

nipsa

Annual Report 2024



# Contents

Officers and Secretariat at 31 December 2024.....	i	Attendances, Committees and Meetings.....	v
Seconded Officers: Civil Service.....	ii	Resolutions and Motions.....	ix
Trade Union Side Officers.....	iv		

## Section A

### NIPSA Headquarters

#### General Issues

A1 Irish Congress of Trade Unions.....	2
A2 Legal Cases.....	2
A3 Equality Committee.....	2
A4 Global Solidarity Committee.....	2
A5 Pensions.....	3
A6 Policy and Research Unit (PRU).....	3

#### Organisation and Administration

A7 Donations.....	4
A8 Appointment of Auditors.....	5
A9 Headquarters Staff.....	5
A10 Membership.....	5
A11 NIPSA Annual Conference.....	5
A12 Services for Members.....	5
A13 Trades Councils.....	6
A14 Union Learning.....	6

## Section B

### Civil Service

#### B1 General Issues

B1.1 Accommodation.....	8
B1.2 Pay, Reward and Grading.....	8
B1.3 Pensions.....	10
B1.4 Public Service Management.....	11

#### B2 Personnel Management

B2.1 Employee Relations.....	12
B2.2 Resourcing and Workforce Planning.....	13
B2.3 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.....	14

### B3 Group Reports

B3.1 Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).....	15
B3.2 Department for Communities (DfC).....	16
B3.3 Department for the Economy (DfE).....	19
B3.4 Department of Education (DE).....	21
B3.5 Department of Finance (DoF).....	23
B3.6 Department of Health (DoH).....	25
B3.7 Department for Infrastructure (DfI).....	26
B3.8 Department of Justice (DoJ).....	30
B3.9 The Executive Office (TEO).....	32
B3.10 Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI).....	32
B3.11 Construction Industry Training Board (CITB).....	38
B3.12 Human Rights Commission.....	38
B3.13 Invest NI.....	38
B3.14 National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI).....	38
B3.15 North South Bodies.....	40
B3.16 Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA).....	40
B3.17 Northern Ireland Audit Office.....	41
B3.18 Northern Ireland Water (NIW).....	42
B3.19 NSL Traffic Attendants.....	42
B3.20 Police Ombudsman Northern Ireland.....	43
B3.21 Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI).....	44
B3.22 Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI).....	45
B3.23 Public Prosecution Service Northern Ireland (PPSNI).....	45
B3.24 Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Services (NICTS).....	47
B3.25 Serco.....	49
B3.26 Sodexo.....	50
B3.27 Sport NI.....	50
B3.28 Utility Regulator.....	51

# Contents

## Section C

### Public Officers

#### C1 Education & Further/Higher Education

C1.1	Education Authority (EA)	54
C1.2	Education Authority Belfast Region (EABR)	55
C1.3	Education Authority North Eastern Region (EANER)	56
C1.4	Education Authority South Eastern Region (EASER)	56
C1.5	Education Authority Southern Region (EASR)	56
C1.6	Education Authority Western Region (EAWR)	57
C1.7	Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC)	58
C1.8	Northern Regional College (NRC)	59
C1.9	North West Regional College (NWRC)	59
C1.10	Southern Regional College (SRC)	59
C1.11	South Eastern Regional College (SERC)	59
C1.12	South West College (SWRC)	60
C1.13	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)	61
C1.14	Queens University Belfast (QUB)	61
C1.15	Stranmillis University College	61

#### C2 Health and Social Care

C2.1	NIPSA Health Branches	62
------	-----------------------	----

#### C3 Libraries NI

#### C4 Local Authorities

C4.1	Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council (ANBC)	65
C4.2	Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC)	65
C4.3	Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council (ACBC)	66
C4.4	Belfast City Council (BCC)	66
C4.5	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council (CCGBC)	67
C4.6	Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC)	68

C4.7	Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (FODC)	69
C4.8	Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC)	70
C4.9	Mid and East Antrim Borough Council (MEABC)	70
C4.10	Mid-Ulster District Council (MUDC)	71
C4.11	Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC)	72

#### C5 Northern Ireland Housing Executive

#### C6 Other Bodies

C6.1	City of Derry Airport (CoDA)	76
C6.2	Controlled Sector Schools Council (CSSC)	77
C6.3	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)	77
C6.4	EXTERN	77
C6.5	General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI)	77
C6.6	Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL)	78
C6.7	Linen Hall Library (LHL)	78
C6.8	Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS)	78
C6.9	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)	79
C6.10	Radius Housing Association	79

#### Branch Organisation at 31 December 2024

Civil Service Group	81
Public Officers' Group	85

# Foreword

This year was the high point in NIPSA's history. We achieved outcomes that far exceeded any of our previous results. This success was built upon the hard work that went before.

