



EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

**ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS
2020 – 2021**

HC 446

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Annual Report and Accounts
for the year ended 31 March 2021

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by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
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Chief Commissioner's Foreword

This really has been a year like no other. I became Chief Commissioner on 1 March 2020 and, on 18 March, we followed Government advice and moved to working from home because of the pandemic.

It is to the credit of all staff that this massive change went so smoothly, with the technology in place to allow staff to continue the range of our work, including the provision of all our advice and information services, as well as employer training, online. Commissioners also adapted readily to online meetings and new technologies.

COVID-19 has shone a spotlight on inequalities in society right across the world.

It is clear that the pandemic has had a disastrous effect on health inequalities, and it seems that older people and people with disabilities are bearing the brunt. Our health and social care services have valiantly tackled the pandemic, but have another huge job ahead dealing with the aftermath.

One of the effects of the pandemic on education has been that many children who were already educationally disadvantaged have even more to catch up on.

We took every opportunity to promote the use of the equality law framework, including effective implementation of the equality and good relations duties set out in S75 of the Northern Ireland Act in policy making, so that equality considerations were taken into account, focusing on areas of real concern such as health and education. We highlighted the pressing need for adequate equality data, so that policies and resources could be targeted effectively. We stressed that legislation is required to protect people from discrimination on grounds of age in the provision of goods, facilities and services and called for the introduction of a childcare strategy to ensure the provision of affordable, good quality, accessible childcare provision as fundamental to economic recovery and economic participation. We produced guidance for employers and service providers to help deal with the new realities of business and employment covering a range of important issues such as furlough, redundancy and wearing face coverings.

This was also the year of the George Floyd killing and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter campaign. I have sought to bring a particular focus to our work in this area to challenge racism and to promote racial equality, I have been meeting with ethnic minority groups, as well as working to keep the issues on the political agenda and pressing for more political engagement and urgent delivery of the Racial Equality Strategy.

A significant area of work for us is the realisation of our new role, from 1 January 2021, to oversee the Government's commitment to protecting equality and human rights in a post-Brexit Northern Ireland. We are working jointly with the NI Human Rights Commission, on monitoring, advising on, reporting on and enforcing the UK Government's adherence to its commitment to non-diminution of equality and human rights after Brexit. This includes work with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission on oversight of rights and equalities issues that have an island of Ireland dimension.

The promotion of equality and good relations should be central to COVID-19 response and recovery plans, as well as the Programme for Government, to address the inequalities which have been highlighted by the pandemic. The Commission will continue to both challenge and support the Executive and Government Departments; its role is as important as ever in the current context and adequate resources to enable us to carry out all our functions are critical.

I would like to express thanks to my fellow Commissioners and to Evelyn and her staff for their work, and to commend the resilience displayed throughout a difficult and very different year.

I am determined to take forward the determination and flexibility that has characterised our work over the course of the last year, with renewed focus on continuing engagement and applying the lessons of this extraordinary year to promoting equality and challenging discrimination.



Geraldine McGahey OBE
Chief Commissioner

Performance Report

The purpose of this Performance Report is to provide the reader of the Annual Report with an outline of the Commission's purpose and remit; a summary of its performance against its objectives and key results in 2020-21, including the challenges and key risks it has faced in delivering its main objectives and strategies; and a brief overview of the likely developments and challenges it faces in the coming year.

1.1 Performance Overview

Statutory Purpose and activities of the Commission

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is an executive non-departmental public body (NDPB) sponsored by The Executive Office (TEO).

The Commission, established on 1 October 1999 under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, assumed, along with the responsibilities for statutory equality duties and new disability matters, the duties and responsibilities of four former organisations:

- The Commission for Racial Equality for Northern Ireland;
- The Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland;
- The Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland; and
- The Northern Ireland Disability Council.

Since October 1999, additional duties and responsibilities with respect to age, disability, sexual orientation and special educational needs have also been assumed.

During 2009, jointly with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission was designated as the independent mechanism for Northern Ireland of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) with the role of promoting, protecting and monitoring the implementation of the Convention.

Under the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement, the UK Government has committed, in Article 2 of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol, to ensuring that certain equality and human rights in Northern Ireland will continue to be protected after Brexit. To ensure that the UK Government meets its commitment under Article 2 of the Protocol, it created a 'dedicated mechanism' comprising of the Equality Commission and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC).

Since 1 January 2021, the Equality Commission, together with the NIHRC, has been given additional powers and responsibilities to ensure that the UK Government's commitment under Article 2 of the Protocol is met. Schedule 3 of the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020 amended the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to confer these additional powers on the Commission – to monitor, advise, report on and enforce the UK's adherence to its commitment.

Since the Commission's inception, it has aimed to fulfil all of its duties by working in partnership with key stakeholders to place equality at the heart of civic, economic and political life in Northern Ireland. The main pieces of legislation from which the Commission derives its duties and powers are:

- Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976, as amended;
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended;
- Race Relations (NI) Order 1997, as amended;
- Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998, as amended;
- Northern Ireland Act 1998, as amended;
- Equality (Disability, etc.) (NI) Order 2000;
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003, as amended;
- Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005, as amended;
- Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006;
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006, as amended; and
- Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006, as amended.

Organisational structure, objectives and strategies

To deliver its statutory obligations the Commission sets out its approach in three-yearly corporate plans and in annual business plans. These are approved by the Executive Office (TEO) and published on the Commission's website.

Following extensive consultation with a wide range of key stakeholders during 2018 and 2019, the Commission published a new Corporate Plan covering the period 2019-2022. The Plan was approved by the TEO Departmental Board in June 2019. Following the re-establishment of the NI Executive, Ministerial approval was confirmed in April 2021. The Business Plan 2020-21 was approved by the Departmental Board on 28 October 2020 and Ministerial approval was confirmed in April 2021.

The areas that we have prioritised over the Corporate Plan period were derived from our statutory remit, evidence of persistent inequality arising through our work over recent years on key inequalities and evidence from our day-to-day work - across legal, advice, policy, research, investigations, and communications and from the consultative feedback received. The four areas prioritised were Employment; Education; Access and Participation; and Mainstreaming and Championing Equality, with specific areas of focus in each. Each of these areas are linked both to draft Programme for Government (PfG) population outcomes and to our statutory responsibilities, ongoing work programmes and core business objectives.

This is the first Corporate Plan for which the Commission has taken an Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) approach to the development of performance measures, following the lead set by the Executive in its approach. It will be kept under review and further developed throughout its timespan and it will be supported by detailed annual business plans, evaluation, review and communication. Further development of our approach to OBA and our annual business plans will reflect and take account of new developments and changes in the wider environment.

Our aim is to focus the organisation on making a difference, on improving the lives of those we serve, and on identifying and measuring those actions that are most likely to effect and sustain change in the longer term.

Central to this is the need for the development of clearer equality indicators aligned to the PfG, addressing data gaps and extending disaggregation of data by section 75 equality groups.

To deliver its objectives the Commission is structured into seven Directorates:

- Advice and Compliance;
- Communications;
- Dedicated Mechanism Unit;
- Legal Services;
- Public Policy and Strategic Engagement;
- Research and Investigations; and
- Corporate Services.

The Commission's Organisation Chart has been included in Appendix 2.

The Commission's Statement of Commitment sets out our vision and mission statement as:

Vision

A society in Northern Ireland where there is:

Equality for all and a common understanding of the benefits of a more equal society

Mission

To improve people's lives through the effective implementation of our statutory responsibilities

These are supported by our **Values**

- ❖ we are open, honest and trustworthy;
- ❖ we act with integrity, with courage and with impartiality; and
- ❖ we listen;

and founded on a number of related operating **Principles**.

We ensure that we:

- are accountable for our decisions and actions;
- act on a strong evidence base;
- provide an expert, relevant and responsive service to all;
- respect all those who have dealings with us;
- strive for excellence in all we do;
- challenge inequalities actively; and
- are both leaders and partners in driving positive change on equality and good relations.

Chief Executive's Statement for 2020-21

For the Commission, as for the rest of society, this has been an extraordinary year. The Commission and its staff have faced the challenges thrown up by the pandemic - personal and organisational - with flexibility, fleetness of foot, resilience and the utmost professionalism. In a difficult operating environment business continuity was maintained and, as restrictions were extended, existing business processes were adapted and new ways of service delivery quickly developed.

New responsibilities, in the form of the Dedicated Mechanism, are being delivered. Existing business plans were amended to address the new issues raised in the context of the pandemic and existing work programmes, although disrupted, continued to deliver positive outcomes. Successful delivery of these outcomes reflects the continued hard work of our staff and their passion for, and commitment to, delivering high standards of public service. I would also acknowledge the support and cooperation of partners, across the public, private and the voluntary and community sector, in what has been a very difficult year for us all.

This review of performance, and the further detail contained in this Annual Report should provide assurance to stakeholders and customers of the resilience of the Commission and the robustness of its governance structures and arrangements for financial control and risk management. The Commission remained fully operational throughout the pandemic and fully committed to the continued delivery of its statutory responsibilities, working to advance equality and to make a difference across the whole community, particularly to the lives of the most vulnerable.

The performance analysis below sets out where progress continues to be made and where additional work is necessary to demonstrate that progress. The coming year will pose a different set of challenges and the Commission remains well placed to meet them.

The year in review

The overall business environment that public bodies in Northern Ireland operated in was a particularly challenging one in 2020-21 with the need to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. By April 2020, it was clear that our initial plans for the year needed to be amended, in recognition of the extraordinary measures that were put in place by Government to address the pandemic and the impact of the measures and of the virus itself on all aspects of life in Northern Ireland. Not only did the virus impact on the way the Commission's staff worked throughout the year, it also impacted on the issues we worked on in response to the pandemic. This included information and advice to individuals who were concerned about being discriminated against, advice to employers and public authorities about COVID-19 related issues they need to pay attention to, policy inputs about equality impacts and public communication of our views that equality matters, especially in such challenging times.

Despite the pandemic, the overall policy environment improved this year due to the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive in January 2020 and the framework for progress, provided by the New Decade New Approach Deal (NDNA).

Consultation on a new Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework was initiated in the last quarter of the year. It is hoped that greater clarity over a longer-term legislative framework and multi-year budgeting will result.

Given the number of commitments in NDNA which are of direct relevance to the Commission's business objectives –for example, strategies on disability, gender, racial equality, sexual orientation, active ageing, childcare and anti-poverty, as well as key outcome areas such as educational underachievement, special educational needs, employability and housing, it is clear that engagement with Departments will remain a focus for our work over the remainder of the corporate planning period and beyond.

Work on these commitments has been overshadowed this year, by the need to respond to the pandemic and also the out workings of the UK's withdrawal from the EU, in particular aspects of the Ireland/NI Protocol. In different ways, both of these had a major influence on the Commission's operation and performance in 2020-21.

This was the second year of delivery of the Commission's new Corporate Plan 2019-22. Both the draft Corporate Plan 2019-22 and draft Business Plan for 2019-2020, were approved by the Departmental Board in May 2019. In April 2021, it was confirmed that both had received Ministerial approval.

The four strategic outcome areas under which the Commission's work was structured in 2020-21 were: Employment; Education; Access and participation; and Mainstreaming and championing equality. The Commission also has a series of objectives relating to resourcing the plan.

Each of these areas are linked both to Programme for Government (PfG) population outcomes and to our statutory responsibilities. The priority areas have been identified based on our statutory remit, from evidence of substantial and/or persistent inequality arising through our work on key inequalities and evidence from our day-to-day work and engagement with stakeholders. In identifying the outcome areas, we have also attempted to focus on areas where we believe that, with the use of our powers and in partnership in others, we have the potential to make a difference to the lives of people in Northern Ireland.

The escalation of the impact of the pandemic and its extended duration through 2020-21, resulted in a reconfiguration of the Commission's working practices and its business plan priorities.

The new ways of working introduced this year will have a lasting impact on how the Commission will organise its operations and, responding to the changing demands of responding to COVID-19, will continue to influence aspects of its influencing, advisory and compliance work. It is anticipated that during this year continued attention will need to be paid to the inequalities highlighted by COVID-19.

The latter half of the business year saw the establishment of arrangements to fulfil our role as part of dedicated mechanism, in partnership with NIHRC, to oversee the UK Government's commitment, under Article 2 of the Ireland/Ni Protocol, to ensuring no diminution of certain equality and human rights protections. On 1 January 2021, the Commission assumed the powers and responsibilities granted to it under Schedule 3 of the EU (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020.

During 2021-22, recruitment of staff for a new Unit will continue and the Unit will continue to develop and implement the Commission's powers and responsibilities. Additional resources to undertake these new functions have been made available by Government, to support staffing and programme costs, and they are initially secured until the end of March 2023.

Performance against key actions is reviewed on at least a quarterly basis by the Commission and a summary report of performance is provided on a quarterly basis to the TEO sponsor team. Of the thirteen key actions contained in this year's plan, by the end of the year, four of these were delivered or on target and seven were broadly on target to be delivered over the Corporate Plan period. In two areas, progress, at this stage of the corporate planning period, is less than planned.

It is anticipated that the ongoing public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to impact on the Commission's work and working practices over, at least, the first half of the coming year. We also anticipate that the positive aspects from the introduction of new technology and processes, to manage remote working and service-delivery, will be adapted and utilised following any return to a more office-based working environment.

A number of ongoing recruitment exercises, brought to a halt by the lockdown, were progressed during 2020-21. In addition to recruitment for the new Dedicated Mechanism Unit, a number of other vacancies will be filled during 2021-22.

Work has restarted on planning for the future relocation of the ALBs sharing Equality House, as part of the Executive's overall Reform of Property Management (RPM) project.

Managing Risks and uncertainties

The key risks to the achievement of the Commission's objectives are set out in its Corporate Risk and Business Continuity Register. Each of the risks can be related to delivery of the Commission's key objectives, which are themselves aligned with outcome areas set out in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government.

The Register is reviewed at each monthly Executive Board meeting or earlier in the event of the emergence of a significant risk or 'near miss'. It is reviewed at each meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee and by the full Commission at least twice each year.

This year the key risk to the delivery of the Commission's objectives was the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Commission responded quickly and effectively to lockdown and the new challenges that emerged. While in some areas service delivery was disrupted – mainly as a consequence of the impact of the pandemic on other sectors, such as the Courts and Tribunal system and the impact of restrictions on smaller private sector employers – overall business continuity was maintained throughout the year, and the Commission adapted well to new working methods and the extension of virtual technologies and service delivery. A more detailed review of the Commission's risks and risk management is included in the Performance Analysis section below.

Ensuring effective governance and internal control

The Commission has high standards of governance and risk management, as measured by internal and external audit reports and comments from the auditors. Of the three internal audit reviews undertaken this year, all provided satisfactory assurance.

There were no failures of internal control over the period and the level of 'near misses' remains low.

Throughout the year, the Commission and its Committees continued to meet, albeit remotely, and effective governance was maintained. Further detail on these and other governance matters are included in the Governance Statement later in this report.

Financial Results for the Year

The financial position of the Commission as at 31 March 2021 and other results for this year are set out in detail in our Financial Statements at page 86. The Accounting Officer authorised these financial statements for issue on 24 June 2021.

The Financial Reporting Manual (FReM) requires the Commission to treat grant-in-aid as financing rather than income. This year, £5,391k (2019-20, £5,203k) was received from TEO. This included £300k, from TEO in October monitoring, for the establishment of the dedicated mechanism arrangements.

The Commission shows a decrease in income from its activities. Income from activities was £426k this year, which compares with £444k last year. This decrease resulted from an overall reduction in expenditure on premises, due to fuel savings from under-utilisation of the building and the temporary period of Supplier Relief introduced across the public sector.

Net expenditure for the year was £5,275k (2019-20, £5,147k). The increase mainly resulted from increased staff costs, particularly in the use of agency contracts.

There has been an increase in Taxpayers' Equity of £116k - from a surplus of £39k at 31 March 2020, to a surplus of £155k at 31 March 2021. The increase is largely the result of an increase of cash-in-bank at the year-end.

Each year, the Commission aims to operate within the allocated budget provided by TEO, avoiding overspend and managing underspend within a tolerance level of 1.5% by 31 March. At the year-end, this target was met in terms of the resource and capital allocations.

Going concern

The Equality Commission operates as a going concern. It is financed by funding from The Executive Office. Confirmation of its opening budget and grant-in-aid for the financial year 2021-22 was received in April 2021. The Commission has no significant liabilities that cannot be funded over the coming period.

Management accounts are prepared on a monthly basis based on present forecasts. This process seeks to facilitate timely remedial actions. Formal arrangements for regular and frequent liaison with the Departmental sponsorship team are in place and there are no known events or conditions that would cast doubt on the Commission's ability to continue as a going concern.

1.2 Performance analysis

It is impossible to consider the Commission's performance this year without putting it in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the course of this year, staff have worked outside of the office and the vast bulk of Commission operations and services have been delivered virtually.

COVID-19 response

Our response to COVID-19 has involved making changes to our core ways of working and how we deliver our services. We have rolled out MS Teams across the organisation; our internal and external communications now take place on virtual platforms such as MS Teams, Zoom or Webex, there has been minimal face to face contact in the delivery of our advisory work. This was both in response to public health restrictions and the need to keep staff safe, as well as in response to the needs of customers and how they had changed their ways of working and communicating their needs. Throughout the year we have invested in equipment, software, training and wellbeing support, to ensure that our services could be delivered safely, securely and as effectively as possible.

The pandemic threw up new challenges for the Commission and its customers, in terms of highlighting equality issues in the responses to the virus and concerns about its potential to exacerbate some existing inequalities. From the early days of the pandemic, its impact and the impact of the action taken in response, on different equality groups – age, disability, race, gender - moved to the centre of public and media debate and have remained there throughout.

In response to these two main sets of challenges – organisational and those relating to emerging issues and new customer demands - the Commission reappraised its draft business plans and risk registers. It updated its draft business plan, sent to TEO in January 2020, in April 2020, to include additional actions focused on COVID-19 impacts and with COVID-19 as a cross-cutting theme running through all of the actions, and presented this to TEO for approval.

During the course of the year, COVID-19, and our response to it, permeated every area of our work, both its content and how it was delivered. New guidance materials were developed for employers, service providers and the public; existing public policy positions were updated and new positions and recommendations were approved and disseminated and supported by blogs and articles, as well as in our day-to-day engagement with policy leaders and stakeholders; the use of the website, social media and e-zines was accelerated and increased.

The guidance materials related to COVID-19 covered issues such as: redundancy and coronavirus, face masks and overcoming barriers to communication, furlough, protecting pregnant employees during COVID-19, returning to work and the impacts on people with caring responsibilities, ensuring equality for disabled people post-lockdown. These were promoted through blogs, media releases and press articles.

We issued 26 ezines during the year and COVID-19 related topics were of particular interest for subscribers across all editions. Our ezine system now has 12,200 subscribers, a 20% increase from last year's 10,200.

Issues publicised this year, in addition to those highlighted above, included – childcare educational inequalities, the impact of Section 75 when developing new COVID-19 related policies and the important role of equality data.

This year, traffic to the website increased with a rise of 13% in users, making 9% more visits to the site. Trending topics included pregnancy and maternity redundancy related issues and the series of advice notes on COVID-19 issues produced for employers were well read. There were notable increases for specific topics including fair employment and monitoring web pages, Section 75 and equality impact assessment pages, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (UNCRPD) and race equality policy pages.

