



OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Business Plan 2023-2024

Foreword

I am pleased to present our Annual Business Plan for the 2023-24 financial year.

The Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 established the Attorney General for Northern Ireland as a statutory and independent office holder within the devolved administration of Northern Ireland. The Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland (OAGNI) exists to provide high quality advice and support to the Attorney General to assist her in carrying out her functions.

The 2023/24 plan sets out the strategic objectives/operation and management elements of the OAGNI which are aimed at:

- Ensuring that the Attorney General is provided with high quality advice and support to enable them to fulfil their functions and assist them in effectively discharging the duties and responsibilities of the Office.
- Maintaining and continuing to develop an outward looking office that effectively communicates and engages with all our stakeholders;
- Ensuring that corporate governance and resource management within OAGNI is of the highest standard and complies with all statutory and best practice requirements;
- Ensuring that we support and empower each other to carry out our roles, and to make the OAGNI a great place to work.

This business plan will be an essential tool in measuring how we deliver against our agreed objectives and will be agile and capable of adapting to reflect new priorities and responding to change in the year ahead.

Brenda King

Dame Brenda King

Attorney General for Northern Ireland

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL NORTHERN IRELAND

BUSINESS PLAN 2023-24

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 establishes the Attorney General for Northern Ireland as a statutory and independent office holder within the devolved administration of Northern Ireland. The Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland (OAGNI) exists to provide high quality advice and support to the Attorney General to assist her in carrying out her functions. These functions include:

- acting as Chief Legal Adviser to the Northern Ireland Executive in relation to the most complex and important legal matters facing the Executive;
 - scrutinising every Bill passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly (both Executive Bills and Bills initiated by individual MLAs) to determine whether the provisions of those Bills are within the legislative competence of the Assembly;
 - protecting the public interest in the courts where appropriate;
 - the power to participate in litigation where a devolution issue under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 arises;
 - producing guidance for criminal justice organisations on the exercise of their functions in a manner consistent with international human rights standards;
 - taking decisions on whether or not to direct a coroner to hold an inquest under section 14 of the Coroners Act (Northern Ireland) 1959;
 - the protection of the public interest in matters related to charities;
 - discharging functions under the Mental Capacity Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, where the Attorney is empowered to refer to the Review Tribunal the question of whether the authorisation of a deprivation of liberty under the 2016 Act is appropriate;
- and

- discharging responsibilities in relation to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS), including the appointment of the Director and Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions.

A complete list of the Attorney General's functions can be found on our website www.attorneygeneralni.gov.uk

2. VISION

To be an Office that is recognised for its culture of integrity, quality and independence in working to support the Attorney General for Northern Ireland in the delivery of her duties and responsibilities.

3. VALUES

The OAGNI is committed to values that reflect the distinctive nature of the role and work of the Attorney.

- Valuing our people – to achieve the highest standards in all aspects of our work we depend on the skills, diversity, knowledge, experience, dedication and hard work of our people. We will provide the opportunity for our people to perform to the best of their ability and to develop their talents and capabilities to achieve these high standards.
- Treating everyone with respect - we value the individual contribution, diverse experiences and perspectives that all of our people bring to the OAGNI.
- Acting with integrity - we adhere to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Standards, NICS Code of Ethics and legal professional standards and take personal responsibility for our actions.

- d. Taking pride in our work - we strive for the highest standards in all aspects of our work. We will continually look for ways of improving the working practices within OAGNI.
- e. Working with others - we engage constructively with other people and organisations and share information, knowledge and good practice. We work with others in order to develop effective relationships and deliver the highest standards in all aspects of our work.

4. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES/OPERATION AND MANGEMENT

- a. Providing support and advice to the Attorney General to fulfil her functions - To ensure that the Attorney has the appropriate high-quality advice and support to assist her in effectively discharging the duties and responsibilities of her Office.
- b. Communication and Engagement – Maintain and continue to develop an outward looking office that effectively communicates and engages with all our stakeholders.
- c. Delivering Accountability and high standards of governance - To ensure that corporate governance and resource management within OAGNI is of the highest standard and complies with all statutory and best practice requirements
- d. Valuing our people - To ensure that we support and empower each other to carry out our roles, and to make the OAGNI a great place to work.

5. BUDGET

Under section 22(3) of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 the Attorney General is to be funded by the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly. Her office has been allocated an initial (indicative) resource budget of £1.5m. Most of the expenditure is on salaries and accommodation. We are mindful of the need to protect public funds and adhere to the principles of [Managing Public Money](#)

6. PEOPLE

As of 1 April 2023, the Attorney General is supported by 5.8 full time equivalent lawyers (one of whom is deployed exclusively on deprivation of liberty cases); 2 trainee solicitors; 3 paralegals (who deal exclusively with deprivation of liberty cases); and 4 Administrative Staff. Our people are key to what we do. Our people deliver a wide and varied range of work. The OAGNI recognises the importance of continuing to develop capacity, capability and collaboration to achieve and maintain cohesion and resilience in this team. The Office commits to valuing the wellbeing, diversity and development of its staff, including by continuing to align with all NICS and TEO policies, maintaining its own learning and development plan and encouraging staff to participate in relevant TEO events.

