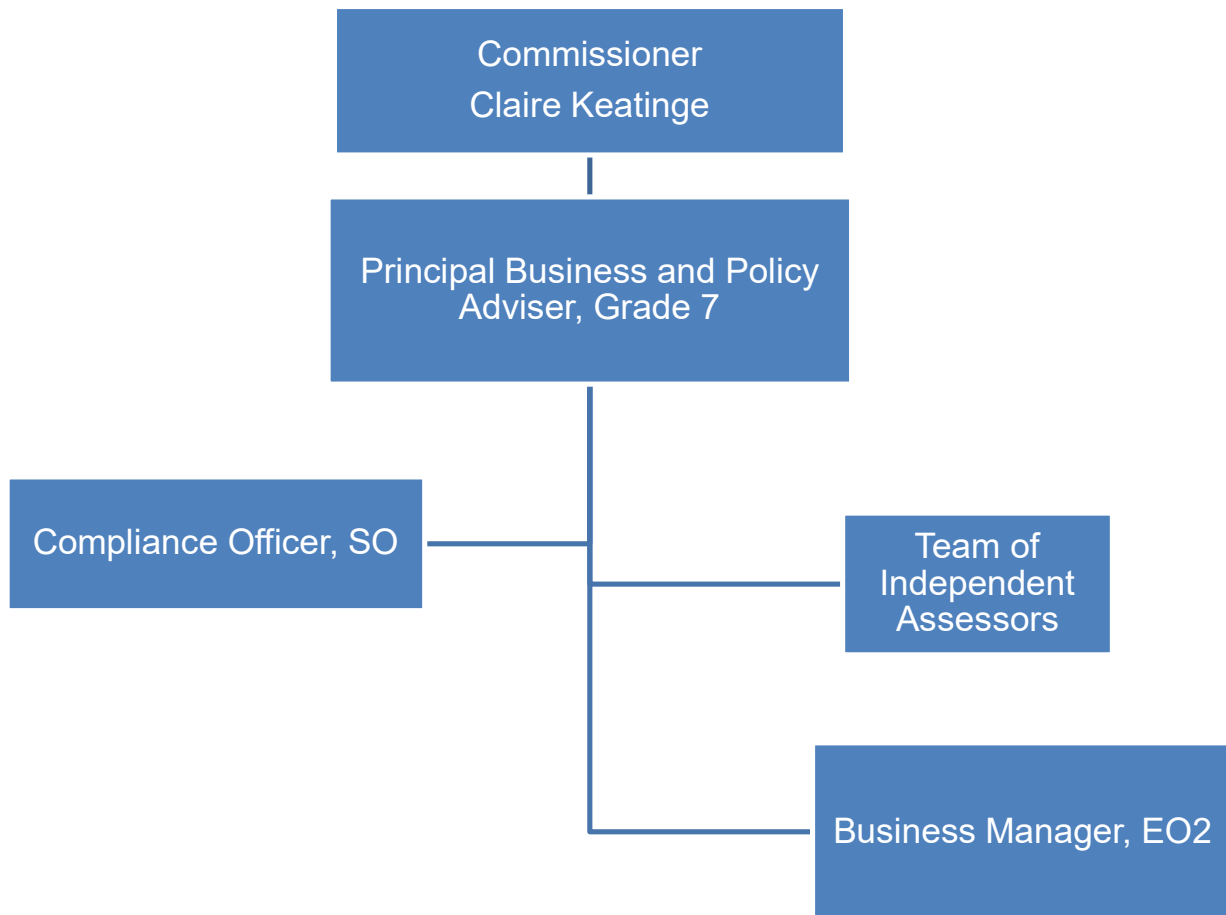
The six statutory duties of the Commissioner are set out in the Commissioner for Public Appointments (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 as amended, noting that the mention of "he" includes all Commissioners.

They are:

- **The Commissioner shall in the manner he considers best calculated to promote economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the procedures for making public appointments, exercise his functions with the object of maintaining the principle of selection on merit in relation to public appointments.**
- **The Commissioner shall prescribe and publish a Code of Practice on the interpretation and application by Departments of the principle of selection on merit for public appointment and shall adopt and publish from time to time such additional guidance to Departments as the Commissioner shall think fit.**

- The Commissioner shall carry out an audit to review the policies and practices of Departments in making public appointments to establish whether the Code of Practice referred to in paragraph 2 is being observed.
- The Commissioner may require any Department to publish such summary information relating to selection for public appointments as he may specify in writing.
- The Commissioner may from time to time conduct an inquiry into the policies and practices pursued by a Department in relation to any public appointment or description of any public appointment.
- The Commissioner shall publish an annual report.