A new social media monitoring system has been put in place this year. This allows us to track and evaluate our social media work across all our channels, measuring reach more fully and using it for social listening to gather information on what is being said about us, our work and on equality more generally.

A major challenge, and success, was the migration of the Commission's training delivery on-line. The training programme was reviewed and revised to suit web-based delivery. Between July 2020 and the year-end, 170 webinars were delivered. This resulted in a 33% increase in training sessions provided this year and a 25% increase in the number of attendees.

This Commission's response to COVID-19, and particularly the speed of response, was one of the key achievements of this business year and this was reflected in the positive feedback received from stakeholders, as well as the findings of an internal audit review of our response to the key risks posed by COVID-19.

EU withdrawal

Another key achievement this year was the successful establishment of arrangements to fulfil our role as part of the 'dedicated mechanism', to oversee, in partnership with NIHRC, the commitment made by the UK Government under the EU/UK Withdrawal Agreement, in Article 2 of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol, to ensuring that certain equality and human rights in Northern Ireland will continue to be protected after Brexit. To ensure that the UK Government meets its commitment under Article 2 of the Protocol, it created a 'dedicated mechanism' comprising of the Equality Commission and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC).

Resources to implement the dedicated mechanism arrangements covering the period 2020-23 have been committed by Government and £300k funding for 2020-21 was provided to the Commission, in the October 2020 monitoring round. This funding enabled the recruitment of some staff and the initiating of a work programme during the final months of the year.

Even though the initial European Union (Withdrawal) Act was passed in 2018, negotiations about the nature of that withdrawal, the relationship with the EU that would follow, the structures and legislative framework that would underpin the withdrawal, and further legislation to enact these, were required. The implementation period, during which European law remained in force, ended in 31 December 2020. Since 1 January 2021, the Equality Commission, together with the NIHRC, has been given additional powers and responsibilities to ensure that the UK Government's commitment under Article 2 of the Protocol is met. During the year, legal advices were obtained on the scope of Article 2(1) of the Protocol, to assist the assessment of areas of potential impact.

Engagement with the Secretary of State, members of the House of Lords and MPs, equality and human rights stakeholders, secured assurances from the UK Government that addressed the joint ECNI/NIHRC concerns in relation aspects of the Internal Market Bill.

Providing briefings and presenting evidence to the NI Affairs Committee at Westminster, Assembly Committees and sub-committees, working in partnership with key Government Departments and delivering a considerable programme of engagement to promote North/South and East/West understanding and cooperation has been a focus of activity this year. Throughout the year, awareness has been raised of the new provisions and guidance provided via stakeholder events, information materials, media liaison and social media.

A key area over recent months has been the strengthening of relationships with the NIHRC as part of the dedicated mechanism, and also the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), on overseeing the commitment on an all-island basis, including establishing communications and planning structures and agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding.

A relationship was also established with the Independent Monitoring Authority for the Citizens' Rights Agreements, which has the role of monitoring UK public bodies to make sure they implement the rights of these citizens and by identifying any underlying issues.

The impact of the work to deliver our responsibilities as part of the dedicated mechanism will be kept under review over the coming years and, in light of this, further bids for resources will be made for the period April 2023 onwards.

Other highlights

Clearly, the Commission's response to COVID-19, both its maintenance of business continuity and the new on-line approaches to web-based training and publicising its range of COVID-19 related advisory guidance and policy interventions was a highlight of the year as was our work on the Dedicated Mechanism.

However, alongside both of these major developments the Commission continued to deliver its core statutory responsibilities in relation to promoting equality of opportunity and combatting discrimination and working to influence the wider policy framework, insofar as it impacted on the Commission's areas of responsibility. These key frameworks include the New Decade, New Approach Deal (NDNA) (January 2020), which set out the priorities for a restored Executive, including a wide range of policy commitments relevant to the work of the Commission and the outcome areas set out in its Corporate Plan 2019-22.

Achievements in the delivery of statutory duties and in responding to the evolving public policy framework included:

- ❖ **Making it Work campaign:** In partnership with the NI Union of Supported Employment (NIUSE), this provided a valuable focus for work on employment support services for disabled people. The campaign involved case studies, resource materials, web pages and use of social and print media. The campaign and the associated materials generated good coverage in the regional and local press and very positive feedback from support organisations and more widely across the business and disability sectors. We plan to further develop this project over the next financial year.
- ❖ **Tackling inequalities in Education;** Key outputs included our publication of 'COVID-19 and Education: Equality Considerations'; and 'Family Engagement: Learning from the Pandemic'. Other successes included the adoption by the Department of Education (DE) of the Commission's COVID-19 and Education recommendations in its Equality Toolkit, indications the Department of Education and Education Authority would ensure equality data collection in the new c2k system and inclusion of our work in Assembly research papers.

There were also positive references to Commission work in Assembly debates, all-party working groups and in the public and press statements of politicians and other opinion formers.

- ❖ **Developing inclusive workplaces:** An objective this year was to develop a programme of work on inclusive workplaces in partnership with Trade Unions and employer organisations based on the roll-out of survey findings from last year and to raise awareness with employers and promote improved practices in target areas.

In partnership with the Labour Relations Agency and NIC-ICTU a number of webinars, with input from employer organisations and trade unions, were developed. These will be rolled-out in 2021-22.

In total, this year 41 webinars were delivered on bullying and harassment and developing inclusive workplaces. Building on last year's survey work, case studies based on experiences of harassment were compiled and published.

- ❖ **Disability Stakeholder Forum:** This year saw the establishment and first meeting of the Independent Mechanism for Northern Ireland (IMNI) Disability Stakeholder Forum.

The Forum brings together and involves persons with disabilities and their representative organisations to assist IMNI to promote, protect and monitor implementation of UNCRPD; and to coordinate efforts to support and challenge government to give effect to the UNCRPD in Northern Ireland.

- ❖ **Racial Equality Strategy:** We have also continued to support and challenge TEO to effectively implement the commitments set out in the Race Equality Strategy, including with regards to race law reform and data collection / monitoring to inform the delivery of public policy and services. Working with others we have also secured the establishment of the Travellers' Thematic Group under Racial Equality Strategy.

- ❖ **Communications and Engagement:** This year saw the publication of an updated Communications Strategy and the development of a new Political Engagement Strategy. Increase in engagement with the Assembly. The Commission appeared before Assembly committees on five occasions this year.
- ❖ **Impact of engagement in key policy areas:** increasing evidence of advocacy and adoption of Commission public policy positions and recommendations in work of government Departments, such as the Department for Communities' Social Inclusion Expert Panel Reports and co-design groups; also Marrinan Review of Hate Crime, Assembly debates and in the public statements of key opinion formers.
- ❖ **Measuring Equality in Northern Ireland:** This year saw the initiation of a Commission project to develop a framework for measuring equality outcomes in key areas across each of the equality grounds. We also published a third annual survey of public opinion on equality in Northern Ireland.
- ❖ **Investor in People Silver:** Early in the pandemic, an Investor in People assessment was undertaken remotely. This was the first time the Commission was assessed under the Generation 6 standard. A Silver accreditation was awarded.

Meeting statutory responsibilities

The Commission has formal regulatory powers and responsibilities across its legislative remit, primarily with regard to:

- advising and assisting with regard to complaints of discrimination over each of the grounds covered by the anti-discrimination provisions;
- a number of duties with respect to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998;
- the preparation by public authorities of disability action plans under sections 49A and 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA); and

- the registration, monitoring and review requirements placed on private and public sector employers, contained in the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998 (FETO) and related provisions.

Each year, in its Annual Report, the Commission outlines its work in these areas.

Complaints of discrimination

The most significant impact of COVID 19 was in the area of legal assistance. During 2020-21 advice was provided in relation to 2,962 (3,922 – 2019-20) complaints. Although this is a substantial decrease on last year's figure, the number of enquiries received in the first quarter of the year was very low and suggests that the decrease was COVID-19 related. Of the enquiries, 49.5% were disability related, including 2.4% SENDO; 26.9% were sex related; 8.3% were race related; 7.6% FETO; 6.2% were age related and 1.5% were related to sexual orientation. A number of complaints may cover more than one ground. During the year, 191 applications for assistance were considered by the Commission's Legal Funding Committees, 43.3% less than last year's 337. Of these 46 (24.1%) were granted assistance - again, much lower than last year's 72 (21.4%). This reflects the reduction in the number of applications for assistance received and delays in receiving respondent responses.

No Commission assisted cases were heard by Courts and Tribunals during the year, mainly because the Courts and Tribunals were closed for a considerable period of time.

There were 25 settlements of cases resulting in a total of £210,000 in compensation for claimants, along with commitments by respondents to address equality issues in follow up with the Commission.

During the year, the Commission reviewed its Legal Assistance Strategy. The updated strategy is being prepared for consultation in 2021-22.

Section 75 statutory equality and good relations duties

Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a number of duties on the Commission with respect to the enforcement of Section 75. The Commission is required to:

- keep under review the effectiveness of the duties on public authorities;
- offer advice to public authorities and others in connection with Section 75;
- approve equality schemes and request any public authority to make a revised scheme; and
- consider complaints received regarding a potential failure by a public authority to comply with its approved equality scheme, and to investigate where appropriate.

The Commission took a number of steps in furtherance of these duties during the year under review, as set out below.

Keeping the effectiveness under review

Following a review of progress on delivering the recommendations from the Commission's 2018 report on 'Section 75 – Acting on the evidence of public authority practices' in 2019, it was agreed that focus be maintained on public authorities and their practices, including on leadership and improvements to implementation of the arrangements set out in equality schemes.

Building on the engagement with senior Departmental officials in 2019-20, this year, the Commission adapted its Leadership Audit checklist for local authorities. In partnership with NISRA, a Section 75 Data Signposting guide was developed and a video, to advise public authorities on the purpose of Section 75 annual progress reports, was produced.

Advice to Public Authorities

A focus for the Commission this year was the provision of advice on budgetary processes and consultations. This included advising the Department of Finance to ensure Section 75 arrangements are incorporated in the budgeting process and to all Government Departments.

Advice was also provided to TEO on the Section 75 requirements in advance of its Programme for Government (PfG) Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) being developed and on its consultation and on other major public policy frameworks, including the Strategic Investment Board's proposed updated Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland, which will cover 2021-31.

Equality Schemes

Two new public authorities were designated this year. Of the other 158 designated public authorities, 144 have an equality scheme in place and 14 are exempt from producing a scheme. Due to the pandemic the Commission extended the date for submission of public authority annual progress reports from the end of August 2020 to the end of December 2020. By year end 117 (81%) of 144 public authorities submitted an annual progress report for 2020-21 which is a decrease from last year's 135 (93.7%).

During the year under review, the Commission provided feedback to 15 public authorities on their annual progress report, to 24 public authorities on equality screening and audits of inequalities, and to four public authorities on the five-year review of their equality schemes.

Complaints and Investigations

Under Schedule 9, Paragraph 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Commission considers complaints against public authorities alleging they have failed to comply with their approved scheme and it may investigate such complaints. Under paragraph 11, it can investigate public authority compliance on its own initiative.

This year the Commission advised 35 individuals on complaints, potential complaints or about the Paragraph 10 complaints process, a decrease on the 2019-20 figure, when 52 individuals were advised.

Two new written complaints, under Paragraph 10 of Schedule 9, were received and the Statutory Duty Investigations Committee (SDIC) considered seven complaints.

One investigation of a complaint commenced and one investigation under paragraph 11 of Schedule 9 was completed. This was an investigation into whether the Department of Finance failed to comply with its approved Equality Scheme, relating to equality impact assessment and consultation, in preparation of the Budget for Northern Ireland 2019-20. In September 2020, the Commission found that the Department failed to comply with its Equality Scheme and a number of recommendations were made to improve practices.

Public Sector Disability Duty

Of the 160 designated public authorities, 15 are exempt from producing a Disability Action Plan (DAP). Of the 145, which are not exempt, 123 (85.0%) have a DAP with current disability action measures. Of the remaining 22, ten are consulting on revised disability action measures, seven have redrafted their disability action measures and at the year-end the Commission was engaging with the three small public authorities, which were due to update their DAP measures and the two newly designated public authorities, to put DAPs in place.

During the year, advice was provided to 36 public authorities to improve the quality of disability action plan measures, particularly focusing on promoting participation for disabled people. Website guidance was promoted and seven training sessions on the DAP duties were delivered by webinar.

Fair Employment and Treatment Order (FETO)

Each year the Commission receives almost four thousand monitoring return forms from private sector employers and public authorities. This year, temporary provision was made to receive these by emails and timelines were amended for submission to mitigate the difficulties that employers and public authorities were encountering. In 2020-21, 2,218 returns were received. This compares with 3,719 by the year-end in 2019-20. All of these returns were validated, plus 789 received prior to 1 April 2020.

The Commission's main focus in relation to Article 55 Reviews in this year was to ensure that employers, due to conduct their Reviews, were advised to do so. We appreciated the difficulties many employers, particularly in the private sector, had in completing their Reviews and the number submitted to the Commission in this year was lower than previous years. We requested 80 (111 in 2019-20) Article 55 reviews for audit. By the year end, 42 (74, 2019-20) had been received and three others submitted voluntarily. Of the 45 audited, by the year-end, 44 (97.8%) were compliant, following engagement with compliance staff. Work was ongoing with the remaining employer to ensure compliance. At the year-end, staff were following up the findings of their reviews with 16 private sector employers and public authorities.

Annual Summary of Monitoring Returns

Work was completed on the Commission's annual summary of monitoring returns, this year. The Fair Employment Monitoring Report No.30 will be published on the Commission's website early in 2021-22. The report provides information on the community background of the monitored workforce based on those returns made during 2019.

The total monitored workforce in 2019 was 564,826. This represented an increase of 1,597 (0.3%) from the previous year's 563,229. Of that total, 253,750 (44.9%) were Protestant, 249,035 (44.1%) Roman Catholic, and 62,041 (11.0%) were Non-Determined. The Non-Determined share increased by 0.1 percentage points (pp) from 2018 (10.9%).

Looking at the composition of those from Roman Catholic and Protestant community backgrounds only, in 2019 Protestants [50.5%] continued to comprise the majority of the workforce. The Roman Catholic share of the monitored workforce increased by [0.2 pp] to [49.5%].

Roman Catholics comprised more than half of applicants [53.1%]. In 2019, the Roman Catholic share of applicants to the monitored workforce had increased by [8.3%] from [44.8%] in 2001.

Roman Catholics represented [53.3%] of appointees to the monitored workforce in 2019. This continues a broad trend of increasing Roman Catholic appointees to the monitored workforce during the period 2001-2019. Overall, their share increased by [8.5%] from [44.8%] in 2001.

For the fifth consecutive year, Roman Catholics [52.4%] comprised a greater share of leavers from the monitored workforce.

In 2019, women no longer accounted for more than half of all monitored employees in Northern Ireland; the female share decreased to 49.5% from 51.8% in the previous year.

In terms of high-level trends in the Monitored Workforce, the findings continue to show a gradual upward trend in the Roman Catholic share of the monitored workforce; this has been evident since 2001. This increase continued in 2019 [0.2 pp], although at a lesser degree to that observed in previous years.

The Commission is continuing to monitor the increase in those recording employees and applicants as 'community background could not be determined' in their annual monitoring returns. In 2019, 11.0% of the monitored workforce was Non-Determined.

The Annual Summary was supported by additional information on company data, analysis by sector and other background information available on the Commission's website.

That increase takes place alongside a growing percentage of Roman Catholics in the composition of those available for work, as measured by the Labour Force Survey (LFS). When compared with the LFS data, the trend indicates a closing of the gap between Roman Catholics in the monitored workforce figures from 1990 until 2011 and remaining within the LFS margins for error up until 2016. From 2016 to date, the data suggests a slight annual widening of the gap. Given the differences in methods of data collection, this is currently being kept under review and discussed with NISRA, which provides the LFS data.

In 2019, the Roman Catholic community composition of the monitored workforce was 2.6 percentage points lower than the broad approximation of Roman Catholics available for work. This represents a decrease of 0.5 percentage points from 2018.

Performance measurement

Although the corporate planning framework, with its commitment to the use of an Outcome Based Accountability (OBA) approach to measuring progress against population indicators and improving the performance measurement of our own delivery remains a core element of our corporate planning, a greater focus this year was placed on quickly reacting to the pandemic and the new issues raised and challenges posed. Inevitably, as business objectives were reprioritised and new work streams were developed, this impacted on the progress made in the utilisation of OBA this year.

During 2021-22, the final year of the current three-year corporate planning cycle, the Commission will review its progress in measuring and meeting the indicators and measures set out in its Corporate Plan and using this in the development of a new Plan covering 2022-25. In parallel with this review, the Commission will continue with its Measuring Equality in Northern Ireland project, which was initiated this year.

With regard to meeting our corporate planning objectives, of the thirteen areas contained in this year's plan, by the end of the year, four of these objectives were met or on target and seven were broadly on target to be delivered over the Corporate Plan period. In two areas, progress, at this stage of the corporate planning period is less than planned.

Performance against service delivery areas is reviewed on at least a quarterly basis by the Commission and a summary report of performance is provided on a quarterly basis to the TEO sponsor team.

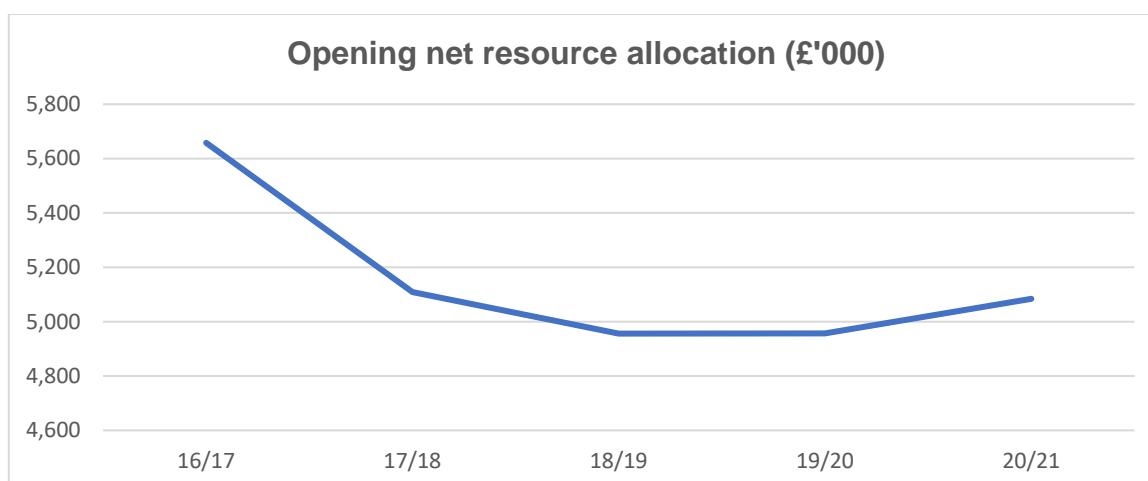
Further analysis of performance delivery against this year's objectives is set out below and further summarised in Appendix 1.

An internal audit review at the end of this year contained a priority 3 recommendation that the Commission should review the performance measures template used for all Directorates and consider how best to define performance measures and actions so that they can be monitored and reported on. The revised template should reflect any adoption of an Outcomes Based Accountability approach. Work on addressing this will be undertaken in 2021-22.