This year members, activists and staff maintained a focused approach. We sought every opportunity to address the imbalance in the economic system that steals the hard-earned money made by workers and siphons it off as massive profits in the offshore bank accounts of billionaires. NIPSA made it its business to return those unpaid wages back to workers and back to fund our vital public services. We won significant pay deals in all areas of the public and civil services. In addition, we pursued every opportunity to improve members' income by pursuing grading issues, allowances and enhancements. While that process is ongoing in some areas, we can note successes this year such as equal pay in the Veterinary Services, the pay and grading review in Education and the PSNI non-uniformed staff allowances. In addition, NIPSA continued to work with our partner legal firm, MTB, to build solid legal cases on 'holiday pay' and 'injury to feelings'. Legal cases have been another way through which we pursued all possible avenues to achieve the same result... putting money in members' pockets.

Alongside pay, our union continued to focus on fighting for public services that are properly funded and democratically run. NIPSA continued to push forward on getting the Housing Executive to build new homes, members in the health service took strike action to fight for safe staffing and, in Councils, we pushed back against politicians who want to privatise services. By organising robust campaigns, connecting with the public and, where applicable, working with our sister unions we achieved results for NIPSA members and for the public.

All our engagements around public service funding this year took place against a backdrop of political turmoil in the NI Assembly and Westminster. We saw the fall of the Tories, who were then replaced by the Starmer government. Labour unfortunately did not adopt NIPSA's position of a socialist economy, run in the interests of ordinary people, and instead maintained the same political and economic approach as its predecessors. Throughout the year NIPSA took the view that the funding needed to run, maintain and improve public services had to be wrung from Treasury in London. We fought for an increase in the NI Budget and following the historic January 18 public service general strike, the NI Assembly returned with an increased budget. But even that was not sufficient and NIPSA warned that more needed to be forthcoming. Our warnings proved correct and through the rest of the year the NI Assembly limped from one financial problem to another.

Alongside pay and public services, NIPSA did not neglect to take up the other social and economic issues, both local and international, that impact the lives of our members. Frequently these issues are complex, but NIPSA remained determined to deal with them. As always, we followed NIPSA Conference policy and sought to ensure that we took up issues in a sensitive manner.

The horrendous slaughter and complete abandonment of even a pretence of humanity by the main international political actors marked the year. Sudan, the DRC, Kurdish areas, Myanmar and Ukraine were examples of places wracked by violence caused by local tensions and the struggle between super-powers vying for economic and political control. Palestine/Israel was the conflict that people here were most aware of. It sent shock waves across the Middle East igniting trouble in other countries and threatened to engulf the region. As with other issues, there was the potential for this to be viewed through the distorting lens of sectarian tensions here. NIPSA responded to the crisis in line with its conference motions.

# Foreword

We sent money for medical aid; we had an active campaign of information to members and campaigned for an end to the violence and slaughter and for a just solution to the conflict based on the common interests of the workers in the region.

In July, simmering racism boiled over. Racist reaction poured across the border, particularly from Dublin. This coincided with an upsurge in racism in England and Wales. NIPSA responded with an anti-racist campaign. We can be proud that we were in the lead in facing down racists and that we assisted in mobilising the wider trade union movement in fighting back. We organised to ensure that all protests were properly stewarded so that our members and the public could exercise their democratic right to protest in a safe environment. We also recognised that the racists preyed on communities where poverty led to desperation and people turned on each other rather than the greedy rich who cause the problems. With that in mind, NIPSA does not just condemn racism, we also seek to remove the conditions that breed. That is why we have adopted the slogan 'Fight Racism - Fight for Decent Jobs, Homes and Services for ALL'. We could not do justice to this campaign unless we salute the courage and commitment of our members, other activists and the wider public who understood that racism must be challenged.

This year positive steps were taken to strengthen NIPSA structures. Long term staffing gaps in NIPSA HQ have been filled. A focused approach to different employment areas was introduced and strengthened training arrangements were put in place. NIPSA worked closely with the staff trade union reps to ensure this significant change was introduced smoothly. It is worth noting that NIPSA maintained a policy of Headquarters staff enjoying the same pay and terms and conditions as the civil service. This ensures NIPSA staff have a real connection to the members they represent.