## Organisational Structure



**CPANI OPERATING PLAN: 01 APRIL 2026 – 31 MARCH 2027.**

The activities listed below contribute to the objectives and outcomes described in the introduction. The Commissioner is the owner of all Business Plan activities. Included is the operational lead.

**Commissioner**  
**PBPA – Principal Business & Policy Advisor – Grade 7**  
**CO – Compliance Officer – Staff Officer**  
**BSO – Business Support Officer – EO2**

ACTIVITY	WHAT WE WILL DO AND BY WHEN
<p>1. CPANI Code of Practice ('The Code')</p> <p><a href="https://www.publicappointmentsni.org/publications/code-practice-ministerial-public-appointments-northern-ireland">https://www.publicappointmentsni.org/publications/code-practice-ministerial-public-appointments-northern-ireland</a></p> <p>To prescribe and publish, and update as necessary, a Code of Practice on the interpretation and application by NI Departments of the principle of selection on merit for public appointments.</p> <p>This includes the effective maintenance, development and promotion of the Code of Practice and associated guidance.</p>	<p>Monitor the implementation of the Code in recruitment processes. This takes place through a number of mechanisms: the audit and complaints procedures and the internal CPANI policy, awareness and advice services. To effect any necessary changes to the Code arising from these mechanisms within 2 months of publishing an audit or complaint report or finalisation of a new CPANI policy. This is continuous.</p> <p>To review the CPANI Code against equality legislation and best practice.</p> <p>Liaise closely with departmental Public Appointment Units and recruitment practitioners including Independent Assessors. This is continuous.</p>

ACTIVITY	WHAT WE WILL DO AND BY WHEN
<p>2. Compliance Programme including Audits</p> <p>A CPANI compliance programme including audits, thematic reviews, compliance monitoring, designed to ensure that appointment processes are carried out effectively, fairly, openly, efficiently and proportionately and in line with the Code.</p>	<p>We will conduct and deliver a compliance programme incorporating audits. This programme will review the practices, application of practices and the Code and actions of Departments in making public appointments.</p> <p>We will report on findings, produce recommendations and publish on the CPANI website. We will carry out at least two audits or thematic reviews every year.</p> <p>Carry out investigations regarding public appointment competitions where issues arise during or following the competition process.</p> <p>To conduct regular compliance checks on documentation and processes used and issued by Departments, including advertisements and press releases. These will be carried out in line with competition timetables.</p>
<p>3. Complaints</p> <p>To review complaints made to CPANI to determine if they are viable and conduct investigations to assess, comment and report on the complaint, including remedial actions or recommendations.</p> <p>To ensure the establishment, maintenance, publication and implementation of an effective and objective complaints system in CPANI.</p>	<p>Investigate and report on complaints presented to CPANI.</p> <p>CPANI will firstly determine if the complaint is within legal and regulatory scope.</p> <p>The Commissioner will confirm if the complaint is to be investigated by CPANI within 20 working days from date of receipt of the complaint.</p> <p>CPANI will endeavour to complete a complaint report within three months of commencement of the investigation of the complaint.</p> <p>CPANI will publish an anonymised copy of the investigation report two weeks after being issued to the complainant and Permanent Secretary, unless the complainant requests CPANI not to do so.</p>

ACTIVITY	WHAT WE WILL DO AND BY WHEN
<p>4. Annual Report</p> <p>The provision and publication of an annual report which serves the requirements of internal and external stakeholders, including the political and administrative systems of Government and the general public.</p>	<p>Collate relevant information for the year and draft and publish an annual report no later than the end of June.</p> <p>Provide First Minister and deputy First Minister with an advance copy of report at least two weeks before the proposed publication date.</p> <p>Present report to NI Assembly immediately following publication..</p>
<p>5. Advice and Guidance</p> <p>To provide advice and guidance in the conduct of effective and fair public appointment procedures that are compliant with the Code. To provide prompt and high-quality responses to queries on the Code and its application, from Departmental representatives, panel chairs, Independent Assessors, and other relevant parties.</p>	<p>Provide updates, advice and guidance to Departmental representatives, panel chairs, Independent Assessors, and other relevant parties.</p> <p>CPANI will endeavour to provide advice and guidance within 10 working days of the date of receipt of the request.</p> <p>Provide advice to Departments and others on the value and importance of securing a broad candidate base of applicants for public appointments. Promoting principles and practice of equality, diversity and inclusion, while maintaining the merit and other principles for public appointments as set out in the Code.</p> <p>Maintain a system for handling, managing and recording all queries.</p>