Financial performance

As has been reported in previous reports, in budget terms, the last decade has been a difficult one for the Commission, with opening grant-in-aid has falling by more than £2 million, from 2009-10. This reduction occurred against the background of the extension, largely driven by developments in the European Union, of the Commission's statutory responsibilities under anti-discrimination legislation on grounds of age, disability and sexual orientation since the Commission's establishment. It has also occurred within a context of increasing demand for our services promoting equality, combating discrimination and addressing key inequalities in our society.

As can be seen from the graph below, the reduction over the past years has not been so dramatic and over recent years, the position has stabilised. The current year saw an increase in the opening net resource allocation of £127k (2.56%).



Establishment of Dedicated Mechanism arrangements

This increase did not include the additional funding that was provided this year, to fund the implementation of dedicated mechanism arrangements. Funding for the new arrangements was provided in the October monitoring round. The Commission has been given powers and responsibilities under the EU/UK Withdrawal Agreement.

The Table below sets out the funding that will be provided over the first three years of the dedicated mechanism operations.

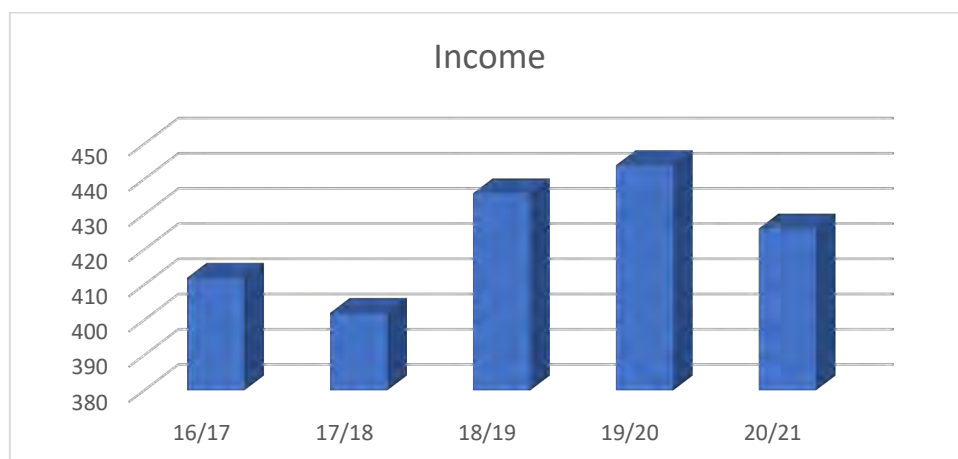
DM Funding 2020-23 (£'000)

£m	Resource budget	Capital budget	Total
2020-21	381	20	401
2021-22	793	0	793
2022-23	805	0	805
Grand total	1,979	20	1,999

Given the timing of the approval of the additional funding, it was agreed that only £300k would be required for DM recruitment and operations this year and, of this, £232k was spent. The staffing establishment to deliver on the new responsibilities was agreed by the Department of Finance and TEO at eleven posts. Four posts were recruited this year and the remainder will be recruited in 2021-22.

Income

The Commission has continued to mitigate the impact of budget reductions, through increasing its efficiency and through sharing its accommodation and sharing its services with other smaller public bodies. The Commission has also made use of in-year monitoring processes to increase its funding.



As can be seen from the chart above, over the past five years the financing derived from income has added between £400k - £450k.

In the current year the income from sharing premises and services was £426k, lower than last year's £444k. This reduction was a result of the savings in facilities management and other premises costs, due to the supplier relief scheme and the under-utilisation of the Commission offices. The reduced costs arising from remote working led the Commission to declare an easement of £100k of its resource allocation this year.

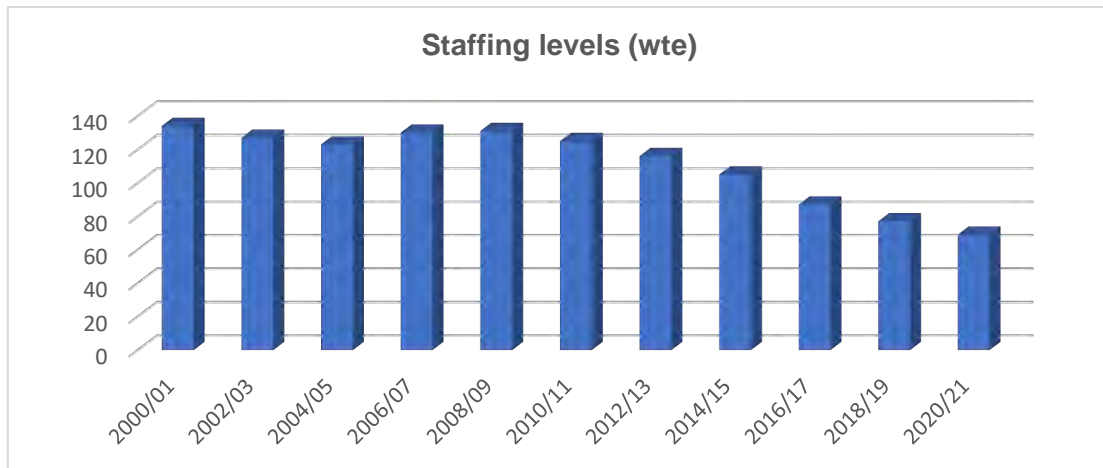
Commission expenditure

The table below gives a breakdown of Commission expenditure over the past five years. This year's expenditure includes the £232k utilised in the establishment of the new dedicated mechanism arrangements.

Expenditure trends 2016 – 21 (£'000)

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Staff costs	4,151	4,023	3,930	3,793	3,910
Current expenditure	1,641	1,721	1,671	1,692	1,683
(Receipts)	(412)	(402)	(436)	(444)	(426)
Resource	5,380	5,342	5,165	5,041	5,167
Capital	146	60	55	52	127
Depreciation	104	109	111	110	104
Impairment	0	0	29	0	0
Total expenditure	5,630	5,511	5,360	5,203	5,398

The table above demonstrates the high proportion of Commission expenditure accounted for by staffing. Given the structure of the Commission and the proportion of its budget that is committed to staffing, budget reductions have had a disproportionate impact on staffing levels. Consequently, in the context of continuing reductions in the Commission's budget, the downward pressure on staffing levels continues to be a very significant challenge for the Commission. The chart below provides an illustration of the scale of staff reductions since 2000-01.



From the first year of its existence 2000-01, staff numbers have fallen from 134 to the current 69, a reduction of 48.5%. Although the Commission has continued to deliver its statutory responsibilities, inevitably the reductions have had an effect on the scale and scope of what we have been able to deliver, across the range of our functions.

Over the period of the current Corporate Plan, staff numbers have fallen by 8 (10.3%). Although this year the overall level of staffing continued to fall, the rate of increase reduced and the latter half of the year saw the beginnings of a small increase in staffing that should continue into 2021-22, with additional recruitment into the DMU and the filling of a number of vacancies from this year.

This year expenditure on Staff and Commissioners' costs was £3,910k, an increase of £117k (3.08%) compared with last year (£3,793k). This increase was mainly a consequence of a rise in agency worker costs, from £154k last year, to £241k this year as we engaged a small number of agency workers to fill vacancies on a temporary basis. There were no staff severances this year.

There was little change in current expenditure. This year's figure of £1,683k was a small decrease on the 2019-20 figure of £1,692k. Although there were savings due to the underutilisation of the building in premises related areas such as fuel usage, additional expenditure was incurred in the provision of IT consumables such as laptop cables, docking stations, headphones and keyboards to support remote working and in annual contracts, resulting from the migration of Commission systems to Microsoft 365 in the Cloud.

Much of the Capital expenditure this year was directed towards providing staff with the necessary equipment to work remotely and in preparation for the hybrid and more agile working arrangements that will develop further during 2021-22. The other main area of capital expenditure was on maintaining system security.

Considerable efforts were made this year to maintain control over staff annual leave balances and any resultant accrual for untaken leave. By the year end, the efforts to ensure that staff were managing their annual leave were successful and the 2020-21 accrual, at £110,590, was slightly lower than last year's £111,580.

Proactive steps were also taken to ensure that the disruption to the Tribunal and Court system did not result in the development of a backlog of unprovided expenditure on assisted cases being pushed into next year. Legal staff worked to ensure that live funded cases were subject to periodic review and brought before Legal Funding Committees to ensure that authorised expenditure limits reflected the work that was ongoing to prepare the cases to readiness once the Tribunal and Court system becomes fully operational again. This year's legal casework provision, at £143,700, is higher than the figure for 2019-20, £97,504.

At the year-end there was a substantial increase in the bank balance, from £126k in 2019-20 to £313k this year. This increase was the result of slippage in recruitment and in some project work, as well as in invoicing and final acceptance of work completed by 31 March. It was also an effect of the quarterly drawdown arrangements put in place this year and the volatility and disruption to historic expenditure patterns resulting from the pandemic and longer than anticipated relocation of staff from Equality House.

Mainly as a result of the increase in assets and the increase in cash in bank, there was an increase in taxpayers' equity. The surplus in taxpayers' equity this year was £155k, compared with £39k in 2019-20.

Payment to Suppliers

The Commission is committed to the prompt payment of bills for goods and services received in accordance with the Government's Better Payment Practice Code. Unless otherwise stated in the contract, payment is due within 30 days of receipt of the goods or services, or presentation of a valid invoice or similar demand, whichever is later.

The Northern Ireland Executive's target is for 90% of valid bills to be paid within 30 days. During the period, 95.3% of bills were paid within the thirty-day standard and 76.6% were paid within 10 days. The figures for 2019-20 were 97.0% and 73.4% respectively. This year was the first full year following the migration of payments to Bacs and, as a consequence, the two sets of annual figures are not strictly comparable this year. The movement to Bacs has been beneficial to the Commission's operations and the Commission's payments to suppliers remain well within the target set by the Executive.

Corporate social responsibility and sustainability

During this year, the Commission signed up to Business in the Community's CORE programme which will further enable the mapping of our entire corporate responsibility activity against the four main themes of Core Business Values, People, Planet and Place. Following the mapping process, we will consider whether or not to make a formal submission to the CORE programme for accreditation.

As the leaseholder in Equality House, the Commission took the lead in invoking business continuity measures and creating a bio-secure environment within which staff could operate when home working was not possible. In addition to creating and sharing access protocols and installing sanitising and instructional signage, a programme of information, training and wellbeing support was instigated and shared with all staff. Strict recording of access was maintained, should it have been needed for track and trace purposes, and it is testament to staff's compliance and professionalism that no health and safety concerns were reported at Equality House during the pandemic.

Staff wellbeing was supported during lockdown with a range of initiatives including an eLearning wellbeing toolkit, training for line managers to support remote workers, physical challenges to encourage activity and virtual clubs to promote good connections among staff.

Equality House currently has an independently assessed energy rating of 'Category B' with a score of 46. This is an improvement on the last assessment which was rated as 'C' with a score of 57. In this rating system, a lower score indicates a more efficient building. A typical rating for a building of the size and occupancy of Equality House would be 100 meaning that a score of 57 is indicative of efficient operation.

An energy rating improvement was to be expected due to relative under-occupancy during the pandemic. However, it is the case that Equality House was open and available to limited staff for the majority of lockdown, a key factor in the Commission being able to maintain much needed services to customers and stakeholders.

One main environmental advantage of working remotely was the move to mainly electronic communications and the resultant reduction in waste production largely accomplished via a 95% reduction in printing and paper waste.

Waste receptacles are positioned throughout the building to guide staff to sort waste into recyclable, food and landfill categories. Equality House was able to reduce its waste production down from 22.73 metric tonnes to less than two metric tonnes, most of which was recyclable.

The Commission utilises the services of Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) for its larger contracts, such as Facilities Management and Reprographics. CPD contracts require contractors to focus on economic, environmental and social factors pertaining to their services. The Commission continues to support local small businesses and social enterprises such as local caterers and social enterprises, which, in more normal times, supply refreshments for Commission events and meetings.

The Commission operates a Bike to Work Scheme which over the last eight years has supported fourteen staff, almost 20% of the workforce, and space has been set aside in the basement car park for bikes. Commission staff have also advised other organisations in setting up their own schemes.

Further opportunities are being explored to accommodate the expected uplift in demand as society emerges from lockdown. Public transport users can also avail of a scheme, which assists them to pay for their annual Translink Travel Cards.

Equality House is accessible to people with disabilities and has benefitted from an accessibility audit which has enhanced its facilities. In delivering its services, the Commission is committed to the provision of equality of opportunity to all service users. The Commission has effective policies in place and will make reasonable adjustments for disabled people to reduce barriers and increase accessibility.

The Commission is committed to complying with its human rights obligations in delivering its statutory responsibilities and duties. Further information on staffing policies, including the Commission's approach to the promotion of equality of opportunity can be found in the Staff Report.

During the first lockdown, staff were facilitated to undertake volunteering activities in their local communities and throughout the year continued with their charitable activities. Staff raised £4,600 for Special Olympics this year, in memory of the Commission's own Special Olympics volunteer, Aidan Fitzpatrick, through a sponsored cycle by a staff member and various other remote fundraisers.

Fraud Prevention and Anti-Bribery

The Commission has in place a fraud prevention policy and response Plan, which includes fraud, bribery and anti-corruption guidance for staff. There were no instances of fraud or bribery in 2020-21. Further information on the Commission's fraud policy and response plan can be found in the governance statement. A gifts and hospitality policy is in place and a register is maintained.

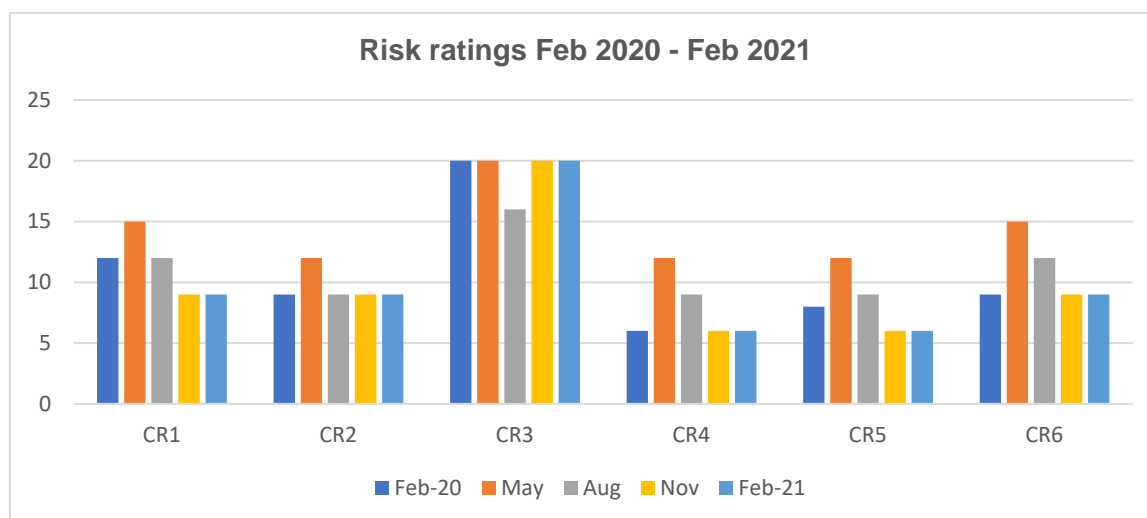
Likely Future Developments, risks and uncertainty

Set out below are the main risks and uncertainties impacting on the Commission's performance this year and anticipated as impacting performance over the coming year. Further information on the Commission's performance is set out above and the management of risks impacting upon performance is also included in the Chief Executive's statement, which forms part of this performance report.

Throughout the course of the year the Commission's risk register monitored and reported on six strategic risks

- CR1 Reputation and credibility
- CR2 Stakeholder confidence
- CR3 Funding and staffing
- CR4 Budgetary control
- CR5 Statutory compliance and internal control
- CR6 Business continuity and asset management

A chart of the residual risk rating for each objective, as reported at the Audit and Risk Committee, is set out below.



Unsurprisingly, the period between February and May 2020 saw a substantial increase in the risk rating of almost all of the risks. In March 2020, the Commission enacted its Emergency Response Plan and all of its staff were required to work from home. COVID-19 was added, as a cross-cutting theme, across the Commission’s business plan and risk registers. As the pandemic progressed, and confidence in the arrangements put in place increased, the risk ratings were able to be reduced.

An internal audit review of the Commission’s response to COVID-19 risks was undertaken. The review focused on mechanisms by which the Commission identified, assessed and responded to risks associated with new ways of operating during the pandemic, including governance and continuity arrangements, addressing emerging risks in areas such as health and safety and staff wellbeing, data protection and cyber security. Although not specifically an assurance review, considerable confidence in the adequacy of the Commission’s response was obtained from the review.

The focus of the audit recommendations was on ensuring wider coverage for remedial measures in the areas of risk assessing home-working arrangements and staff training and in developing lessons learned from the experience. During the year, the coverage was increased and the Commission continues to develop and put in place changes arising from learning obtained this year.

CR3, the risk relating to uncertainty around the longer-term funding and staffing position of the Commission, has for a number of years remained the highest rated risk and most resistant to mitigation. This has largely been a result of the visible reduction in the Commission's resources and staffing levels throughout the decade following 2007-08 financial crisis, and up to more recent years; the impact of a large rent increase, which had to be absorbed from 2016; continuing pessimistic forecasts for the public financing environment; the reliance of the NI Executive on rolling one year budget settlements; and the Commission's dependence on voluntary exit schemes and concerns about the post VES position. A number of these structural issues remain and the uncertainties introduced by the EU withdrawal and COVID-19 pandemic have added an additional note of political uncertainty and pessimism around the future funding environment.

More recently, however, there have been some grounds for optimism. At the macro level, there is clear recognition that a return to a three-year budget cycle is required and, despite the political difficulties, a more stable basis for governance and decision-making. The more recent opening budget settlements have seen a slight upturn in the funding being made available and the TEO's more consistent treatment of the income generated by the Commission and its use of in-year monitoring opportunities has greatly assisted.

Although not reflected in this year's annual figures, 2021-22 should see the first increase in Commission staffing levels in more than a decade, as we seek to fill a number of vacancies. Much of this will be a result of the funding of staff to deliver on the new dedicated mechanism powers and duties and a small increase in other areas is also forecast.

Although the past year has been a difficult one, the experience of dealing with the challenges of remote working has assisted the Commission in preparing its systems and staff for new and more agile forms of working and delivering services.

We have been advised that the relocation of the Commission from Equality House is now likely to take place towards the end of 2024. Although this may place some limitations on the ability of the Commission to fully realise the savings that could arise from more flexible forms of working, in the longer term it is likely that the Commission will be able to reduce the amount of office space it will require.

Although the overall funding environment may be a difficult one, the Commission is in a position to utilise the potential opportunities provided by the transition to hybrid working arrangements and future relocation to new premises. A move to multi-year budgeting across the public sector will also assist the Commission to plan its response to future resource and staffing reductions, should these occur.

The initial shock from the pandemic and first lockdown resulted in an increase in ratings for CR1 – the ability of the Commission to demonstrate the impact of its work on equality outcomes, and CR2 – securing buy-in to its objectives from key stakeholders, as the Commission re-orientated its business plan objectives towards the impact of COVID-19 and the Government’s response on emerging issues and the risk of exacerbating existing inequalities.

However, the speed of response and the increasing public profile for differential impacts of the pandemic and the response to it, on key grounds such as age, race and sex led to an increased demand for Commission guidance and advice, from employers and public authorities once the initial crisis response had subsided.