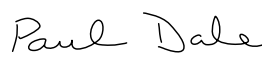
One of the high points of the year was the explosion of recruitment to NIPSA. Naturally the Covid years saw a fall in membership, but that ground was made up and exceeded. NIPSA now stands at 47,000, its highest ever membership and one branch has broken through the 3000 members mark! Activity in the workplace, a strong media presence and appropriate use of industrial action ensured NIPSA is the union of choice for public sector workers.

In closing we would like to thank all our activists who have played a magnificent role this year in building our union.

No doubt 2025 will bring many challenges but if we maintain our momentum and fight for our members, we can be sure that we can overcome any obstacle.



**Tanya Killen**  
*President*



**Paul Dale**  
*Vice President*



**Jane Scott**  
*Honorary Treasurer*



**Carmel Gates**  
*General Secretary*

# Officers and Secretariat 2024

**Officers 2024** **President:** Tanya Killen **Vice-President:** Paul Dale **Honorary Treasurer:** Jane Scott

## Secretariat at 31 December 2024

**General Secretary** C Gates

**Deputy General Secretaries** A McMillen M Morgan P Mulholland

**Policy and Research Officer** J McVey

**Assistant Secretaries** C Arkinson K Smyth K Kelly A Law  
L Mackel N Shiel R Wilson

**Assistant Secretary (Finance)** M Law

**Higher Executive Officers** P Boyle<sup>(T)</sup> E Farrell<sup>(T)</sup> R Graham S Harvey<sup>(T)</sup>  
C McDonnell J Murdock<sup>(T)</sup> B Trainor J Walsh<sup>(T)</sup>

**Executive Officers** M Donnelly T McAteer A McDonnell B Nugent  
L A Scott D Whitford

**Senior Personal Secretary (EO)** L Hudson

**Building Supervisor (EO)** A Burns

**Personal Secretaries** A Cartwright<sup>(A)</sup> D Dawson S Johnston C McConnell  
C McLeish M Ó'Coisneacháin

**Administrative Officers** C Connor G Jarvis<sup>(P)</sup> J Jennings G Jones  
J Lavery P Murray

**General Assistants** A Mekelburg<sup>(P)</sup> S Overend<sup>(P)</sup> D Rolley<sup>(P)</sup>

(A) Acting (T) Temporary (P) Part-time



# Seconded Officers, Civil Service

## Central Whitley, Assistant Trade Union Side Secretaries

**Vacant x 2**

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## Department for the Economy (DfE)

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1. At time of publication, Temporary HEO at NIPSA HQ

\* In January 2025, assumed new post at NIPSA Headquarters and ceased role as Seconded Officer.

## Department of Finance (DoF)/The Executive Office (TEO)

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## Department of Health (DoH)

---

**Vacant**, 1x Departmental Secretary  
**NIPSA Section Office, Room 4, Annex 5, Castle Buildings, Belfast, BT4 3PP.**

## Department for Infrastructure (Dfi)

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## Department of Justice (DoJ)

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## Invest NI

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**Bedford Square, Bedford Street, Belfast, BT2 7ES.**

## National Museums NI

---

**N Wilson**, Secretary      T: 028 9039 5178      E: nipsa.officer@nationalmuseumsni.org  
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2. Temporary

3. Temporary



# Seconded Officers, Civil Service

## Northern Ireland Assembly

**H Clarke**, Acting Trade Union Side Secretary    **T:** 028 9052 1791    **E:** harry.clarke@niassembly.gov.uk  
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## NI Water (NIW)

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## Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)

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NIPSA Office, PSNI Lisnasharragh, 42 Montgomery Road, Belfast, BT6 9LD.  
**W Scott**, Assistant Secretary    **T:** 07866 067 625    **E:** warren.scott@psni.police.uk

## Public Prosecution Service (PPS)

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*\* In January 2025, assumed new post at NIPSA Headquarters and ceased role as Seconded Officer.*

# Trade Union Side Officers

## Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)

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## Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCT)

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12 Hampton Manor Drive, Belfast, BT7 3EN.

# General Council

## Attendance of members at General Council Sessions:

January to May 2024		
Name	Possible	Actual
Antal, S	4	3
Barlow, D	4	3
Bell, S	4	3
Collins, L	4	3
Conlon, SP	4	0
Creaney, T	4	2
Dale, P	4	4
Dawson, E	4	3
Doherty, E	4	2
Duffy, L	4	0
Garland, H	4	4
Graham, R	4	4
Killen, T	4	4
Loughran, M	4	0
McAtamney, E	4	4
McCann, F	4	3
McCloskey, M	4	2
McSherry, H	4	4
McVeigh, G	4	3
Mulholland, B	4	3
O'Sandair, R	4	3
O'Neill, F	4	3
Scott, J	4	2
Toner, D	4	4
Turner, P	4	4