THEME	OUTCOMES (Description of intended impact)	ACTIONS (How we will achieve our outcomes)	MEASURES (How we will measure success)
Support & Advice	<p>High quality advice provided to the Attorney, rule of law supported, public interest protected and devolution supported.</p> <p>Awareness of areas of legal work that are decreasing in volume and emerging areas.</p>	<p>OAGNI will provide or secure specialist research, analysis and advice for the Attorney on constitutional and administrative law, EU exit law, human rights law, mental capacity law, coronial law, contempt of court, the law of charities, litigation strategy and any other legal issues arising from departments or the Executive.</p> <p>Identify and discuss decreasing and emerging areas of work at each Stocktake and SMT meeting and prepare timely business cases or contingency plans, for additional resource, if required.</p>	Attorney's requests for advice and support met within agreed timescales.
Communication and Engagement /outreach?	Increased understanding of the role of the Attorney and enhanced confidence in the OAGNI.	OAGNI will seek opportunities for and will support the Attorney to: -Attend speaking engagements at conferences and events.	Percentage of respondents reporting an increase in awareness of the role of the Attorney General measured through a survey taken following

	<p>The fostering of effective working relationships with others, enabling the OAGNI to provide well informed advice to the Attorney.</p>	<p>-Deliver information sessions for MLAS, Assembly staff, NI departments, legal professional bodies, law students and other groups and bodies.</p> <p>OAGNI will maintain a quality accessible website.</p> <p>OAGNI will continue to engage key stakeholders on a regular basis to “horizon scan” for significant matters and to maintain effective and responsive working relationships.</p> <p>OAGNI will treat those engaging with the Office with courtesy and respect, responding to correspondence and queries within a reasonable timescale.</p>	<p>information sessions and events. (Target 80%)</p> <p>Number of “hits” on website.</p> <p>Responses received through feedback link on website.</p> <p>Percentage expressing satisfaction with their interaction with the OAGNI in an annual survey of stakeholders. (Target 80%)</p>
<p>Accountability & Governance</p>	<p>Corporate governance and resource management within the OAGNI is of the highest standard and fulfils all statutory requirements and takes account of best practice, thereby ensuring</p>	<p>OAGNI will: - implement effective, efficient and accurate budgetary and financial management processes;</p>	<p>We will deliver within +/- 1.5% of planned spend.</p> <p>Percentage of payments properly authorised and</p>

	<p>that public money is effectively, efficiently and appropriately used in supporting the Attorney to discharge her functions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -process all payments in a timely and accountable manner; -produce an annual business plan; -ensure the continuous identification and regular review of business risks, and implement mitigating actions where necessary; -provide accurate Quarterly Assurance and Performance Statements to TEO; and -ensure all procurement is compliant with DoF and TEO Guidance. 	<p>processed within specified TEO timescales. (Target 90% within 10 days and 97% within 30 days)</p> <p>Percentage of financial management and governance information returned to TEO in line with required timeframes. (Target 100%)</p>
<p>Valuing our people</p>	<p>Staff are engaged, feel supported and equipped to carry out their roles; making the Office a great place to work.</p>	<p>OAGNI will support staff to develop individually as lawyers or administrators and collectively as colleagues by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Delivering on the 2022-24 OAGNI learning and development plan that meets the needs of staff and the Office; -appointing a learning and development co-ordinator -Supporting staff to attend CPD training and mandatory training. - 	<p>Percentage of professionally qualified legal staff meeting CPD requirements. (Target 100%)</p> <p>Percentage of staff training needs met in line with learning and development plan (Target 90%)</p> <p>Development of a staff knowledge Portal in 2023/24.</p>

		<p>Encourage both formal in informal opportunities to support a range of personal and professional development.</p> <p>OAGNI will support communications between staff by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - holding weekly staff meetings; -holding monthly team briefings; -establishing working groups to take forward change projects within the OAGNI. -encourage wider engagement with NICS initiatives and updates to ensure staff remain connected and up to date with relevant developments. <p>OAGNI will support staff health and well-being by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -implementing the NICS health and well-being policies; Appointing a Wellbeing champion. -holding “whole Office” informal meetings weekly to ensure that staff have an 	<p>Seek/highlight learning opportunities to enable personal development via a variety of sources.</p> <p>Achievement of outcome measured through the NICS People Survey and face to face discussions as appropriate.</p> <p>Staff events, including online and in-person, frequent use of online intranet and staff resources, including HR developments.</p>
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		opportunity for face to face contact with all colleagues; -continually monitor workloads and priorities to balance staff time with business needs.	Number of events held each year. (Target 4.)
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