The pattern of ratings in the second half of the year reflects a more stable and steady position. However, underlying the apparent continuity, changes have continued to be made to mitigation measures.

Although the focus on COVID-19 impacts will continue into 2021-22, the disruption to organisational business objectives and progress on monitoring the impact of our work on them, will be reviewed in 2021-22, in preparation for the development of a new Corporate Plan covering the period 2022-25.

In year budgetary control was tested this year, with changes to Departmental budgetary processes, the introduction of supplier relief, a rapid movement to electronic processes for financial approvals and record retention and increasing uncertainty around the extent to which previous years’ expenditure profiles and trends would be reflected in the unusual circumstances of 2020-21. The main risk areas were identified and, where necessary, additional monitoring processes put in place. At the year-end the Commission reported a small underspend, which was well within the Department’s financial target of keeping any underspend within 1.5%.

The risk of failure to meet statutory compliance standards and maintain effective financial control also increased as a result of the need to introduce homeworking, new systems and new working practices. However, audit findings were positive throughout the year and the action to ensure system security and maintain staff safety and wellbeing were effective. There was an increase in data protection incidents and near misses during the year. In addition to the remedial action put in place in response to individual incidents, an internal review of the pattern of incidents has been initiated and the Commission's arrangements for data protection will be reviewed by internal audit as part of the 2021-22 audit programme.

CR6 covers the risk of a failure to ensure business continuity. The Commission's business continuity arrangements were comprehensively stress tested this year and at key levels – e.g. governance, financial control, service delivery – business continuity was maintained.

New arrangements to respond to the need for remote working and staff and visitor safety, if required to come into the office, were put in place. Investment in equipment, software licences and staff training was made, both to facilitate continuity and to prepare the Commission for the introduction of agile and flexible working arrangements over the coming year.

Important Events Occurring After the Year-end

There have been no significant events since the year-end that would affect this report and the accounts.

Annual Report and Accounts

The Equality Commission's Annual Report and Accounts are prepared in accordance with Schedule 8 of the Northern Act 1998 and in a form directed by The Executive Office with the approval of the Department of Finance.



Evelyn Collins CBE
Chief Executive and Accounting Officer
24 June 2021

2. Accountability Report

2.1 Corporate Governance Report

This report describes the organisation and composition of the Commission's governance structures and how they support the achievement of the Commission's objectives.

2.1.1 Directors' Report

The Directors' Report provides details of those with the key responsibilities for directing the Commission in the delivery of its objectives, their attendance and any significant external interests held by them. It also provides information on any personal data incidents reported to the Information Commissioner's Office.

The Commission is led by a Chief Commissioner, who is supported by a Deputy Chief Commissioner. The overall number of Commissioners should be not less than 14 and not more than 20. Including the Chief Commissioner and the Deputy Chief Commissioner, there are currently 14 Commissioners. Commissioners are appointed by open competition and are accountable to the Secretary of State, under the Northern Ireland Act 1998

The Chief Commissioner is Ms Geraldine McGahey OBE. Ms McGahey was appointed on 1 March 2020. The Deputy Chief Commissioner is Mr Neil Anderson, from 1 March 2020.

The Commission's Chief Executive, Dr Evelyn Collins CBE, has been designated as the Accounting Officer by the Accounting Officer of The Executive Office.

The individuals who served as members of the Commission during the reporting period, and their attendance at Commission meetings is detailed in the Governance Statement below, as is the composition of key Committees. The current membership of the Commission comprises nine women and five men.

Commission composition

The following table provides the composition of the Commission at 31 March 2021.

Gender	M	F	Total
	5	9	14

Community background	P	RC	Neither/ ND	Total
	4	8	2	14

Senior Executive Team

Evelyn Collins	Chief Executive
Keith Brown	Head of Corporate Services

Directorate Heads

Lisa King	Director Research and Investigations
Roisin Mallon	Director Dedicated Mechanism Unit
Jacqui McKee	Director Advice and Compliance
Anne McKernan	Director Legal Services
Darren McKinstry	Director Public Policy and Engagement
Louise Conlon	Acting Director Communications

The composition of the Executive Team by sex and community background, as well as the composition of all employees, is included in the Remuneration and Staff Report.

Committees

Schedule 8 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 allows the Commission to make provision for the discharge of its functions by Committees and the Commission has operated with a number of different Committee structures since it was established.

At present, there are three Committees of the Commission: Audit and Risk Committee; Statutory Duties Investigation Committee; and Legal Funding Committee. The following Commissioners served on the Commission’s Committees during the period 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021. Information on the Audit and Risk Committee is contained in the Governance Statement.

Statutory Duty Investigations Committee (SDIC)

The SDIC has the responsibilities in relation to complaints and investigations under Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The frequency of its meetings may depend upon the numbers of complaints and investigations. It normally meets on at least five occasions during the year.

COMMISSIONER	NO. OF MEETINGS	NO. ATTENDED
Helen Ferguson (Chair)	6	6
Neil Anderson	6	6
Theresa Donaldson	6	6
Geraldine McGahey	6	6
Dawn Purvis	6	5
Katy Radford	6	5

Legal Funding Committee

The Legal Funding Committee is responsible for taking decisions about the funding of the cases for which the Commission provides legal assistance. It normally meets fortnightly. Committee members are rotated to ensure that each meeting has three committee members present. The Chair of this Committee rotates between all members. In addition to the set meetings, Commissioners may be called upon to consider emergency applications as they arise.

During 2020-21, the following Commissioners served on Legal Funding Committees: June Best, Helen Ferguson, Hazel Francey, Jarlath Kearney, Stephen Mathews, Geraldine McGahey, Joseph McVey, Dawn Purvis and Deepa Mann-Kler.

Commissioners' Interests

An up-to-date [register of interests](#) is maintained by the Chief Executive as Accounting Officer and is available on the Commission's website.

Data Protection and Freedom of Information

The Commission is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office and has in place policies, guidelines and arrangements for compliance with Data Protection and Freedom of Information legislation.

Eight data breaches occurred during this year and there were also a number of near misses, where although information was sent in error, no personal data was disclosed. Further information on these can be found in the Governance Statement below. No data incidents required reporting to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Of the ten Freedom of Information, and two subject access requests received this year, eight were responded to within the relevant time limits. In two cases extensions were agreed. In the remaining two cases, explanations for the delay were provided to those making the requests.

2.1.2 Statement of the Accounting Officer's responsibilities

Under Paragraph 7(2) (a) of Schedule 8 of the Northern Ireland Act 1988, the Executive Office with the consent of the Department of Finance has directed the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to prepare for each financial year a statement of accounts in the form and on the basis set out in the Accounts Direction. The accounts are prepared on an accruals basis and must give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the Commission and of its income and expenditure, Statement of Financial Position and cash flows for the financial year.

In preparing the accounts the Accounting Officer is required to comply with the requirements of the Government Financial Reporting Manual and in particular to:

- observe the Accounts Direction issued by The Executive Office, including the relevant accounting and disclosure requirements, and apply suitable accounting policies on a consistent basis;
- make judgements and estimates on a reasonable basis;
- state whether applicable accounting standards as set out in the Government Financial Reporting Manual have been followed, and disclose and explain any material departures in the accounts;
- prepare the accounts on a going concern basis, and
- confirm that the Annual Report and Accounts as a whole is fair, balanced and understandable and take personal responsibility for the Annual Report and Accounts and the judgements required for determining that it is fair, balanced and understandable.

The Accounting Officer of The Executive Office has appointed the Chief Executive as the Accounting Officer of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. The responsibilities of an Accounting Officer, including responsibility for the propriety and regularity of the public finances for which the Accounting Officer is answerable, for keeping proper records and for safeguarding the Commission's assets, are set out in 'Managing Public Money Northern Ireland', published by the Department of Finance.

As the Accounting Officer, I have taken all of the steps that I ought to have taken to make myself aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the Equality Commission's auditors are aware of that information. So far as I am aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the auditors are unaware.

2.1.3 Governance Statement

This statement outlines the Commission's governance framework for directing and controlling its functions and demonstrates how risk is managed. It also describes the assurance provided to support me, in my role as Accounting Officer for the Commission, during the period 2020-21.

The Governance Framework

As Accounting Officer, I have responsibility for maintaining a sound system of internal control that supports the achievement of the Commission's policies, aims and objectives, whilst safeguarding the public funds and Commission assets for which I am personally responsible, in accordance with the responsibilities assigned to me in 'Managing Public Money Northern Ireland'.

The Commission

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is an executive non-departmental public body (NDPB) established as a body corporate by Section 73 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Commission's primary source of financing is grant-in-aid provided by The Executive Office. Statutory authority for the payment of grant-in-aid is contained in Schedule 8 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Relationships between the Commission and the Ministers and their Department are governed by the "arm's length" principle, wherein the primary role of Ministers is to set the Commission's legal and financial framework including the structure of its funding and governance.

These responsibilities are discharged on a day-to-day basis on the Ministers' behalf by the Sponsoring Department, The Executive Office (TEO). Within this framework, it is the role of the Commission to determine its equality policies and activities in keeping with its statutory responsibilities and the objectives of Government policy.

The Commission has agreed a Management Statement with The Executive Office. This sets out the relationship between the two organisations and defines the financial and administrative framework within which the Commission operates. It also sets out the conditions under which grant-in-aid is paid to the Commission and the delegations within which the Commission operates.

It is supplemented by a Financial Memorandum agreed with the Commission and approved by The Executive Office and the Department of Finance. A new Management Statement and Financial Memorandum were agreed in October 2018. During 2021-22, the Commission anticipates working on a draft Partnership Agreement with TEO, to replace the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum.

The Commission is led by a Chief Commissioner, supported by a Deputy Chief Commissioner. Including the Chief Commissioner, there are currently 14 Commissioners.

The responsibilities of the Chief Commissioner and Commissioners are set out in the founding legislation and more fully in the Code of Practice.

A record of Commissioners' attendance is contained below.

Commissioners identify and update their interests and the Register of Interests is available on the Commission's [website](#). The identification of potential conflicts is addressed at the beginning of each Commission and Committee meeting. Guidance on declaring and handling conflicts of interests is contained in the Commissioner Handbook, which is provided to all Commissioners on appointment.

Although it is primarily directed at central Government Departments, the Commission complies in all material respects with the guidance set out in Corporate Governance in Central Government Departments: Code of Good Practice NI (DFP, 2013).

Commissioner attendance 2020-21

Commissioner		No. of meetings	No. Attended
Geraldine McGahey	Chief Commissioner	10	10
Neil Anderson	Deputy Chief Commissioner	10	10
June Best		10	9
Theresa Donaldson		10	9
Duane Farrell		10	9
Helen Ferguson		10	10
Hazel Francey		10	10
Jarlath Kearney		10	10
Deepa Mann-Kler		10	10
Stephen Mathews		10	10
Carmel McKinney		10	9
Joseph McVey		10	8
Dawn Purvis		10	10
Katy Radford		10	10

Committees

Schedule 8 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 allows the Commission to make provision for the discharge of its functions by Committees and the Commission has operated with a number of different Committee structures since it was established.

At present, there are three Committees of the Commission:

- Audit and Risk Committee;
- Statutory Duties Investigation Committee; and
- Legal Funding Committee.

Audit and Risk Committee

The Commission seeks to ensure high standards of corporate governance and high levels of compliance with the values of public service.

It has an Audit and Risk Committee, which oversees internal audit arrangements and ensures that they are conducted in accordance with the objectives and standards of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The Committee also oversees the Commission's arrangements for risk management.

The Committee's full responsibilities are set out in its Terms of Reference, which were last reviewed in February 2021. Its core work for the year is set in a work programme structured around the guidance in the Department of Finance's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook (NI) (April 2018).

The Audit and Risk Committee meets at least four times per year. Minutes of Audit and Risk Committee meetings are provided to the full Commission and the Chair of the Committee reports to Commission meetings at regular intervals. On an annual basis, the Audit and Risk Committee undertakes a self-assessment of its operations and a formal written report of its work is presented to the Commission.

Audit and Risk Committee Attendance 2020-21

COMMISSIONER	Number of Meetings	Meetings Attended
Neil Anderson (Chair)	5	5
Duane Farrell	5	5
Stephen Mathews	5	4
Geraldine McGahey (May 2020 meeting)	1	1
Carmel McKinney (from 1 June 2020)	4	4
Katy Radford	5	5

Accounting Officer

The Commission's Chief Executive has been designated as the Accounting Officer.

The Accounting Officer's role and responsibilities are set out in the Management Statement and in more detail in 'Managing Public Money Northern Ireland' (MPMNI). The Equality Commission's Annual Report and Accounts are prepared in accordance with Schedule 8 of the Northern Act 1998 and in a form directed by The Executive Office with the approval of the Department of Finance.

Risk Management and Assurance

As the Accounting Officer, I have overall responsibility for the Commission's corporate business and decisions and ensuring the effective management of the key associated risks.

The Commission has appropriate procedures in place to ensure that it has identified its objectives and risks and determined a control strategy for its strategic risks.

A corporate approach to risk, involving Commissioners, the Executive Team and other staff, is taken. Ownership of risks has been allocated to the relevant staff at appropriate levels and they have received the necessary training to assist them in handling these risks.

Risk management is cascaded down the organisation and Risk Registers are produced for each Division. Stewardship statements are completed by corporate risk owners and forwarded to me as Accounting Officer. These provide me with assurance that risk management processes are effective and operating in line with the Commission's risk management framework.

Staff receive regular training in Governance, Risk Management and Fraud Awareness. A programme of risk management training was undertaken this year. This training was provided to both staff and Commissioners. On Board training was made available to newly appointed Commissioners and those Commissioners wishing to refresh their knowledge.

As Accounting Officer, I submit a quarterly stewardship statement to the Audit and Risk Committee and to the Commission's Sponsoring Department.

The risk and control framework

The Commission has ensured that procedures are in place for verifying that risk management and internal control are regularly reviewed and reported on. Risk appetite is assessed by the Commission and targets approved by the Commission are included on the risk register.

Corporate and business continuity risk is routinely reviewed by the Management Board and at each Audit and Risk Committee meeting and the corporate risk and business continuity register is updated as necessary. The Commission, its Audit and Risk Committee and the Management Board, receive regular reports on internal control and monitor progress on addressing internal audit recommendations.

The system of internal control has been in place in the Commission from 1 April 2020 to date and it accords with Department of Finance guidance.

Consideration of risk forms the basis of the Commission's Strategic Internal Audit Programme, which is mapped against the Corporate Risk Register.

The Commission has an internal audit service, which operates to Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). The service is provided currently by Deloitte. In June 2015, TEO's Head of Internal Audit completed a quality assurance review of the Commission's internal audit arrangements against the PSIAS. A high level of conformity was found.

The Commission's risk management framework and risk policy has been reviewed against the updated HM Treasury Orange book. The updated Risk Management Framework and Policy was reviewed by the Audit and Risk Committee and full Commission in November 2020. The new Policy was audited by internal audit and satisfactory assurance was provided in December 2020. In February 2021, Commissioners met to undertake a horizon scanning exercise, assess the Commission's attitude to, and appetite for, risk and to review its risk appetite statement to ensure it adequately reflects this and consider improvements to the Commission's risk management arrangements.

Potential Risk Issues

The areas of potential risk outlined below are those on which the Commission reports to its Sponsoring Department on a monthly basis or any other significant issue referred to in the Commission's corporate and business continuity risk or other risk register.

Business Planning and budgeting

The Commission's draft Corporate Plan 2019-22 and annual Business Plan for 2019-20 were approved by the TEO Departmental Board on 5 June 2019 and 19 April 2021, the Commission was advised that Ministerial Approval has been provided. On 19 April 2021, the Commission was also advised that Ministerial Approval had also been provided for its Business Plan for 2020-21. The Business Plan had already been approved by the Department Board on 28 October 2020.

The Commission's opening budget allocation for 2020-21 was formally confirmed on 5 July 2020. Commissioners receive quarterly reports of progress against business plan and budgetary targets throughout the year. Commissioners are also provided with regular reports of staff's work and outcomes of key policy and operational actions. Quarterly reports of communications work are presented at Commission meetings. In 2019-20, budgetary control was included within the scope of internal audit's review of core financial controls. Satisfactory assurance was provided.

Information Assurance

The Commission is proactive in developing and implementing policies and procedural guidance to manage Information Risk. Information risk management is a key element of information governance and is an integral part of good management.

The Commission undertakes regular reviews of its ICT infrastructure and security arrangements and information security risks and controls are included on the Commission's Corporate Services risk register. The Commission is a member of the National Cyber Security Centre's CiSP programme. In October 2020, the Commission's security arrangements were assessed and accredited against the National Cyber Security Centre's (NCSC) Cyber Essentials Plus standard. A review of general IT controls formed part of the 2019-20 internal audit programme. Satisfactory assurance was provided.

The Commission has a Freedom of Information Policy and satisfactory arrangements in place to ensure compliance. The Commission's Data Protection and Freedom of Information Officer receives regular training.

During the lockdown period, training and guidance on protecting data while working from home and cyber security have been provided for all staff and Commissioners.

Eight data breaches occurred during this year and there were also a number of near misses, where although information was sent in error, no personal data was disclosed. In none of the cases was it considered that the breach was serious enough to warrant referral to the Information Commissioner's Office. Remedial action was undertaken in each case. All data breaches and near misses were reported to the Commission's Audit and Risk Committee.

At the February 2021 meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee, it was agreed that Data Protection would be included in the Internal audit Operational Plan for 2021-22.

During the year, the Commission has received ten requests for information under the Freedom of Information legislation. Two subject access requests were received under the Data Protection provisions. The Commission has procedures and reporting arrangements in place to ensure that any relevant information is provided within the time limits required. On a quarterly basis, summary information on these requests is reviewed by the Management Board.

Of the ten Freedom of Information, and two subject access, requests, eight were responded to within the relevant time limits. In two cases extensions were agreed. In the remaining two cases explanations for the delays were provided.

Business Continuity Plans

The Commission has undertaken a business continuity risk assessment and up to date business continuity and other contingency arrangements are in place. The ICT continuity and disaster recovery arrangements are regularly tested, most recently in November 2020. An internal audit review of the Commission's Business Continuity and IT Disaster Recovery was completed in April 2019 and limited assurance was recorded. Action was taken to address each of the recommendations made by the internal auditor.

Gifts and Hospitality

Appropriate arrangements for the management of Gifts and Hospitality are in place and all offers, both to Commissioners and Staff, are included on a Gifts and Hospitality Register.

Whistle blowing

The Commission's Whistle blowing procedure was updated in May 2015, following a review against the guidance issued by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and others at that time. It was further updated in November 2018 in light of dissemination of new TEO Departmental procedures.

There have been no incidences of whistle blowing during the year to date. A review of the Commission's whistle blowing procedures will be undertaken during 2021-22.

Fraud

The Commission has a Fraud Policy and Fraud Response Plan. An updated policy and response plan were reviewed by the ARC at its November 2018 meeting. This has been disseminated to staff. In September 2019, staff were reminded of the key reporting procedures contained in the Commission's whistleblowing and fraud procedures. Further training on fraud awareness will be undertaken in 2021-22. In September 2020, the Commission undertook a fraud risk assessment using the COVID-19 Fraud Risks guidance produced by NIAO (August 2020). Based on the guidance, an action plan was prepared and implemented. There have been no incidences of fraud or suspected fraud reported during the year.