June to December 2024		
Name	Possible	Actual
Anderson, F	7	4
Antal, S	7	6
Barlow, D	7	7
Bell, Si	7	6
Bell, St	7	7
Brooks, W	7	7
Collins, L	7	6
Conlon, SP	7	1
Creaney, T	7	6
Dale, P	7	7
Doherty, E	7	5
Fleming, E	7	5
Graham, R	7	6
Hamilton-Toner, D	7	3
Killen, T	7	6
McAtamney, E	7	6
McCann, F	7	5
McConville, S	7	2
McSherry, H	7	5
Morgan, C	7	5
Mulholland, B	7	6
O'Sandair, R	7	6
Scott, J	7	6
Turner, P	7	5
Watson, L	7	6

# Committees

Membership of Committees at 31 December 2024

## General Purposes Committee

L Collins  
T Creaney  
P Dale  
T Killen  
H McSherry  
B Mulholland  
J Scott

## Finance Committee

P Dale  
R Graham  
T Killen  
R O'Sandair  
J Scott

## Conference Arrangements Committee

W Brooks  
Si Bell  
E McAtamney  
F McCann  
S McConville

## Equality Committee

S Antal  
L Collins  
T Creaney  
P Dale  
J Davidson  
P Devenney  
H Garland  
L Glass  
E McAtamney  
F McCann  
A Millar  
N Rea

## Management Side JNCC

P Dale  
T Killen  
J Scott

## Standing Orders Committee

A Boal  
K Loughran  
J McCloskey  
J Veighey

## Global Solidarity Committee

F Anderson  
S Antal  
D Barlow  
L Collins  
T Creaney  
W Brooks  
E Fleming  
B O'Reilly  
R O'Sandair  
J Scott

## NIPSA News Editorial Committee

I Boersma  
J Davidson  
D Maguire  
H McSherry  
R O'Sandair

## Welfare Fund Committee

St Bell  
T Killen  
J Scott

# Civil Service Group

## Attendance of Members and Officers at Executive Committee Meetings

December 2021 to October 2024

Name	Possible	Actual
I Boersma	9	9
W Brooks	9	9
P Cobain	9	9
L Collins	9	6
T Creaney	9	9
D Crilly	9	8
P Dale	9	7
J Davidson	9	9
M Dummigan	9	6
H Garland	9	9
L Glass	9	9
S Gowdy	9	9
E McAtamney	9	8
F McCann	9	7
D McErlean	9	9
M McKee	9	7
C Morgan	9	9
B Mulholland	9	7
B O'Reilly	9	8
R O'Sandair	9	7
J Rooney	9	3
V Russell	9	6
D Toner	9	4
P Turner	9	6
J Veighey	9	8

Officers: November 2023 to October 2024

**Chairperson:** T Creaney

**Vice Chairpersons:** P Dale, J Rooney

Standing Orders Committee

A Boal, E Donaghy

# All other Representations and Committees

## Health and Social Services

Representation on Health and Social Services Trade Union Forum 31 December 2024

**K Kelly**, *(HQ Official)*      P Quinn

## Education Authority

Representation on the Education and Library Boards Joint Council, 31 December 2024

D Austin                      B Booth                      E Lavery

**N Shiel**, *(HQ Official)*      H McSherry              J Scott

## Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Joint Consultative and Negotiation Committee, 31 December 2024

S Agnew                              C Boyle                      J Foster                      **K Smyth**, *(HQ Official)*

**S McConville**, *(Assistant TUS Secretary)*    **S McDaid**, *(TUS Secretary)*    **T Girvan**, *(Vice Chair)*      S McMahon

T McNulty                              **L O'Hanlon**, *(Chair)*

# Resolutions and Motions

Resolutions at the 2024 General Conference

Resolutions at the 2024 Civil Service Group Conference

# Resolutions at the 2024 General Conference

## Resolution No. 1

Notes the return of the NI Assembly but is alarmed that this has been accompanied by an inadequate package from Westminster. Calls on the General Council to:

- Lobby for strategies that tackle social and economic injustice and fight for a socialist economy run on the basis of need and for the benefit of the majority.
- Demand that the NI Assembly does not become the facilitators of a UK Government cuts agenda.
- Maintain opposition to the introduction of all stealth taxes such as water charges.
- Prepare material and communications to raise awareness amongst members and the wider public about cuts to services and the likely impact on them and their families.
- Prepare NIPSA structures and branches for the fight ahead to defend public services.
- Organise, where possible, with the broader Trade Union Movement and community to build real opposition to an austerity agenda whether it is from Westminster, Stormont or Local Councils.