ACTIVITY	WHAT WE WILL DO AND BY WHEN
<p>6. Capacity Building</p> <p>To contribute to the planning and implementation of a training and awareness programme for public appointment practitioners and selection panel members.</p> <p>To build greater understanding of and access to public appointments.</p>	<p>Provide training to departmental public appointment practitioners to include applicant summary training where the need arises.</p> <p>Provide advice and support on requests that contribute to capacity building for groups that are under-represented on public appointments.</p> <p>Support TEO as they deliver free public workshops to promote understanding of the public appointment system to potential applicants.</p>
<p>7. Independent Assessors</p> <p>The effective recruitment, support and monitoring of a trained team of Independent Assessors who are available to participate in public appointment exercises.</p>	<p>Support, monitor, arrange training for and allocate Independent Assessors. To provide at least two information / training seminars / updates per year for Independent Assessors.</p> <p>Provide support and guidance to Independent Assessors. To issue an annual information bulletin to Independent Assessors.</p> <p>Allocate Independent Assessors to departments no later than 10 working days from the date of receipt of the request. Availability dependent.</p> <p>Implement effective administrative procedures and records with regard to the management of the Assessors.</p> <p>Maintain the monthly operation of the system of payment for Independent Assessors.</p> <p>To maintain an adequate pool of Independent Assessors.</p>

ACTIVITY	WHAT WE WILL DO AND BY WHEN
<p>8. Budget &amp; Payment</p> <p>In co-operation with TEO Partnership branch, to establish, implement and monitor the CPANI budgetary process and financial regime. To adhere to all financial and budget guidance issued by TEO and successfully manage the budgetary and financial processes set out in the Partnership Agreement and MPMNI.</p>	<p>Implement effective and timely processes for budgetary and financial management. This is reviewed monthly.</p> <p>Ensure that the necessary resources are secured to meet the full requirements of CPANI and its customers, allowing for levels of complaints, issues arising from audit and compliance work, ad hoc legal advice and research requirements. This takes place when setting the budget and is ongoing throughout the year.</p> <p>Process payments, in a timely and accountable manner, using Account NI.</p> <p>Ensure that all procurement is compliant with the regulations stipulated by TEO Partnership branch.</p>
<p>9. Outreach &amp; Engagement:</p> <p>Liaison with stakeholders including provision of relevant information to the public</p> <p>To promote the role of CPANI and its functions, within and without the political and administrative systems of Government, with the aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- promote public appointment opportunities to a wide field of potential candidates.</li> <li>- increase public confidence in the fairness and openness of the public appointments system</li> <li>- increase public awareness of the independent functions provided by CPANI and of the right to avail of the CPANI complaints procedure.</li> </ul>	<p>Work in partnership with Departments on the promotion and development of public appointments. This is continuous.</p> <p>Prioritise and be responsive to requests for advice and guidance from Ministers, Special Advisers, MLAs, the Senior Civil Service and Departmental contacts.</p> <p>Develop and maintain constructive relationships with key stakeholders including arms length bodies, ombudsman and regulatory networks, wider</p> <p>Maintenance, continuous updating, and development of the CPANI website to ensure that it contains up to date, relevant and accurate information.</p>

ACTIVITY	WHAT WE WILL DO AND BY WHEN
<p>10. Resourcing within CPANI to meet business needs</p> <p>Ensuring the staffing within CPANI is adequate for delivering the legal remit of the Commissioner and the CPANI business plan objectives.</p>	<p>To plan and co-ordinate the work of the Commissioner’s office to meet the Business Plan targets in an effective, efficient and value-for-money manner.</p> <p>Monitor progress in line with each business plan; key target, measure and action. This will be done on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Fulfil the requirements of the TEO Partnership branch as set out in the Partnership Agreement and other relevant documents. This is continuous and reviewed quarterly.</p> <p>Ensure that all staff are provided with appropriate training opportunities to help them fulfil their respective roles and meet their business objectives.</p>
<p>11. Information Management</p> <p>To ensure all information that is managed and stored by CPANI is in line with all relevant legislative requirements and Departmental policies.</p>	<p>Monitor information assurance procedures. This takes place quarterly.</p> <p>Continue to apply data sharing agreements with all Departments.</p> <p>Ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).</p>