Managing Attendance

A Managing Attendance Policy is in place and quarterly indicators of staff absence are provided to the Commission and to the TEO Sponsoring Team. The figure for average days due to sickness per employee during 2020-21 was 5.1 days. This was much lower than last year's figure of 8.9 days (2018-19 – 5.5 days). Commissioners and the TEO sponsor team are provided with this information on a quarterly basis.

Complaints

The Commission has in place a three-stage formal procedure for dealing with service complaints. Should they not be resolved through the internal procedure, they may be referred to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Information on complaints dealt with under the procedure is reported in the Annual Report. Following an internal review of customer complaints and the complaints procedure, the procedure was updated. A review of the procedure and arrangements for handling complaints was undertaken by internal audit during the year. Two Priority three advisory recommendations were made and these are being implemented.

Three customer service complaints were raised under our procedure this year. One was resolved and two required further information from the complainants, which has not been provided. These have been considered to be closed.

Third Party Organisations

Although it has the vires to award grants under some of the legislation from which it derives its powers and duties, the Commission has not utilised its discretion in relation to the provision of such grants. The Commission provides a number of property management, ICT, financial and HR support services to a number of other arm's-length bodies.

Related party transactions are reported in Note 16 of the Annual Accounts.

Internal & External Audit Reports

The Commission's external auditor is the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG).

Work on behalf of the C&AG is contracted to ASM. Following completion of the audit of the Commission's Annual Report and Accounts, a Report to those Charged with Governance containing the audit findings and associated recommendations is issued.

The draft Report to those Charged with Governance, following the 2019-20 audit, was considered at the June 2020 Audit and Risk Committee. No issues were raised by NIAO in the Report. The final Report was considered by the Commission at its September meeting.

A revised internal audit programme for 2020-21 was approved at the August 2020 meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee. The scope of this year's audit programme and the assurances provided to date are summarised in the table below.

Audit Area	Assurance Rating / Outcome
COVID-19 response and planning	Advisory review – Three Priority 3 recommendations
Complaints handling	Advisory review – Two Priority 3 recommendations
Core Financial Controls	Satisfactory
Risk Management	Satisfactory
Policy and Strategic Engagement Directorate	Satisfactory

In her Annual Report to the Audit and Risk Committee, the Head of Internal Audit's independent opinion provided a satisfactory level of assurance for 2020-21.

Risk Management Status

Over the course of this year the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the public health and public policy response has been evident across the breadth of the Commission's work. All of the key risks identified in the Corporate Risk Register have been impacted and COVID-19 related impacts and mitigations have been included.

In the final quarter of 2019-20, in response to the emerging COVID-19 crisis, the Commission added the risk of pandemic to its Corporate Risk Register and made preparations for the introduction of remote working. In accordance with Government guidance, all staff continue to work remotely on secure remote gateway connections.

The work of the Commission has continued on a largely business-as-usual basis, with a good deal of focus being directed towards addressing equality impacts of the pandemic and measures being taken to address it.

A separate risk assessment has been completed, covering the impact on staff working from home and preparations for a return to more office-based work are in place.

The ongoing requirement for the effective management of budgetary reductions continues to be the key risk facing the Commission. The Commission continues to operate in an environment of financial constraint and uncertainty and is required to manage the upward pressure from its staffing costs. To do so has involved a significant reduction in staff numbers over the past decade. The Commission has been able to do this through the management of flexible working arrangements, natural wastage and facilitating, where practicable, voluntary exit.

Over more recent years, the annual budget position has been more stable and some recruitment of a small number of new staff has been possible. This year the Commission was also provided with ring-fenced funding to establish a new unit to guard against a diminution of key equality commitments guaranteed in the Belfast Agreement, due to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. However, due to the increasing pressure public finances, which will be a consequence of the pandemic, it is anticipated that the risk rating in this area will remain high.

In addition to progress in mitigating its corporate risks, Commissioners are provided with regular information on emerging risks and opportunities and information on incidents or 'near misses' which have occurred during the course of its operations. An increase in minor data breaches has been identified as an emerging risk. Work is ongoing to address this and the Commission's arrangements for data protection have been added to next year's internal audit programme.

I am satisfied that the controls in place to manage risks for which I am responsible are appropriate. They provide reasonable assurance that the risk will not occur, or if it does occur, that it will be detected and corrected in sufficient time to reduce the impact of the risk to tolerable or negligible levels.

Review of Effectiveness and the quality of data provided to the Board

As Accounting Officer, I have responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal control. My review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control is informed by the work of the internal auditors and the executive managers within the Commission who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control framework, and comments made by the Northern Ireland Audit Office in its Report to those charged with Governance.

I have been advised on the implications of the result of my review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control by the Commission and its Audit and Risk Committee.

The Commission's internal audit service submits reports on its work, which include the Head of Internal Audit's independent opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Commission's system of internal control together with recommendations for improvement.

The Commission receives quarterly reports on finance, staffing and progress against business plan targets. Minutes of each Audit and Risk Committee are presented and regular reports from the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee and the Chief Executive are provided. The Committee provides a formal review of its work to the Board each year. The Commission formally approves the Corporate Risk Register at six monthly intervals and is advised on emerging risks, incidents and near misses.

Each of the Commission's corporate risks is included on an assurance map, which highlights the key sources of information and assurances that are provided to Commissioners to facilitate their oversight of the arrangements for effective governance, risk management and internal control. Commissioners have expressed their satisfaction with the assurance arrangements in place and the information provided to allow them to undertake their challenge role.

A Quarterly Stewardship report provided by the Accounting Officer to TEO, is considered at each Audit and Risk Committee.

The Commission considers that the information provided is sufficient to enable it to effectively discharge its strategic planning and governance responsibilities.

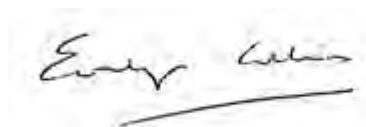
In April 2020, the Board considered the final report of a self-assessment of their effectiveness against the good practice and checklists published by the Department of Finance and Northern Ireland Audit Office. The self-assessment was administered by the Commission's internal auditors against the framework they have developed. This, and other assessments undertaken over recent years, recorded a high level of adherence to good practice. In the survey the statement "The Board has a good understanding of the performance of the organisation and is provided with sufficient information to enable this", elicited the highest level of agreement.

Due to public health restrictions, it has not yet been possible for the survey report be considered by the Board at a Strategic Away Day. The Commission did however undertake a virtual meeting in March 2021, which confirmed the adequacy of its risk management arrangements and the information being provided to facilitate the delivery of their responsibilities.

Significant internal control issues

There are no significant internal control issues at present.

Signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Evelyn Collins', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Evelyn Collins CBE
Chief Executive and Accounting Officer
24 June 2021

2.2 Remuneration and Staff Report

This report sets out the policy for remunerating Commissioners and key staff with responsibilities in relation to directing and controlling the activities of the Commission, as well as statutory disclosures in relation to pensions and compensation for early retirement or loss of office. Fair pay disclosures are also included. The report also includes additional information on staff numbers and costs, staff composition, sickness absence data and exit packages. The remuneration and staff report are fundamental to demonstrating transparency and accountability.

2.2.1 Remuneration Report

Remuneration Policy

The pay remit for the Northern Ireland (NI) public sector, including senior civil servants (SCS), is approved by the Minister of Finance. The Minister has set the 2020-21 NI public sector pay policy (September 2020) in line with the overarching HMT parameters. Annual NICS pay awards are made in the context of the wider public sector pay policy. The pay award for NICS staff, including SCS, for 2020-21 has not yet been finalised. The pay of SCS is based on a system of pay scales for each SCS grade containing a number of pay points from minima to maxima, allowing progression towards the maxima based on performance.

Service Contracts

Commission staff appointments are made in accordance with the Commission's Recruitment Policy which requires appointment to be on merit on the basis of fair and open competition but also includes the circumstances when appointments may otherwise be made.

Unless otherwise stated below, the staff covered by this report hold appointments which are open-ended. Early termination, other than for misconduct, would result in the individual receiving compensation as set out in the Civil Service Compensation Scheme.

Commission members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland following open competition.

Remuneration and pension entitlements

The following sections provide details of the remuneration and pension interests of the Commissioners and the most senior management of the Commission.

**Remuneration (including salary) and pension entitlements
(Audited Information)**

Commissioners

	Salary		Bonus Payments		Benefits in kind (to nearest £100)		Pension Benefits (to nearest £1000)*		Total (£'000)	
	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20
Geraldine McGahey Chief Commissioner (from 1 March 2020)	55-60 (FTE 70-75)	55-60 (FTE 70-75)	0	0	0	0	22,000	2,000	80-85 (FTE 95-100)	55-60 (FTE 70-75)
Neil Anderson (Deputy Chief Commissioner from 1 March 2020)	5-10	5-10	0	0	0	0	0	0	5-10	5-10
Michael Wardlow Chief Commissioner (to 29 February 2020)	0	60-65 (FTE 75-80)	0	0	0	0	0	26,000	0	90-95 (FTE 105-110)
Dr Lesley Carroll Deputy Chief Commissioner (to 31 May 2019)	0	5-10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5-10

	Salary		Bonus Payments		Benefits in kind (to nearest £100)		Pension Benefits (to nearest £1000)*		Total (£'000)	
	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20
Hazel Francey	0-5	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5	0-5
Joseph McVey	0-5	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5	0-5
Duane Farrell	0-5	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5	0-5
Helen Ferguson	0-5	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5	0-5
Jarlath Kearney	0-5	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5	0-5
Theresa Donaldson (from 1 June 2019)	0-5	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5	0-5
Stephen Mathews (from 1 June 2019)	0-5	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5	0-5
Dawn Purvis (from 1 June 2019)	0-5	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5	0-5
Dr Katherine Radford (from 1 June 2019)	0-5	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5	0-5

	Salary		Bonus Payments		Benefits in kind (to nearest £100)		Pension Benefits (to nearest £1000)*		Total (£'000)	
	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20
June Best (from 1 June 2019)	0-5	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5	0-5
Deepa Mann-Kler (from 1 March 2020)	0-5	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5	0-5
Carmel McKinney (from 1 March 2020)	0-5	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5	0-5
Judith Gillespie (to 31 May 2019)	0	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5
William Gamble (to 31 May 2019)	0	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5
Tom Hartley (to 31 May 2019)	0	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5
David Rose (to 31 May 2019)	0	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5
Deborah Donnelly (to 29 February 2020)	0	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5

	Salary		Bonus Payments		Benefits in kind (to nearest £100)		Pension Benefits (to nearest £1000)*		Total (£'000)	
	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20
Robin Mullan (to 29 February 2020)	0	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5
Eileen Chan-Hu (to 29 February 2020)	0	0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0-5

Senior Management

Official	Salary		Bonus Payments		Benefits in kind (to nearest £100)		Pension Benefits (to nearest £1000)*		Total (£'000)	
	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20	2020-21	2019-20
Evelyn Collins Chief Executive	80-85	80-85	0	0	0	0	31,000	14,000	115-120	95-100
Keith Brown Head of Corporate Services	65-70	60-65	0	0	0	0	23,000	11,000	90-95	75-80

** The value of pension benefits accrued during the year is calculated as (the real increase in pension multiplied by 20) plus (the real increase in any lump sum) less (the contributions made by the individual). The real increases include increases due to inflation and any increase or decreases due to a transfer of pension rights.*

Salary

'Salary' includes gross salary; overtime; reserved rights to London weighting or London allowances; recruitment and retention allowances; private office allowances and any other allowance to the extent that it is subject to UK taxation and any gratia payments.

Benefits in kind

The monetary value of benefits in kind covers any benefits provided by the employer and treated by HM Revenue and Customs as a taxable emolument. No benefits in kind were paid to Commissioners or staff during this period.

Bonuses

No bonus payments were paid to Commissioners or senior managers in these years.

Fair Pay disclosure (Audited)

	2020-21	2019-20
Band of Highest Paid Directors Total Remuneration* (Chief Executive) (£'000)	80-85	80-85
Median Remuneration (£)	32,800	32,157
Ratio	2.5	2.6

*Total remuneration includes salary, non-consolidated performance related pay, benefits-in-kind as well as severance payments. It does not include employer pension contributions and the cash equivalent transfer value of pensions.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is required to disclose the relationship between the remuneration of the highest paid employee in the organisation and the median remuneration of the Commission's workforce.

The banded remuneration of the highest paid employee in the Commission in the financial year 2020-21 was £80,000 to £85,000 (2019-20 was £80,000 to £85,000). This was 2.5 times (2019-20, 2.6 times) the median remuneration of the workforce, which was £32,800 (2019-20, £32,157).

In 2020-21, no employees received remuneration in excess of the highest paid employee, the Chief Executive.

Remuneration ranged from £19,000 to £85,000.

Pension Entitlements (Audited Information)

	Accrued pension at age 60 as at 31/03/21 and related lump sum £'000	Real increase in pension and related lump sum at age 60 £'000	CETV at 31/3/21 £'000	CETV at 31/3/20 £'000	Real increase in CETV £'000
Michael Wardlow Chief Commissioner (to 29 February 2020)	0	0	0	397	0
Geraldine McGahey Chief Commissioner (from 1 March 2020)	0-5	0-2.5	23	2	21
Evelyn Collins Chief Executive	35-40 plus a lump sum of 115-120	0-2.5 plus a lump sum of 2.5-5	896	875	21
Keith Brown Head of Corporate Services	25-30 plus a lump sum of 80-85	0-2.5 plus a lump sum of 2.5-5	597	582	15

The Equality Commission made no employer contributions to a Partnership Pension Account for any of the above individuals.

Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Pension Schemes

Pension benefits are provided through the Northern Ireland Civil Service pension schemes, which are administered by Civil Service Pensions (CSP).

The alpha pension scheme was introduced for new entrants from 1 April 2015. The alpha scheme and all previous scheme arrangements are unfunded with the cost of benefits met by monies voted each year. The majority of existing members of the classic, premium, classic plus and nuvos pension arrangements also moved to alpha from that date. Members who on 1 April 2012 were within 10 years of their normal pension age did not move to alpha and those who were within 13.5 years and 10 years of their normal pension age were given a choice between moving to alpha on 1 April 2015 or at a later date determined by their age. Alpha is a 'Career Average Revalued Earnings' (CARE) arrangement in which members accrue pension benefits at a percentage rate of annual pensionable earnings throughout the period of scheme membership. The current accrual rate is 2.32%.

Discrimination identified by the courts in the way that the 2015 pension reforms were introduced must be removed by the Department of Finance. It is expected that, in due course, eligible members with relevant service between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2022 may be entitled to different pension benefits in relation to that period. The different pension benefits relate to the different schemes e.g. classic, alpha etc and is not the monetary benefits received. This is known as the 'McCloud Remedy' and will impact many aspects of the Civil Service Pensions schemes including the scheme valuation outcomes. Further information on this will be included in the NICS pension scheme accounts which are available at <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/dof-resource-accounts>.

Currently new entrants joining can choose between membership of alpha or joining a 'money purchase' stakeholder arrangement with a significant employer contribution (partnership pension account). New entrants joining on or after 30 July 2007 were eligible for membership of the nuvos arrangement or they could have opted for a partnership pension account. Nuvos is also a CARE arrangement in which members accrue pension benefits at a percentage rate of annual pensionable earnings throughout the period of scheme membership. The current accrual rate is 2.3%.

Staff in post prior to 30 July 2007 may be in one of three statutory based 'final salary' defined benefit arrangements (classic, premium and classic plus). From April 2011, pensions payable under classic, premium, and classic plus are reviewed annually in line with changes in the cost of living. New entrants joining on or after 1 October 2002 and before 30 July 2007 could choose between membership of premium or joining the partnership pension account.

Benefits in classic accrue at the rate of 1/80th of pensionable salary for each year of service. In addition, a lump sum equivalent to three years' pension is payable on retirement. For premium, benefits accrue at the rate of 1/60th of final pensionable earnings for each year of service. Unlike classic, there is no automatic lump sum (but members may give up (commute) some of their pension to provide a lump sum). Classic plus is essentially a variation of premium, but with benefits in respect of service before 1 October 2002 calculated broadly as per classic.

The partnership pension account is a stakeholder pension arrangement. The employer makes a basic contribution of between 8% and 14.75% (depending on the age of the member) into a stakeholder pension product chosen by the employee. The employee does not have to contribute but where they do make contributions, the employer will match these up to a limit of 3% of pensionable salary (in addition to the employer's basic contribution). Employers also contribute a further 0.5% of pensionable salary to cover the cost of centrally provided risk benefit cover (death in service and ill health retirement).

Active members of the pension scheme will receive an Annual Benefit Statement. The accrued pension quoted is the pension the member is entitled to receive when they reach their scheme pension age, or immediately on ceasing to be an active member of the scheme if they are at or over pension age. Scheme Pension age is 60 for members of **classic**, **premium**, and **classic plus** and 65 for members of **nuvos**. The normal scheme pension age in alpha is linked to the member's State Pension Age but cannot be before age 65. Further details about the NICS pension schemes can be found at the website www.finance-ni.gov.uk/civilservicepensions-ni.

All pension benefits are reviewed annually in line with changes in the cost of living. Any applicable increases are applied from April and are determined by the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) figure for the preceding September. The CPI in September 2020 was 0.5% and HM Treasury has announced that public service pensions will be increased accordingly from April 2021.

Employee contribution rates for all members from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 are as follows:

Scheme Year 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

Annualised rate of pensionable earnings (Salary bands)		Percentage Contribution Rate
From	To	From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022
£0	£24,199.99	4.6%
£24,200.00	£55,799.99	5.45%
£55,800.00	£153,299.99	7.35%
£153,300.00 and above		8.05%

Cash Equivalent Transfer Values

A Cash Equivalent Transfer Value (CETV) is the actuarially assessed capitalised value of the pension scheme benefits accrued by a member at a particular point in time. The benefits valued are the member's accrued benefits and any contingent spouse's pension payable from the scheme. A CETV is a payment made by a pension scheme or arrangement to secure pensions benefits in another pension scheme or arrangement when the member leaves a scheme and chooses to transfer the benefits accrued in their former scheme.

The pension figures shown relate to the benefits that the individual has accrued as a consequence of their total membership of the pension scheme, not just their service in a senior capacity to which disclosure applies.

The CETV figures, and from 2003-04 the other pension details, include the value of any pension benefit in another scheme or arrangement which the individual has transferred to the NICS pension arrangements. They also include any additional pension benefit accrued to the member as a result of their purchasing additional years of pension service in the scheme at their own cost. CETVs are calculated in accordance with The Occupational Pension Schemes (Transfer Values) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 and do not take account of any actual or potential benefits resulting from Lifetime Allowance Tax which may be due when pension benefits are taken.

Real increase in CETV

This reflects the increase in CETV effectively funded by the employer. It does include the increase in accrued pension due to inflation, contributions paid by the employee (including the value of any benefits transferred from another pension scheme or arrangement) and uses common market valuation factors for the start and end of the period. However, the real increase calculation uses common actuarial factors at the start and end of the period so that it disregards the effect of any changes in factors and focuses only on the increase that is funded by the employer.

Compensation for loss of office

No employee received compensation for loss of office in 2020-21 or in 2019-20.

Payments to past Directors

There were no payments to past Directors.

2.2.2 Staff Report

Staff and Commissioner costs (audited):

				2020-21	2019-20
	Commissioners	Permanently employed staff	Others	Total	Total
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
Wages and Salaries	128	2,498	241	2,867	2,765
Social security costs	7	251	0	258	255
Other pension costs	20	754	0	774	766
Severance	0	0	0	0	7
Total net costs	155	3,503	241	3,899	3,793

There were no outward secondments during 2020-21 or 2019-20.