**Referred to GPC. Continue to lobby politicians, prepare information literature for Branches and make contact with Community leaders.**

## Resolution No. 4

Condemns the continuing assault on the founding principles of the Welfare State. Calls on the General Council to continue its support for all campaigns that seek to restore and expand the duties of the state in supporting its citizens. Further calls on the General Council to raise a new demand that any potential, detrimental breach of this social contract in the context of pensions in particular, must now require democratic affirmation including the possibility of approval via referenda.

**Referred to GPC. Letter to incoming Government and continue to lobby.**

## Resolution No. 5

Notes with dismay the lack of concern shown by public sector employers towards its lowest paid employees. Calls on the General Council to robustly challenge this continued lack of duty of care which could include campaigning for different options for paying staff backdated pay if they are affected by this but should look at all avenues available to its resources.

**Referred to GPC. Ongoing action by Executive Committee and Panels.**

## Resolution No. 6

Welcomes NIPSA's ongoing strategic focus on cost of living issues that impact the living standards of our members. Calls on the General Council to ensure members' living standards are the number one priority of the Union. Calls on the General Council to defend living standards by all necessary means including:

- Principled engagement with government parties and representatives of political parties.
- Judicious use of legal levers.
- Intelligent use of industrial action.

**Referred to Executive Committees and Panels for ongoing action.**

## Composite Resolution No. 7

Commends the work that NIPSA and other public sector unions have done in recent months to achieve the better than expected pay offer for 2023/24 that were made to public sector workers in NI. Calls on the General Council to take steps, in conjunction with other public sector unions where appropriate, to press the case for parity for NICS and other areas of the public sector with our GB colleagues.

**Referred to Executive Committee and Panels for ongoing action.**

## Resolution No. 8

Commends and congratulates all those who worked tirelessly to co-ordinate the fantastic industrial action and to the members for their fortitude, determination and enthusiasm. Calls on the General Council to ensure that the momentum is not lost from the campaigns and a plan is in place as to how NIPSA can best support branches in pushing for more victories.

**Referred to the Executive Committee and Panels for ongoing action.**



### Resolution No. 9

Notes that pay has been a huge issue for public services over the past years and will continue unless something is done to replace the funding needed in NI. Notes that the education sector still has no resolution in their campaign for a just and equitable pay structure and condemns the employers for not implementing a fair and equitable solution. Calls on the General Council to robustly fight all attempts to derail or ignore the legitimate call from members across the public services for above inflation pay increases.

**Noted the successful outcome of the pay campaigns across the public sector and successful outcome of the pay and grading review in education. Referred to Executive Committee and Panels for continuing action.**

### Resolution No. 12

Notes the new normal of hybrid working arrangements which can be problematic for many parents who grapple with the financial burden of childcare expenses. Calls on the General Council to engage with the relevant Departments, business areas and employers across the public sector to explore all possible options with a view to providing government operated crèche facilities for all workers in the public sector.

**Referred to GPC, Executive Committee and Panels.**

### Resolution No. 13

Notes that contractual maternity pay is paid for 18 weeks but contractual paternity pay is paid for 2 weeks. Calls on NIPSA to campaign for more equal contractual paternity pay or contractual shared parental leave pay to achieve greater gender equality and improve outcomes for families.

**Referred to GPC, Executive Committee and Panels. Benchmark provision across the public sector.**

### Resolution No. 14

Notes that, in the eve of climate crisis, more must be done to encourage people to use local infrastructure. Calls on NIPSA to negotiate and campaign for free public travel for all workers in the public sector.

**Referred to GPC. Letter to DfI Minister.**

### Resolution No. 17

Notes that the series of revenue raising consultations launched by NIO in September 2023 continued to run until March 2024 despite the restoration of devolution in February 2024. Calls on the General Council to continue the work of challenging Westminster for its historic underfunding/negligence of public services here and scrutinizing the NI Executive in relation to the budgetary approach it adopts in relation to a future Programme for Government. Further calls on the General Council to resist, by all means necessary, the introduction of all stealth taxes.

**Referred to GPC. Continue to monitor.**

### Resolution No. 18

Notes with alarm the Government's attack on National Insurance contributions. Calls on the General Council to investigate, along with other ICTU/TUC affiliated unions if possible, the consequences of each cut and publicise the likely outcomes of these reductions.

**Referred to GPC and ICTU and continue to monitor the situation.**

### Resolution No. 19

Condemns the extension of the Tory Government's "Hostile Environment Approach" to newcomer families in NI. Calls on the General Council to campaign against any further extension of the 2022 Immigration Act to NI and to highlight to members and the wider public, the corrosive impact of the border force deportation regime would cause to the region.

**Referred to GPC. Raised with the UK Government. Continue to work with ICTU to lobby NI Executive.**

### Composite Resolution No. 20

Notes with concern the current state and environmental impact that Blue/Green algae is having on Lough Neagh. Calls on the General Council to lobby the NI Assembly to develop a comprehensive strategy for the preservation and protection of Lough Neagh, focusing on measures such as water quality monitoring, pollution control, habitat restoration and sustainable management practices.

**Continue to work with ICTU to lobby NI Executive.**

### **Resolution No. 21**

Notes with alarm the increasing cost of school uniforms for hard pressed families and condemns the school uniform grants. Calls on the General Council to continue to press for a uniform price cap and, in the meantime, encourage parents to donate good quality used school uniforms to charities who can sell for a fraction of the cost.

**Responded to DE consultation on School uniforms. Continue to work with ICTU and to lobby NI Executive.**

### **Resolution No. 24**

Notes that hostility towards trans people is increasing in the UK and Ireland. Calls on the General Council:

- Oppose all forms of prejudice and bigotry particularly prejudice and bigotry directed towards Trans people;
- Campaign against the attacks on this community by the government, the media and the far right, and calls on local members to support local pride and pride communities;
- Campaign for the concrete action that is needed to challenge and ultimately to eradicate gender violence including fully funded support services for anyone impacted;
- Challenge Transphobia - support protests against transphobic attacks and hate;
- Support and campaign for Trans and LGBTQ+ inclusive RSE (Relationship and Sex Education) for young people;
- Campaign for fully funded gender identity services, integrated into the NHS and based on a model of informed consent;
- Rep training to include how to tackle transphobia in the workplace.

**Referred to Training Officer and LGBTQI+ & Equality Committees.**

### **Resolution No. 27**

Salutes the work of Palestinian and Jewish trade unionists and social activists who are struggling for national rights, human rights, social rights and an end to poverty for all people in Palestine, Israel and the wider Middle East. Calls on the General Council to:

- Continue to provide balanced and accurate information about the situation.

- Engage in a meaningful debate with the wider trade union movement on appropriate steps to ensure NI does not contribute materials that exacerbate the conflict or can be used for repression or dispossession.
- Provide material support to legitimate medical organisations and aid organisations in the region.
- Establish direct links with trade unionists in the region.
- Continue to be involved with, and help build, Trade Union Friends of Palestine.
- Continue to support the BDS Movement.

**Referred to GPC. Continue to work with TUIFP and to send letters to the UK and Irish Governments.**

### **Resolution No. 28**

Notes with concern the significant change in the narrative about immigration in general and refugees in particular in recent years. Calls on the General Council to fight racism at all levels.

**Referred to GPC. Continue to be at the forefront of campaigning against racism.**

### **Resolution No. 29**

Commends the recent attempt to boycott the White House on St Patrick's Day in light of the complicity of US imperialism and condemns all parties who broke the boycott. Calls on the General Council to campaign for the expulsion of the Irish and British Israel's ambassadors and support other boycott campaigns.

**Referred to GPC. Raise where appropriate.**

### **Resolution No. 30**

Condemns the ongoing violence directed at the people of Gaza by the Israeli government. Calls on the General Council to support the Palestine Solidarity campaign's position and to support their pledge to boycott Hewlett Packard and their products such as laptops, printers and printer ink.

**Referred to GPC. Continue as policy.**

### **Resolution No. 33**

Notes the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the Miners strike. Calls on the General Council to support the ongoing campaigns on an Orgreave Inquiry, the Miners Pension Scheme and the criminal records of strikers to be expunged and compensation paid.

**Referred to GPC. Letter to UK Government.**

**Resolution No. 34**

Notes the tremendous work carried out by public sector unions in co-operating to build supportive strike action across this year's pay disputes. Notes with concern reports from some members of a small number of local activists who appeared to focus on approaching members from sister unions in the build up to and during strike action. Calls on the General Council to work with sister unions and ICTU to oppose such divisive actions and instead build support for all trade unions to recruit the unorganised.

**Referred to GPC. Raised within ICTU.**

**Resolution No. 35**

Notes the constant stream of anti-union, anti-protest legislation coming from the Westminster government. Calls the General Council to redouble the efforts to reverse the anti-union legislation already in place.