Off Payroll Engagements

There were no off payroll engagements during 2020-21 or 2019-20.

Expenditure on Consultancy

There was no expenditure on consultancy in 2020-21 or in the previous year.

Pension Disclosure

The Northern Ireland Civil Service main pension schemes are unfunded multi-employer defined benefit schemes but the Equality Commission is unable to identify its share of the underlying assets and liabilities.

The Public Service Pensions Act (NI) 2014 provides the legal framework for regular actuarial valuations of the public service pension schemes to measure the costs of the benefits being provided. These valuations inform the future contribution rates to be paid into the schemes by employers every four years following the scheme valuation. The Act also provides for the establishment of an employer cost cap mechanism to ensure that the costs of the pension schemes remain sustainable in future.

Government Actuary's Department (GAD) is responsible for carrying out scheme valuations. The Actuary reviews employer contributions every four years following the scheme valuation. The 2016 scheme valuation was completed by GAD in March 2019. The outcome of this valuation was used to set the level of contributions for employers from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2023.

The 2016 Scheme Valuation requires adjustment as a result of the 'McCloud remedy'. The Department of Finance have also commissioned a consultation in relation to the Cost Cap Valuation which will close on 25 June 2021. By taking into account the increased value of public service pensions, as a result of the 'McCloud remedy', scheme cost control valuation outcomes will show greater costs than otherwise would have been expected. On completion of the consultation the 2016 Valuation will be completed and the final cost cap results will be determined.

For 2020-21 employers' contributions of £773,773 were payable to the NICS pension arrangements (2019-20 £766,371) at one of three rates in the range 28.7% to 34.2% of pensionable pay, based on salary bands.

Employees can opt to open a partnership pension account, a stakeholder pension with an employer contribution. No such employer contributions were made in this year.

No employees retired on the grounds of ill-health in 2020-21 or in 2019-20.

Average number of persons employed (audited)

The average number of whole-time persons employed during the year was as follows:

Number	Permanently employed staff	Others	2020-21	2019-20
			Total	Total
Directly Employed	69	0	69	71
Other	0	4	4	4
Total	69	4	73	75

The Commission's Chief Executive is the only employee on a Senior Civil Servant pay scale (Grade 5).

Reporting of Civil Service and other compensation schemes – exit packages (audited)

There were no exit packages during the years 2019-20 and 2020-21. In 2019-20, an amount of £7,240 was paid, relating to adjustments to compensation payments made by Civil Service Pensions in respect of prior year departures. Where the Commission has agreed early retirements, the additional costs are met by the Commission and not by the Civil Service pension scheme. Ill-health retirement costs are met by the pension scheme.

Managing Attendance and Sickness Absence

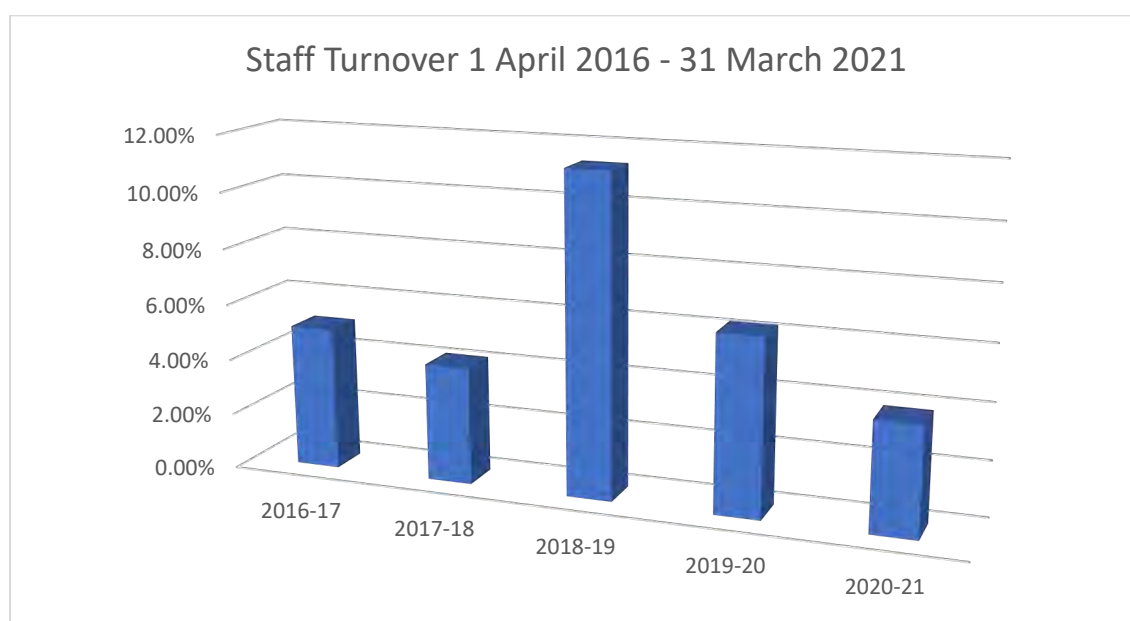
The Commission's arrangements for the payment of Statutory Sick Pay and the monitoring and management of attendance are based on those in operation in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The Commission has a Managing Attendance Policy and provides training to Managers and other staff on its operation.

The Commission's number of average days lost in 2020-21 was 5.1 days, a decrease on last year's 8.9 days. Of the 5.1 days lost, 3.0 related to long term absence (more than 20 days) and 2.1 to short term absence (20 days or less). This compares to an equivalent 6.9 days for long-term absence and 2.0 days for short-term absence last year.

Staff Turnover

This year was the first full year in which the Commission had not used the Public Sector Restructuring Fund to finance voluntary exits. Its staff turnover percentage this year was 3.9%. This compares with a figure of 6.3% in 2019-20. Three staff joined the Commission in 2020-21 and three left.

The graph below shows the trend in staff turnover over the most recent five years. The turnover from 2016-19 was mainly a result of voluntary exits.



Equality of Opportunity and Human Rights

The Commission is committed to the provision of equality of opportunity and fair participation to all persons regardless of sex, marital status, religious belief, political affiliation/opinion, age, family status, ethnic or racial background, sexual orientation, disability, nationality or trade union membership and to adhering to recognised human rights standards and obligations.

In addition to complying with its legal obligations, the Commission will provide a good and harmonious working environment, accommodate flexible working arrangements, provide training, development and progression on a fair and non-discriminatory basis and provide equal treatment in respect of pay and other contractual terms.

As an employer, we recognise that ensuring equality in employment and eliminating workplace discrimination and harassment are essential for developing a diverse workforce, attracting high calibre employees and maximising performance. In line with this commitment, the Commission has developed its employment equality policies and practices in accordance with the requirements of each of the equality and anti-discrimination laws in Northern Ireland and with the good practice recommendations of the Equality Codes of Practice.

This year, the Commission continues to meet its statutory obligations under the Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998, which includes submission of an annual Fair Employment Monitoring Return and a tri-annual Article 55 Review to the Equality Commission for NI (ECNI), both of which assess the composition of its workforce and the composition of applicants and appointees. The next Article 55 Review, covering the period 2018-21, is scheduled to be completed in 2021-22. In addition, the Commission conducts reviews of the composition of its workforces on other equality grounds and uses the findings of its equality monitoring and analysis to inform a programme of targeted outreach activity to address any areas of under-representation.

Information on its staff composition at 1 January 2021 is set out below.

Staff Composition (not wte)

The following table provides the gender composition of Equality Commission staff at 1 January 2021.

Grade	M	F	Total
Senior Civil Service	0	1	1
Other grades	26	51	77
Total	26 (33.3%)	52 (66.7%)	78

The following table provides a breakdown of Commission staff by community background as at 1 January 2021.

Grade	P	RC	Total
Senior Civil Service	1	0	1
Other grades	29	48	77
All Staff	30	48	78
	(38.5%)	(61.5%)	

Disabled persons

Almost one fifth (18.2%) of the Commission’s employees report as having a disability or long-term health condition. In recruitment and selection applicants with a disability who meet the essential requirements will be shortlisted. To retain disabled employees and facilitate their training and progression, the Commission will provide a range of reasonable adjustments to facilitate employees, including amending job criteria and duties, providing flexible working arrangements, access to training and workstation assessments and adaptations. The Commission also provides adjustments for disabled clients and customers.

Learning & Development

To ensure it retains and develops its employees the Commission provides a range of training – from generic, centralised training programmes, to self-identified training and continuous profession development opportunities. A key focus this year was the identification of on-line training and support. With the migration of Commission operations to MS 365 and MS Teams, this will be a focus for training and development in 2021-22. The Commission also provides support for staff participation on Adult Further Education and staff membership of relevant professional bodies. The Commission is currently reviewing its Learning and Development Policy. The review will be completed in 2021-22.

Employee Engagement and Consultation

The Commission encourages widespread consultation and exchange of information at all levels within the Commission. This is implemented through frequent staff briefings and meetings at Directorate and Team levels. We moved from monthly to weekly staff briefings in the early months of remote working, to ensure high levels of internal communications, and for the latter half of the year to fortnightly staff briefings. Staff are involved in key working groups dealing with business improvement and accreditation projects, equal opportunities, health and safety and corporate social responsibility and wellbeing.

The Commission was awarded a Silver Investor in People accreditation in May 2020 and is currently developing a new People Plan. In the 2020 IIP survey, 75.7% agreed that the Commission is a great place to work and 74.4% agreed that they had a say in decisions that affected their role.

The Commission consults and engages with representatives of the recognised trade union, NIPSA, through a Joint Consultative and Negotiating Committee. The Commission has a Health and Safety Officer, who meets regularly with a trade union side counterpart.

2.3 Assembly accountability and audit report

Assembly Accountability Disclosure Notes

i. Losses and special payments (Audited)

Losses Statement

	2020-21	2019-20
	£	£
Total number of losses	Nil	Nil
Total value of losses (£000)	Nil	Nil
Details of losses over £250,000	Nil	Nil
Cash losses	Nil	Nil
Claims abandoned	Nil	Nil
Administrative write-offs	Nil	Nil

Special Payments

	2020-21	2019-20
	£	£
Total number of special payments	Nil	Nil
Total value of special payments	Nil	Nil

There were no special payments over £250,000.

Other notes

ii Fees and Charges (Audited)

There were no fees and charges for the reuse of any information the Commission holds.

iii Remote Contingent Liabilities (Audited)

The Commission has no known liabilities for which the likelihood of a transfer of economic benefit in settlement is too remote to meet the definition of contingent liability.

iv Gifts

There were no gifts received with a value greater than £50.

Signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Evelyn Collins', is written over a horizontal line.

Evelyn Collins CBE
Chief Executive and Accounting Officer
24 June 2021

THE CERTIFICATE AND REPORT OF THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Opinion on financial statements

I certify that I have audited the financial statements of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland for the year ended 31 March 2021 under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The financial statements comprise: the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure, the Statement of Financial Position, the Statement of Cash Flows, the Statement of Changes in Taxpayers' Equity; and the related notes including significant accounting policies. These financial statements have been prepared under the accounting policies set out within them.

The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and International Financial Reporting Standards as adopted by the European Union and interpreted by the Government Financial Reporting Manual.

I have also audited the information in the Accountability Report that is described in that report as having been audited.

In my opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's affairs as at 31 March 2021 and of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's net expenditure for the year then ended; and
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the Executive Office directions issued thereunder.

Opinion on regularity

In my opinion, in all material respects the expenditure and income recorded in the financial statements have been applied to the purposes intended by the Assembly and the financial transactions recorded in the financial statements conform to the authorities which govern them.

Basis for opinions

I conducted my audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISAs) (UK), applicable law and Practice Note 10 'Audit of Financial Statements of Public Sector Entities in the United Kingdom'. My

responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of this certificate.

My staff and I are independent of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in accordance with the ethical requirements of the Financial Reporting Council's Revised Ethical Standard 2019 and have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements.

I believe that the audit evidence obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinions.

Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, I have concluded that the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work I have performed, I have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

The going concern basis of accounting for the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is adopted in consideration of the requirements set out in the Government Reporting Manual, which require entities to adopt the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements where it anticipated that the services which they provide will continue into the future.

My responsibilities and the responsibilities of the Commission and the Accounting Officer with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

Other Information

The other information comprises the information included in the annual report other than the financial statements, the parts of the Accountability Report described in that report as having been audited, and my audit certificate and report. The Commission and the Accounting Officer are responsible for the other information included in the annual report. My opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information

and except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in my report, I do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

My responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or my knowledge obtained in the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If I identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, I am required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work I have performed, I conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, I am required to report that fact.

I have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinion on other matters

In my opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the parts of the Accountability Report to be audited have been properly prepared in accordance with guidance provided by the Department of Finance;
- the information given in the Performance Report and Accountability Report for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements.

Matters on which I report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, I have not identified material misstatements in the Performance Report and Accountability Report. I have nothing to report in respect of the following matters which I report to you if, in my opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept; or
- the financial statements and the parts of the Accountability Report to be audited are not in agreement with the accounting records; or
- certain disclosures of remuneration specified by the Government Financial Reporting Manual are not made; or

- I have not received all of the information and explanations I require for my audit; or
- the Governance Statement does not reflect compliance with the Department of Finance's guidance.

Responsibilities of the Commission and Accounting Officer for the financial statements

As explained more fully in the Statement of Accounting Officer's Responsibilities the Commission and the Accounting Officer are responsible for:

- the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the applicable financial reporting framework and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view;
- such internal controls as the Accounting Officer determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error; and
- assessing the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the Accounting Officer anticipates that the services provided by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland will not continue to be provided in the future.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

My responsibility is to audit, certify and report on the financial statements in accordance with the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

My objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error and to issue a certificate that includes my opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

I design procedures in line with my responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of non-compliance with laws and regulation, including fraud.

My procedures included:

- obtaining an understanding of the legal and regulatory framework applicable to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland through discussion with management and application of extensive public sector accountability knowledge. The key laws and regulations I considered included the Northern Ireland Act 1998;
- making enquires of management and those charged with governance on the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's compliance with laws and regulations;
- making enquiries of internal audit, management and those charged with governance as to susceptibility to irregularity and fraud, their assessment of the risk of material misstatement due to fraud and irregularity, and their knowledge of actual, suspected and alleged fraud and irregularity;
- completing risk assessment procedures to assess the susceptibility of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's financial statements to material misstatement, including how fraud might occur. This included, but was not limited to, an engagement director led engagement team discussion on fraud to identify particular areas, transaction streams and business practices that may be susceptible to material misstatement due to fraud. As part of this discussion, I identified potential for fraud in the following areas: management override of controls relating to the posting of unusual journals and the use of estimates in the financial statements;
- engagement director oversight to ensure the engagement team collectively had the appropriate competence, capabilities and skills to identify or recognise non-compliance with the applicable legal and regulatory framework throughout the audit;
- documenting and evaluating the design and implementation of internal controls in place to mitigate risk of material misstatement due to fraud and non-compliance with laws and regulations;
- designing audit procedures to address specific laws and regulations which the engagement team considered to have a direct material effect on the financial statements in terms of misstatement and irregularity, including fraud. These audit procedures included, but were not limited to, reading

Commission and committee minutes, and agreeing financial statement disclosures to underlying supporting documentation and approvals as appropriate;

- addressing the risk of fraud as a result of management override of controls by:
 - performing analytical procedures to identify unusual or unexpected relationships or movements;
 - testing journal entries to identify potential anomalies, and inappropriate or unauthorised adjustments;
 - assessing whether judgements and other assumptions made in determining accounting estimates were indicative of potential bias; and
 - investigating significant or unusual transactions made outside of the normal course of business.

A further description of my responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities.

This description forms part of my certificate. In addition, I am required to obtain evidence sufficient to give reasonable assurance that the expenditure and income recorded in the financial statements have been applied to the purposes intended by the Assembly and the financial transactions recorded in the financial statements conform to the authorities which govern them.

Report

I have no observations to make on these financial statements.



KJ Donnelly
Comptroller and Auditor General
Northern Ireland Audit Office
1 Bradford Court
Upper Galwally
Belfast
BT8 6RB

30 June 2021

Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2021

This account summarises the expenditure and income generated and consumed on an accruals basis. It also includes other comprehensive income and expenditure, which include changes to the values of non-current assets and other financial instruments that cannot yet be recognised as income or expenditure.

	Note	2020/21 £000	2019/20 £000
Revenue from contracts with customers	4	83	83
Other operating income	4	343	361
Total Operating Income		426	444
Staff Costs	3	(3,899)	(3,793)
Purchase of goods and services	3	(1,454)	(1,416)
Depreciation and amortisation	5&6	(104)	(110)
Impairment	6	0	0
Provisions	11	(240)	(276)
Total operating expenditure		(5,697)	(5,595)
Net Operating Expenditure		(5,271)	(5,151)
Other comprehensive net expenditure			
Items that will not be reclassified to net operating expenditure:			
Net (loss)/gain on revaluation of Plant and Equipment	5&6	(4)	4
Comprehensive net expenditure for the year		(5,275)	(5,147)

The notes on pages 90 to 102 form part of these accounts

Statement of Financial Position as at 31 March 2021

This statement presents the financial position of the Equality Commission. It comprises three main components: assets owned or controlled; liabilities owed to other bodies; and equity, the remaining value of the entity.

	Note	2020/21 £000	2019/20 £000
Non-current assets:			
Plant and equipment	5	166	150
Intangible assets	6	72	70
Total non-current assets		238	220
Current assets:			
Inventories	9	3	2
Trade and other receivables	9	111	82
Cash and cash equivalents	8	313	126
Total current assets		427	210
Total assets		665	430
Current liabilities:			
Trade and other payables	10	(355)	(294)
Total current liabilities		(355)	(294)
Total assets less current liabilities		310	136
Non-current liabilities			
Provisions	11	(155)	(97)
Total non-current liabilities		(155)	(97)
Total assets less total liabilities		155	39
Taxpayers' equity and other reserves			
General Fund		98	(22)
Revaluation Reserve		57	61
Total equity		155	39

The financial statements on pages 86 to 102 were approved by the Board on 23/06/2021 and were signed on its behalf by:



Evelyn Collins CBE
Chief Executive and Accounting Officer.

The notes on pages 90 to 102 form part of these accounts

Statement of Cash Flows for the year ended 31 March 2021

The Statement of Cash Flows shows the changes in cash and cash equivalents of the Commission during the reporting period. The statement shows how the Commission generates and uses cash and cash equivalents by classifying cash flows as operating, investing and financing activities. The amount of net cash flows arising from operating activities is a key indicator of service costs and the extent to which these operations are funded by way of income from the recipients of services provided by the Commission. Investing activities represent the extent to which cash inflows and outflows have been made for resources which are intended to contribute to the Commission's future public service delivery.

	Note	2020-21 £000	2019-20 £000
Cash flows from operating activities			
Net operating expenditure		(5,271)	(5,151)
Adjustments for non-cash transactions			
Depreciation		71	64
Amortisation		33	46
Impairment		0	0
Increase in provisions		240	276
(Increase)/decrease in trade and other receivables		(30)	27
Increase/(decrease) in trade and other payables		62	(163)
Use of provisions		(182)	(303)
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Net cash outflow from operating activities		(5,077)	(5,204)
Cash flows from investing activities			
Purchase of plant and equipment	5	(92)	(28)
Purchase of intangible assets	6	(35)	(24)
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Net cash outflow from investing activities		(127)	(52)
Cash flows from financing activities			
Financing from TEO		5,391	5,203
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Net cash flow from financing activities		5,391	5,203
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Net increase/ (decrease) in cash and cash equivalents in the period		187	(53)
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the period		126	179
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the period	8	313	126

The notes on pages 90 to 102 form part of these accounts.