**Referred to GPC and ICTU. Contributed to DfE "Good Jobs" Bill.**

**Resolution No. 36**

Calls on the General Council to ensure NIPSA works with other unions to prevent any diminution of support and representation of union members within workplaces, to ensure all union members are receiving the support and representation they need and deserve in workplaces where more than one union has consultation and negotiation rights.

**Referred to GPC. Continue to action and raise with ICTU.**

**Resolution No. 40**

Notes that successive conferences have passed motions relating to the turnout in NIPSA's election ballots. Notes the work done by NIPSA over recent years to increase participation levels in elections. Calls on the General Council to take cognisance of the findings of the paper and to develop further strategies to try to increase voter participation which will include targeting areas of low participation.

**Referred to GPC. Continue to action Conference paper No.1.**

**Resolution No. 41**

Notes that timely, clear and regular communications are prerequisites for a well-informed and pro-active union. Calls on the incoming General Council to develop a communications strategy which has the aim of making communications more eye-catching and increasing numbers for voting and that keeps members fully informed, but balancing this in a way that does not overburden with NIPSA correspondence.

**Referred to GPC. Action ongoing.**

**Resolution No. 42**

Acknowledges the accepted procedures on the payment of strike pay as set out in the Procedure for Industrial Action. Endorses the content of Conference Paper No. 2 which sets out a flexible approach to the payment of strike pay dependent on the circumstances and context of each dispute at the time.

**Referred to GPC. No further action at this time.**

**Resolution No. 44**

Endorses the content of Conference Paper No. 3 and agrees not to establish a Union Learning Fund at this time. Calls on the General Council to keep this issue under review.

**Refer to ULR. No further action at this time.**

**Resolution No. 45**

Notes that it is urgent that NIPSA play a leading role in organising agency workers in order to safeguard the future of our union and recruit a younger generation of workers. Recognises progress made to ensure agency workers are organised effectively. Calls on the General Council to produce a strategy paper on organising agency workers for the Annual Delegate Conference 2025.

**Referred to Executive Committee and Panels.**

**Resolution No. 51**

Notes that cases of workplace stress are rising and that the range of ill-health effects associated with workplace stress are of concern. Calls on the General Council to support members by campaigning for all public sector employers to fulfil their statutory duty to undertake suitable and sufficient mental wellbeing at work, workplace risk assessments at organisational level, that recognise workplace stress as a significant hazard; that identify sources of workplace stress and mental unwellness; and that require employers to identify, implement and review control measures to manage workplace stress.

**Referred to H&S Committee and refer to Executive Committees and Panels.**

**Resolution No. 52**

Notes with concern the cost-of-living crisis mostly due to the wage stagnation over the past 15 years. Calls on the General Council to compile, publish and advertise the importance of a survey to all members across NIPSA to find the extent of the issues that causes our membership to have to take on extra hours and jobs.

**Survey to be compiled and issued to members.**

**Resolution No. 53**

Notes with concern that men still find it hard to talk about their mental health. Calls on the General Council to undertake a survey of all male members of NIPSA regarding their mental health, both in terms of issues faced and barriers to getting support and to re-evaluate the resources currently available to them for support.

**Referred to GPC and H&S Committee. Referred to Equality Committee.**

**Resolution No. 56**

Notes with concern the failure of the returning NI Executive to secure guaranteed and sufficient funding for all spending plans in the current and future financial years. Calls on the General Council to investigate and publicise our public service spending shortfalls and the effect that this will have on safe staffing levels and service delivery.

**Work ongoing in conjunction with the ICTU and NERI.**

**Resolution No. 57**

Notes the impact of the current housing crisis on the living circumstances of many families across NI. Calls on the General Council to:

- Ensure that any campaign is framed on the basis that access to high quality affordable housing, is both a fundamental human and political right, and that the days of our politicians choosing to abandon young people and wider society to rack renters and the vagaries of a rigged rental market are numbered.
- Ensures the reinvestment of any income from the promotion of a range of more socially inclusive housing models in developing the availability of the public housing stock.
- Campaign for the NI Housing Executive to be financially supported to acquire and modernise available previous private sector housing stock, released as a result of these policy measures.

**Referred to NIHE Panel and GPC. Raised with UKG and work on going.**

**Resolution No. 58**

Notes with concern that a childcare strategy has not been progressed. Calls on the General Council to lobby all political parties and demand that commitments be given by the NI Executive are actioned urgently to bring about a meaningful childcare strategy that will benefit our members and their families and allow parents to remain part of the workforce.

**Continue to work with ICTU and to lobby NI Executive.**

**Resolution No. 59**

Notes that our education system is in a state of collapse. Calls on the General Council to advance a campaign to protect the most vulnerable children and services within education.