Statement of Changes in Taxpayers' Equity for the year ended 31 March 2021

This statement shows the movement in the year on the different reserves held by the Commission. The Revaluation Reserve reflects the change in asset values that have not been recognised as income or expenditure. The General Fund represents the total assets less liabilities of the Commission, to the extent that the total is not represented by other reserves and financing items.

	Note	General Fund £000	Revaluation Reserve £000	Taxpayers' Equity £000
Balance at 31 March 2019		(74)	57	(17)
Grant from TEO		5,203	Nil	5,203
Comprehensive net expenditure for year		(5,151)	4	(5,147)
Balance at 31 March 2020		(22)	61	39
Grant from TEO		5,391	Nil	5,391
Comprehensive net expenditure for year		(5,271)	(4)	(5,275)
Balance at 31 March 2021		98	57	155

The notes on pages 90 to 102 form part of these accounts.

Notes to the Accounts

1. Statement of accounting policies

These financial statements have been prepared in accordance with paragraph 7(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the 2020-21 Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM) issued by the Department of Finance. The accounting policies contained in the FReM apply International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) as adapted or interpreted for the public sector context. Where the FReM permits a choice of accounting policy, the accounting policy which is judged to be the most appropriate to the particular circumstances of the Equality Commission for the purpose of giving a true and fair view has been selected. The particular policies adopted by the Commission are described below. They have been applied consistently in dealing with items that are considered material to the accounts.

1.1 Accounting convention

These accounts have been prepared under the historical cost convention modified to account for the revaluation of property, plant and equipment.

1.2 Non-Current assets

Non-current assets are fully funded by The Executive Office (formerly Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister). Plant and equipment have been valued at historic cost revalued by indices published by the National Statistics Office. A capitalisation threshold of £500 has been applied. Intangible assets (computer software and licences) are valued at historic cost.

1.3 Depreciation and Amortisation Rates

Depreciation and amortisation are provided on all non-current assets at rates calculated to write off the cost of each asset over its expected life with rates as follows:

IT Equipment	25-33%
Office Equipment	10-33%
Furniture	10%
Fixtures & Fittings	10-33%
Intangible Assets	25-33%

1.4 Inventories

The value of inventories of consumables is immaterial and the Commission does not attribute value for consumable inventories in the accounts as required.

1.5 Income

All income from operations is credited to the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure. Income is based on full cost recovery of services provided.

1.6 Grant in Aid

Grant in Aid received, used to finance activities and expenditure which support the statutory and other objectives of the Commission, are treated as financing. They are credited to the General Fund because they are regarded as contributions from a controlling party.

1.7 Leased Assets

Leases are classified as operating leases whenever the terms of the lease do not transfer substantially all the risks and benefits to the lessee. Rentals under operating leases are expensed to the Statement of Comprehensive Net Expenditure as incurred.

1.8 Financial Instruments

Financial assets and liabilities are recognised on the Statement of Financial Position when the Commission becomes a party to a contractual provision of the instrument. The Commission's financial assets and liabilities are classified as Loans and Receivables and are held at cost which approximates to their fair value because of their short maturities.

1.9 Provisions

The Commission makes provision for liabilities and charges where, at the Statement of Financial Position date, a legal or constructive liability exists (that is a present obligation from past events exists), where the transfer of economic benefits is probable and a reasonable estimate can be made. IAS 37 requires that where the effect of the time value of money is material the amount of a provision should be the present value of the expenditures expected to be required to settle the obligation. Where cash flows have been adjusted for risk, the standard requires the use of a risk free discount rate.

1.10 Legal Fee Provisions

The Commission makes provision for expenditure authorised for legal assistance with letters of commitment to individuals before legal assistance is commissioned to an external provider.

1.11 Pensions

Past and present employees are covered by the provisions of Civil Service Pensions (NI). The CSP (NI) is a non-funded defined benefit scheme which produces its own resource accounts, but the Commission is unable to identify its share of the underlying assets and liabilities.

The most up to date actuarial valuation was completed by Government Actuary's Department (GAD) in March 2019 and these details are available in the CSP (NI) resource accounts.

1.12 VAT

The Commission is not registered for VAT.

1.13 Staff Costs

Under IAS19, Employee Benefits legislation, all staff costs must be recorded as an expense as soon as an organisation is obligated to pay them. This includes the cost of any holiday pay and flexible time owed at the year end.

1.14 Impending application of newly issued accounting standards not yet effective

IFRS 16 Leases replaces IAS17 Leases and is effective with EU adoption from 1 January 2019. In line with the requirement of the FReM, IFRS 16 will be implemented, as interpreted and adapted for the public sector, with effect from 1 April 2022.

2. Statement of operating costs by function

The Commission can be treated as a single operating segment, however under Schedule 8 para 5(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 it is required to give details of how resources have been divided between the functions previously exercised by the bodies dissolved at the time of its formation.

	Salaries & Associated Costs £000	Programme Costs £000	*Other Costs £000	12 mths to 31/03/2021 Total £000	Salaries & Associated Costs £000	Programme Costs £000	*Other Costs £000	12 mths to 31/03/2020 Total £000
Integrated/ New Areas	864	298	206	1,368	665	196	161	1,022
Disability	586	86	140	812	555	104	135	794
Religion & Politics	492	16	117	625	538	18	131	687
Gender	393	37	94	524	428	119	104	651
Race	176	21	42	239	187	32	45	264
Statutory Duty	336	13	80	429	352	9	85	446
Resources	640	0	164	804	635	0	154	789
Executive	257	0	62	319	252	0	61	313
Total Costs	3,744	471	905	5,120	3,612	478	876	4,966
Members Costs	155	0	0	155	174	0	0	174
Other Costs	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	7
Total	3,899	471	905	5,275	3,793	478	876	5,147

* Other costs include general overheads, premises and non-cash costs less income from activities.

3. Expenditure

	2020/21	2019/20
	£000	£000
Staff costs		
Salaries and fees	2,626	2,612
Social Security Cost	258	254
Other pension costs	774	766
Agency	241	154
Severance	0	7
Rentals under operating leases		
Buildings	516	516
Annual contracts	42	24
Rates	202	193
Fuel	58	90
Facilities Management	151	143
Repairs and Maintenance	40	72
Legal – Non-database Costs	48	16
Education and Promotions	102	87
Other Programme	93	99
Miscellaneous	73	79
External Audit Costs	12	12
Consumables	84	49
Legal Costs	(4)	(4)
Staff Related Costs	37	40
Depreciation and Amortisation	104	110
Holiday Pay provision	11	0
Legal Provision charge	229	276
	<hr/> 5,697 <hr/>	<hr/> 5,595 <hr/>

4. Income

	2020-21	2019-20
	Total	Total
	£000	£000
Revenue from contracts with customers	83	83
Other operating income	343	361
	<hr/> 426 <hr/>	<hr/> 444 <hr/>

All income is based on full cost recovery.

Revenue from contracts with customers relates to Service Level Agreements with other ALBs.

Other operating income relates to offset of premises costs by co-tenants.

5. Plant and equipment

2020-21	Information Technology £000	Office Equipment £000	Furniture £000	Fixtures & Fittings £000	Total £000
Cost/Valuation					
At 1 April 2020	442	109	267	350	1,168
Additions	92	0	0	0	92
Disposals	0	0	0	0	0
Revaluations	(1)	0	2	(14)	(13)
At 31 March 2021	533	109	269	336	1,247
Depreciation					
At 1 April 2020	394	99	267	258	1,018
Charged in year	31	4	0	36	71
Disposals	0	0	0	0	0
Revaluations	(1)	1	2	(10)	(8)
At 31 March 2021	424	104	269	284	1081
Carrying amount at 31 March 2021	109	5	0	52	166
Carrying amount at 31 March 2020	48	10	0	92	150
Asset Financing					
Owned	109	5	0	52	166
Finance lease	0	0	0	0	0
Carrying amount at 31 March 2021	109	5	0	52	166

Plant and equipment are revalued annually by reference to the indices issued by the Office for National Statistics for the different types of assets.

Note 5 Continued

2019-20	Information Technology £000	Office Equipment £000	Furniture £000	Fixtures & Fittings £000	Total £000
Cost/Valuation					
At 1 April 2019	403	106	264	343	1,116
Additions	28	0	0	0	28
Disposals	0	0	0	0	0
Revaluations	11	3	3	7	24
At 31 March 2020	442	109	267	350	1,168
Depreciation					
At 1 April 2019	365	90	264	215	934
Charged in year	19	6	0	39	64
Disposals	0	0	0	0	0
Revaluations	10	3	3	4	20
At 31 March 2020	394	99	267	258	1,018
Carrying amount at 31 March 2020	48	10	0	92	150
Carrying amount at 31 March 2019	38	16	0	128	182
Asset Financing					
Owned	48	10	0	92	150
Finance lease	0	0	0	0	0
Carrying amount at 31 March 2020	48	10	0	92	150

Plant and equipment are revalued annually by reference to the indices issued by the Office for National Statistics for the different types of assets.

6. Intangible assets

Intangible assets comprise software and licenses.

2020-21	Information Technology	Software Licences	Total
	£000	£000	£000
Cost or Valuation			
At 1 April 2020	29	239	268
Additions	0	35	35
Disposals	0	0	0
At 31 March 2021	29	274	303
Amortisation			
At 1 April 2020	29	169	198
Charged in year	0	33	33
Disposals	0	0	0
At 31 March 2021	29	202	231
Carrying amount at			
31 March 2021	0	72	72
Carrying amount at			
31 March 2020	0	70	70
Asset financing:			
Owned	0	72	72
Finance Leased	0	0	0
Carrying amount at	0	72	72
31 March 2021			

Note 6 Continued

2019-20	Information Technology £000	Software Licences £000	Total £000
Cost or Valuation			
At 1 April 2019	29	215	244
Additions	0	24	24
Impairment	0	0	0
At 31 March 2020	29	239	268
Amortisation			
At 1 April 2019	28	124	152
Charged in year	1	45	46
Disposals	0	0	0
At 31 March 2020	29	169	198
Carrying amount at 31 March 2020	0	70	70
Carrying amount at 31 March 2019	1	91	92
Asset financing:			
Owned	0	70	70
Finance Leased	0	0	0
Carrying amount at 31 March 2020	0	70	70

7. Financial Instruments

As the cash requirements of the Equality Commission are met through Grant-in-Aid provided by The Executive Office, financial instruments play a more limited role in creating and managing risk than would apply to a non-public sector body. The majority of financial instruments relate to contracts to buy non-financial items in line with the Commission's expected purchase and usage requirements and the Commission is therefore exposed to little credit, liquidity or market risk.

8. Cash and cash equivalents

	2020-21	2019-20
	£000	£000
Balance at 1 April	126	179
Net change in cash and cash equivalents	187	(53)
Balance at 31 March	313	126
The balance at 31 March was held at the Government Banking Service	313	126
Cash in Hand	0	0
Balance at 31 March	313	126

9. Trade receivables and other current assets

	2020-21	2019-20
	£000	£000
Amounts falling due within one year:		
Inventories	3	2
Prepayments	99	80
Accrued Income	12	2
Other Receivables	0	0
	114	84

10. Trade payables and other current liabilities

	2020-21 £000	2019-20 £000
Amounts falling due within one year		
Accruals and deferred Income	(355)	(294)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	(355)	(294)

11. Provisions for liabilities and charges

	Holiday Pay £000	2020-21 Legal Costs £000	Total £000	2019-20 Legal Costs £000
Balance at 1 April	0	97	97	124
Provided in the year	11	288	299	433
Provisions not required written back	0	(59)	(59)	(157)
Provisions utilised in the year	0	(182)	(182)	(303)
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance at 31 March	11	144	155	97

The Commission makes provision for expenditure authorised for legal assistance before it is committed to an external provider. It is not possible to determine the time period for each case.

A provision has been included in the accounts relating to the potential impact of a number of legal cases involving public bodies in Northern Ireland. This was included as a contingent liability in the 2019-20 Financial Statements of ECNI.

The Court of Appeal (CoA) judgment from 17 June 2019 (PSNI v Agnew) determined that claims for Holiday Pay shortfall can be taken back to 1998. However, the PSNI has appealed the CoA judgment to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court hearing was scheduled for the 23rd and 24th June 2021 but this has subsequently been adjourned. There are still some very significant elements of uncertainty around this estimate for a number of reasons:

1. The appeal to the Supreme Court (as detailed above);
2. ongoing negotiations between NICS and its Trade Unions; and
3. the provision includes a pension element which is based on the current rate per staff member provided by the Government Actuary's Department (GAD). This will require subsequent confirmation.

Based on a review of our overtime patterns, the 2020-21 Holiday Pay provision has been estimated by ECNI and covers the period from April 2014 to 31 March 2020. This will be reviewed, in light of any changes to the overall legal position. There was no holiday pay provision in 2019-20.

12. Capital commitments

	2020-21 £000	2019-20 £000
Contracted capital commitments at 31 March not otherwise included in these financial statements		
Plant and equipment	0	0
Intangible assets	0	0

13. Commitments under leases

13.1 Operating leases

Total future minimum lease payments under operating leases are given in the table below for each of the following periods.

	2020-21 £000	2019-20 £000
Obligations under operating leases comprises:		
Buildings		
Not later than one year	572	516
Later than one year and not later than five years	800	1,372
Later than five years	0	0
Other:		
Not later than one year	0	0
Later than one year and not later than five years	0	0
Later than five years	0	0

13.2 Finance Leases

The Commission had no commitments under finance leases.

14. Other financial commitments

The Commission had no other financial commitments at 31 March 2021 or 31 March 2020.

15. Contingent liabilities disclosed under IAS 37

As at 31 March 2021 there were no contingent liabilities.

16. Related-party transactions

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is a non-departmental public body sponsored by The Executive Office (TEO). TEO is regarded as a related party with which the Commission has had various material transactions during the year.

In addition, the Commission has had various material transactions with other central government bodies:

- TEO
(£5,391,000 of which £0 was outstanding at the year-end),
- the Northern Ireland Commission for Children and Young People
(£152,194 of which £11,498 was outstanding at the year-end),
- the Commission for Victims and Survivors
(£80,241 of which £0 was outstanding at the year-end),
- the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
(£24,988 of which £0 was outstanding at the year-end),
- the Commissioner for Older People Northern Ireland
(£109,199 of which £0 was outstanding at the year-end),
- the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission
(£700 of which £0 was outstanding at the year-end),
- the Community Relations Council for Northern Ireland
(£110,526 of which £832 was outstanding at the year-end).

No Commissioner or key management executive has undertaken any material transactions with the Equality Commission during the year.

There were no other related party transactions.

17. Third-party assets

The Commission had no third-party assets at 31 March 2021 or 31 March 2020.

18. Events after the Reporting Period

There were no events after the reporting period impacting on these statements.

Date of authorisation for issue

The Accounting Officer authorised the issue of these financial statements on 24 June 2021.

Performance Delivery against planned objectives 2020-21

Strategic Outcome Area 1 Mainstreaming and Championing equality

Business Plan objective		Assessment				Evidence for delivery / explanation for non-delivery
		Achieved or On Track	Broadly on track	Behind target and doubt about delivery	Not expected to be achieved	
1.1	Mainstreaming equality		✓			<p>The importance of Government action to monitor, assess and respond to equality impacts of COVID-19 was highlighted and reinforced via a range of interventions, which included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - advocating for equality considerations to be core to decision making, up to and including Ministerial level; - dissemination of publications, briefing notes, media articles, e-zines and use of social media channels; - submission of written and oral evidence to Assembly Committees, Departmental expert panels, stakeholder roundtables; - collation and dissemination of data and information on the pandemic's impact on compounding inequalities across the equality grounds;

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provision of advice and guidance to public authorities and employers on addressing equality considerations when developing COVID-19 policies and responding to emerging problems. - highlighting the need to address gaps in equality data, including through publication of a Briefing note. <p>The Commission continued to deliver its section 75 responsibilities through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - advising public authorities on improving their practices as identified in the Commission report 'Acting on the Evidence' (2018); - jointly chairing, with TEO, a Forum of officials from Government Departments; - developing a Leadership Audit checklist and delivering training and advice; - virtual launch of Section 75 Data Signposting Guide, developed in partnership with NISRA; - video developed to advise public authorities on the purpose of Section 75 annual progress reports. <p>The Commission has continued to develop an impact measurement framework for reporting on its impact at performance and population levels.</p> <p>This year saw the publication of a third annual survey of public opinion on equality in Northern Ireland. The survey findings have again provided information pieces for the press and social media, as well as providing baselines and evidence to inform future reviews of Commission progress in meeting its corporate objectives.</p>
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						Further work on developing the Commission's strategic approach to investigations and consultation with stakeholders was deferred into 2021-22.
1.2	Making preparations for new responsibilities as the Dedicated Mechanism under EU Withdrawal Act	✓				<p>In the face of considerable uncertainty about the progress and nature of EU withdrawal at times throughout this year, the Commission focused on delivering three key actions to assist its preparations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - working in partnership with NIHRC and others, to maintain equality protections in the context of UK's exit from the EU; - securing the necessary resources to establish the proposed 'Dedicated Mechanism'(DM) and for delivering any new responsibilities allocated via the UK Withdrawal Bill; and - if progressed by Government, and where resources allowed, ensure equality and good relations are promoted in the context of Government's proposed Shared Prosperity Fund and proposed Future Relations Framework. <p>Resources were secured for establishment of a new DM Unit, covering the period 2020-23 and work was initiated on recruitment and developing a work programme for 2021-22.</p> <p>Both before and after the establishment of the DM, legal advices were obtained on the scope of the legislative framework, particularly the Northern Ireland Protocol to assist the assessment of areas of potential impact.</p>

						<p>Engagement with the Secretary of State, members of the House of Lords and MPs, equality and human rights stakeholders, secured assurances from the UK Government that addressed the joint ECNI /NIHRC concerns in relation to the Internal Market Bill.</p> <p>Throughout the year awareness has been raised of the new provisions and guidance provided via stakeholder events, information materials, media liaison and social media. The impact of this will be assessed over the coming year.</p> <p>Providing briefings and presenting evidence to the NI Affairs Committee at Westminster, Assembly Committees and sub-committees, working in partnership with key Government Departments and delivering a considerable programme of engagement to promote North/South and East/West understanding and cooperation has all been a focus of activity this year.</p> <p>A key area over recent months has been the strengthening of relationships with the NIHRC as part of the DM and also the IHREC on overseeing the commitment on an all-island basis, including establishing communications and planning structures and agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding. Relationship also developed with the Independent Monitoring Authority.</p> <p>By the year-end there was no progress by Government on the proposed Shared Prosperity Fund.</p>
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1.3	Championing equality		✓			<p>The main focus of our work this year was on ensuring we provided recommendations and guidance to ensure equality considerations were central to the response to COVID-19 - including on tackling inequalities emerging, or at risk of being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This required substantial re-structuring of our work programme in response. In total, 29 COVID-19 related media releases, blogs or articles were issued. Further information on this work is provided in section 1.1 above.</p> <p>In normal times, championing equality is demonstrated through our calls for strengthened equality law protections; the effectiveness of our delivery of our statutory responsibilities in relation to fair employment, section 75, and disability action plans; in our assistance to legal complainants and our role as part of the Independent Mechanism in Northern Ireland (IMNI), designated by the UK Government to scrutinise and report on its compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD). It is also championed through the advisory work that is involved in these areas and our work on overseeing and influencing the development of public policy.</p> <p>The impact of COVID 19, not only on Commission activities, but more importantly, those of public authorities and employers, led to some disruption in delivery of some compliance activities this year. For example, the timelines for the submission of fair employment monitoring returns and Section 75 Annual Progress Reports were extended and the processes used for submission of fair employment returns was revised.</p>
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					<p>Delivering our statutory duties: (19/20 numbers or % change in brackets):</p> <p>Fair Employment</p> <p>2,936 (-13.9%) Annual Monitoring Returns authorised 44 Article 55 Reviews audited 10,782 Contacts with registered concerns</p> <p>Although delayed, work on the annual Monitoring Report was completed and will be published early next year.</p> <p>Section 75</p> <p>Of the 160 (158) designated public authorities:</p> <p>144 (144) have equality schemes in place 14 (14) exemptions granted 2 (0) newly designated bodies 117 (135) annual reports submitted</p> <p>During the year under review, the Commission provided feedback to 15 (57) public authorities on their annual progress report, to 24 (22) public authorities on equality screening, S75 monitoring and action plans and to 4(2) public authorities on the five-year review of their equality schemes.</p>
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					<p>Disability Action Plans (DAPs)</p> <p>Of the 143 designated public authorities required to have a DAP this year:</p> <p>123 (124) have a current DAP in place 10 have submitted/consulting on a DAP 7 have drafted a DAP 3 (19) were still to update their Plans</p> <p>During the year, advice was provided to 37(74) public authorities to improve the quality of disability action plan measures, particularly focusing on promoting participation for disabled people.</p> <p>The most significant impact of COVID 19 was in the area of legal assistance. Compared to last year, there were 25% less enquiries and 43% fewer applications brought before Legal Funding Committees.</p> <p>No Commission cases were heard before the Tribunals or Courts this year, as the Tribunals and Courts were closed (or similar) There were 25 settlements this year, five less than last year's 30.</p> <p>Commissioners approved a new draft Legal Enforcement policy at its meeting in February 2021. A public consultation with stakeholders will begin next year.</p> <p>The Commission received two new written complaints, under paragraph 10 of Schedule 9 of the NI Act 1998 and the Committee considered 7 complaints during the year, as well as any review requests. A response was required to 35 (52 2019-20) advisory enquiries.</p>
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					<p>One investigation of a complaint commenced; one investigation under paragraph 11 of Schedule 9 was completed.</p> <p>We continued to fulfil our role in IMNI. This year saw the establishment and first meeting of an IMNI Disability Stakeholder Forum. Engagements with Departmental representatives and other stakeholders, in response to formal consultation processes, were used to highlight the CRPD and Commission policy positions.</p> <p>Engagements with stakeholders and officials, which continued virtually throughout the year, were used to call for local implementation of relevant Concluding Observations from International Frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the recommendations of the European Commission on Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities (FCNM), Examples in this business year related to the implementation of various aspects of the TEO Race Equality Strategy, including the commitment to race law reform; as well as wider work on gender pay reporting and responses to COVID-19 (Education, Childcare etc.)</p>
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					<p>Policy work, aimed at raising awareness and generating advocacy for Commission policy positions continued in areas such as hate crime, age GFS legislation, race and disability law reform, ethnic monitoring and addressing the inequalities faced by Travellers continued, with some indications of progress in delivering the Commission's objectives. We welcomed, for example, that recommendations of the final report of the independent (Marrinan) review of hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland reflected Commission recommendations across a number of areas.</p> <p>At the centre of our work on championing equality is the delivery of our communications and engagements strategies. This year saw the publication of an updated Communications Strategy and the development of a new Political Engagement Strategy.</p> <p>Albeit in a much transformed manner, the Commission continued to deliver a wide range of communications activities championing equality and supporting all areas of the business plan.</p> <p>The COVID 19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown changed the way we delivered our communications work as we adapted to meet the new context. We made the most of our opportunities in a difficult media context - we promoted a range of new advice notes for employers and service providers, press releases, articles and blogs on the equality aspects of the pandemic have dominated our communications</p>
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					<p>We concentrated on publicising our work providing advice and supporting employers and we used our communication channels to translate our policy positions into everyday language in order to make an impact.</p> <p>We were able to gain traction with subjects in the news, for example, on the need for implementation of the race equality strategy and for progress on a childcare strategy.</p> <p>Traffic to the website increased during the period with a rise of 13% users, making 9% more visits to the site. Trending topics included pregnancy and maternity redundancy related issues and the series of advice notes on COVID-19 issues produced for employers were well read.</p> <p>There were notable increases for specific topics including fair employment and monitoring web pages, Section 75 and equality impact assessment pages, and the UNCRPD and race equality policy pages.</p> <p>We put a new social media monitoring system in place and we now have more information about our overall social media activity than ever before. We used our ezine to reach stakeholders, issuing 26 ezines during the year. COVID-19 related topics were of particular interest for subscribers across all editions. Our ezine system now has 12,200 subscribers (an increase from 10,200).</p> <p>We moved all our engagement online - we upskilled very quickly, thought about how to continue to engage with key audiences and produced some quality events and projects.</p>
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					<p>We sustained many longstanding partnerships for example with the Pride and Mela Festivals and we were able to build new relationships with, for example, members of the race sector.</p> <p>A comprehensive programme of webinars and on-line training was developed, covering ongoing equality issues and focusing on particular equality issues of relevance in the COVID-19 context. The programme was launched at the end the first quarter and is having a positive response in terms of employer engagement.</p>
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Strategic Priority Area 2 Employment

Business Plan objective		Assessment				Evidence for delivery / explanation for non-delivery
		Achieved or On Track	Broadly on track	Behind target and doubt about delivery	Not expected to be achieved	
2.1	Employment and disabled people		✓			<p>Building on our work last year, the focus of activity this year was on our partnership work with the Department for Communities and the disability sector to implement a range of initiatives to promote more and better jobs for disabled people. This included providing training with representatives from the disability sector to DfC employment advisors and advisers in the disability sector, with more than 200 participants attending. Based on the feedback and requests for additional training a resource toolkit is being developed.</p> <p>A Making it Work campaign, in partnership with the NI Union of Supported Employment (NIUSE), has provided a valuable focus for work on employment support services for disabled people. The campaign has involved case studies, resource materials, web pages and use of social and print media. The campaign and the associated materials generated good coverage in the regional and local press and very positive feedback from support organisations and more widely across the business and disability sectors. We plan to further develop this project over the next financial year.</p>

						<p>The Commission also continued its training and advisory work with selected public and private sector employers and its work on promoting good mental health in the workplace, which has been very important during lockdown and included holding an event with a range of partners with inputs from the Chair of NI Health Committee and the NI Mental Health Champion.</p>
2.2	Women and employment		✓			<p>COVID-19 also had a significant impact on the direction of this work, with guidance being developed on for employers on pregnancy and on those with carer responsibilities. Communications work also focused on these issues and on childcare and STEM employment. We also attended the Stem Steering Group with the Department for Economy and other key partners.</p>
2.3	Freedom from prejudice and harassment at work	✓				<p>Objectives this year, were to develop a programme of work in partnership with Trade Unions and employer organisations based on the roll-out of survey findings from last year and to raise awareness with employers and promote improved practices in target areas. In partnership with the Labour Relations Agency and NIC-ICTU a number of webinars with input from employer organisations and trade unions were developed for delivery in 2021-22. In total, 41 webinars on bullying and harassment and developing inclusive workplaces, were attended by more than 760 individuals, representing 565 employers. There were eight in-house training sessions delivered for seven employers.</p> <p>Building on last year's survey work, case studies based on experiences of harassment were compiled and published.</p>

Strategic Priority Area 3 Education

Business Plan objective		Assessment				Evidence for delivery / explanation for non-delivery
		Achieved or On Track	Broadly on track	Behind target and doubt about delivery	Not expected to be achieved	
3.1	Address inequalities in attainment and access		✓			<p>Political and public concerns about COVID-19 transmission and the impact of lockdown on children’s education and wellbeing were a key aspect of public debate during this year.</p> <p>A key objective for the Commission was working with the Department of Education (DE), Education Authority (EA) and others to ensure a focus on identification and mitigation of equality impacts arising from, or exacerbated by, COVID-19.</p> <p>Key outputs included our publication of ‘COVID-19 and Education: Equality Considerations’; and ‘Family Engagement: Learning from the Pandemic’.</p> <p>We welcomed the dissemination by DE of the first of these across the Department and its incorporation into DE’s operational Equality Toolkit. We also welcomed a commitment by DE and EA to ongoing and enhanced engagement with families and communities, in context of response to COVID-19.</p>

					<p>This year's Business Plan also contained key actions covering challenging and supporting EA to deliver the comprehensive monitoring of equality data and encouraging progress in supporting Newcomer pupils and Traveller children; in mainstreaming parental and community initiatives</p> <p>Further to ongoing liaison with officials, we welcomed the indication by EA and DE officials of the intention to ensure equality data collection via the new C2K (formerly Classroom 2000) system and to track C19 impacts by S75 ground within the DE Restart programme; with DE also considering the potential for external research to track Equality impacts of C-19.</p> <p>Throughout the year we continued to progress our case, at ministerial level, through engagement with the Assembly's Education Committee, with DE and EA and across our work with stakeholders and partners, as well as in our own media releases and use of social media.</p> <p>Aligned to our ongoing stakeholder engagement, we welcomed positive reference to our work and recommendations in Assembly debates, All-party working groups, and in the public and press statements of politicians and other opinion formers. We also welcomed the inclusion of our work in the outputs of others for example the NI Assembly's research output 'COVID-19 and school shutdowns: Examining the after-effects'.</p> <p>It is hoped to see further outcomes from Commission engagement, for example in the publication by DE of its Supporting Newcomer Pupils Policy and commitment to review the Traveller Child in Education Policy.</p>
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Strategic Priority Area 3 Access and Participation

Business Plan objective		Assessment				Evidence for delivery / explanation for non-delivery
		Achieved or On Track	Broadly on track	Behind target and doubt about delivery	Not expected to be achieved	
4.1	Participation in public and political life		✓			<p>In the context of COVID-19 restrictions and reduction in public appointments, much of our work this year centred on further raising awareness of Commission recommendations alongside maintaining links with the partnerships established with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPANI), the Women’s Resource and Development Agency (WRDA) and the Women’s Caucus in the Assembly.</p> <p>Some advisory work was undertaken with public bodies seeking to ensure that Disability Action Plan (DAP) action measures are directed towards promoting access and participation for targeted groups and on the application of S.75 and DAPs duties to public appointments.</p>

4.2	Accessible facilities and services for disabled people		✓			<p>The main aims this year, were to facilitate targeted larger public and private sector service providers' development and delivery of access and participation for targeted groups, including through the strategic use of Every Customer Counts initiative, Disability Action Plans, Section 75 and support for strategic legal cases.</p> <p>This work was impacted by pandemic restrictions and the need to re-prioritise business objectives.</p> <p>A number of articles and blogs were produced to promote accessible services for disabled people in the context of the pandemic and promote the Commission's Every Customer Counts guidance. A webinar was delivered and training and advice given to a small number of public authorities.</p>
4.3	Addressing housing needs, including in the context of responding to COVID-19			✓		<p>The necessity of addressing COVID-19 related issues, such as the suspension of disability-related housing adaptations was raised through meetings with NIHE officials, in the weeks following the introduction of lockdown.</p> <p>Following on from the publication of the Commission's Housing and Community policy recommendations and priorities for action last year, this year it continued to target engaging with the Department for Communities (DfC), NIHE and housing associations and wider stakeholders to secure their advocacy and on action to overcome barriers to disabled people securing adapted housing.</p>

						<p>There was evidence of success in the advocacy of some recommendations within the NIHE's Older People's Strategy action plan, including the Lifetime Homes Standard and accessible housing register. DfC also indicated use of the recommendations its call for evidence to support its Housing Supply Strategy and its Review of Social Housing Allocations.</p> <p>Infographics and other materials were also produced and disseminated amongst key stakeholders, to further extend reach and understanding of the Commission's recommendations.</p>
4.4	Access to information and digital services			✓		<p>A key task this year, was implementing arrangements for the monitoring and enforcement role of the Commission, under the web accessibility regulations, which required the compliance of existing websites by September 2020. The Commission has agreed a Memorandum of Understanding and works in partnership with the Government Digital Services (GDS) and the other enforcement bodies across the UK.</p> <p>The Commission has received one complaint in its enforcement role under the website accessibility regulations. This is being progressed by GDS.</p> <p>Concerns have been raised about the issue of lack of awareness of the regulations and the enforcement mechanism. GDS has undertaken to improve awareness of this complaint mechanism.</p>

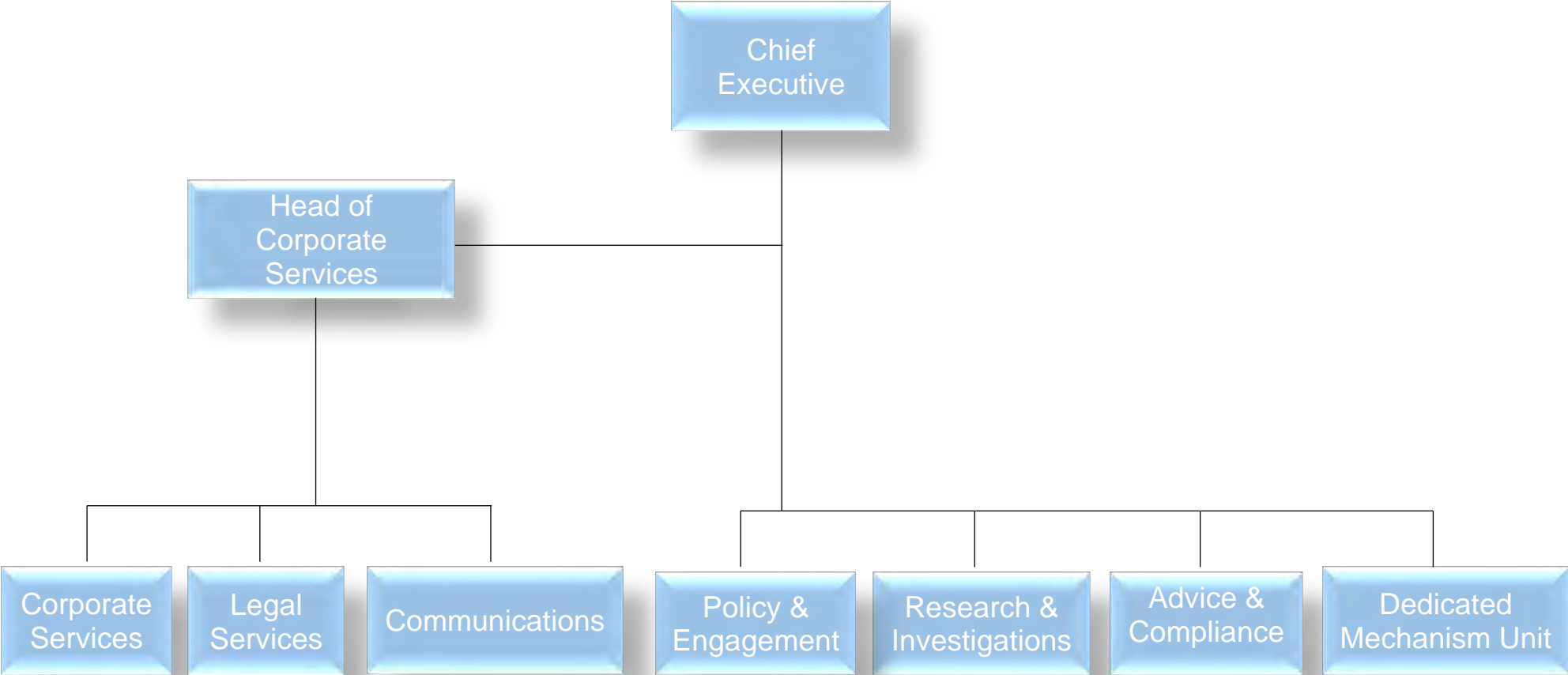
Strategic Priority Area 5 Resourcing and Supporting the Plan

Business Plan objective		Assessment				Evidence for delivery / explanation for non-delivery
		Achieved or On Track	Broadly on track	Behind target and doubt about delivery	Not expected to be achieved	
5.1	Effectively supporting and resourcing the Commission's business plans and actions	✓				<p>Each year the Commission sets two main financial objectives, operating within its allocated budget and taking action to address potential financial impacts on the horizon. This year, both of these were achieved.</p> <p>At the year-end there was an overall underspend of £37k (0.7%) against the core budget figure and the Commission remained within the target parameters set by TEO. The Commission also obtained an allocation of £300k for the establishment of arrangements to deliver the Commission's new responsibilities under the EU Withdrawal Act. Funding of this work until 2023 has been confirmed. The Commission continues to plan for more agile working arrangements, which should have the additional benefit of reducing premises costs in future years.</p>

5.2	Ensuring effective governance and internal control	✓			<p>The Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20 prepared in line with the agreed Audit Strategy timetable and laid before Parliament and the Assembly on 16 July 2020.</p> <p>An unqualified audit opinion was obtained from the C&AG and the Report to those Charged with Governance was very positive and contained no recommendations.</p> <p>The Strategic Audit Plan was delivered and the internal auditor provided an overall assurance rating of Satisfactory. Further information on the Commission's governance arrangements can be found in the Governance Statement earlier in this report.</p> <p>This year, maintaining business continuity during the pandemic and ensuring that staff could work safely and effectively from home were paramount. An additional advisory review on the Commission's COVID-19 response was added to the audit programme. Its outcome was also positive, with three Priority 3 findings being recorded in total.</p> <p>The Commission's emergency response was speedy and effective, with almost staff able to work remotely from home, from mid-March 2020 when public health advice indicated that people should work from home where possible. . Capital bids were made to provide additional equipment to support remote working.</p> <p>Throughout the year, the Commission monitored the impact of remote working on delivery of work and services and also on staff wellbeing. All staff continue to work remotely and business continuity has been maintained.</p>
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					<p>Action to support staff working remotely, to keep staff connected and support their wellbeing continues to be taken. Planning for new hybrid working arrangements is underway.</p> <p>Early in the pandemic, an Investor in People assessment was undertaken remotely and Silver accreditation achieved.</p> <p>A project to review business plan objectives and delivery against Performance and Population indicators set out in the Corporate Plan was initiated and support, from the National Children's Bureau NI, has been procured to assist with the development of OBA report cards.</p> <p>The Commission is currently monitoring its approach to Corporate Social Responsibility against the Business in the Community CORE framework.</p> <p>IT security arrangements have received a Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation following assessment under the Government's National Cyber Security Centre's certification scheme.</p> <p>Work to ensure the Commission's website meets the accessibility requirements was undertaken, An Accessibility audit was completed and the recommendations implemented. A plan is in place for further improvements and for rolling audits going forward.</p> <p>The Commission's Corporate Plan 2019-22 and Business Plan 2020-21 have received Ministerial approval and a draft Business Plan for 2021-22 has been prepared.</p>
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Organisation Structure Chart



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