**Referred to GPC. Continue as policy.**

**Composite Resolution No. 60**

Notes that around 220,000 people in NI provide unpaid care for sick or disabled family members, friends or neighbours. Calls on the General Council to continue with our support of the Coalition of Carers and for all NIPSA bargaining bodies to include improved rights for unpaid carers in any negotiations ahead by any statutory requirements. Further calls on the General Council to join with any programmes or other activists,

if they deem it necessary, so NIPSA can campaign for changes to benefits and legislation comparable to, but not confined to only, the suggestions outlined here.

**Referred to GPC, ICTU and Equality Committee.  
Continue to action through the Equality Committee.**

#### **Resolution No. 61**

Notes with concern the Stormont Assembly parties for their failure to prioritise the needs of ordinary, working people. Calls on the General Council to:

- Oppose all regressive, anti-worker “revenue raising measures” including but not limited to water charges, tuition fee hikes, prescription charges and regressive rate hikes.
- Continue to raise the demand for a needs based budget in both the media and at the negotiating table.
- Challenge Ministers to issue needs based budgets, regardless of Finance Ministers budget allocation, as done in the PSNI.
- Advocate within the trade union movement, for the application of the power of the movement to win the resources required to meet public need.
- Oppose any attempt to use zero hour contracts for agency workers in the planned Employment Bill or any other such legislation, which could be used to further erode terms, conditions and public services

**Continue to work with ICTU and to lobby NI Executive.**

#### **Resolution No. 62**

Notes that hybrid working conditions are here to stay and welcomes the roll out in fibre-optic internet lines to the countryside. Calls on the General Council to press for a quicker fibre broadband roll out to help those in rural areas benefit from improved broadband speeds that the fibre broadband roll out will bring.

**Continue to work with ICTU to lobby NI Executive.**

#### **Resolution No. 63**

Notes that there are around 1.885 million people in NI who require access to GPs and 317 active GP practices and the low funding share of health and social care funding spent on general practice in NI is the key factor driving practice closures and workforce shortage. Calls on the General Council to put pressure on the NI Assembly to

invest more in its primary health services to ensure all service users have a properly funded GP service which will, in-turn take pressures off the Emergency Departments throughout the North.

**Continue to work with ICTU and to lobby NI Executive.**

#### **Resolution No. 66**

Notes that NIPSA responded to the cost of living crisis with a campaign of co-ordinated industrial action, selective action and action short of strike action and, as a result, has seen steady increases in membership numbers. Calls on the General Council to ensure that NIPSA continues to take a positive approach to the strategic building of our trade Union.

**Referred to GPC. Action ongoing.**

#### **Resolution No. 67**

Notes that NIPSA without engaging in ‘poaching’ of members, has had a significant rise in membership. Calls on the General Council to seek to continue this positive upward trend by ensuring the Union:

- Continues to campaign and focus on issues that are of interest to members.
- Further develops NIPSA’s profile as a union that fights for workers.
- Encourages activists and officials to continue to be recruiters to the Union. Calls on the General Council to provide relevant and up-to-date recruitment materials.

**Referred to GPC. Review recruitment material and promotion activities.**

#### **Resolution No. 68**

Notes that NIPSA has achieved remarkable success in communicating with members, the public and employers’ representatives. Calls on the General Council to continue to explore improved communication methods and media training to seek to ensure that the NIPSA message gets out.

**Referred to GPC. Action ongoing.**

## Resolutions at the 2024 Civil Service Group Conference

### Composite Motion No 1

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to recommit to the current Campaign Strategy which will include industrial action, lobbying politicians and highlighting the campaign across the media and other outlets.

**Ongoing as part of the pay campaign strategy.**

### Motion No 2

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to work with other public sector unions to deliver a successful industrial action campaign.

**Ongoing as part of the pay campaign strategy.**

### Emergency Motion No 1

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to continue with the industrial action strategy in order to exert ongoing pressure on the Secretary of State and political decision makers to deliver a budget which allows properly funded public services and which will allow Civil Servants the pay rise they need and deserve.

**Ongoing as part of the pay campaign strategy and political lobbying.**

### Motion No 4

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to ensure that a pay claim is submitted by 31st July of each year regardless of any outstanding claims or action for previous years.

**Ongoing as policy.**

### Motion No 5

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to continue to seek appropriate increases to allowances and to apply further pressure on the employers.

**Ongoing as part of the pay strategy and in discussions on pay and allowances.**

### Motion No 43

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to commit to a revalorisation of overtime caps with a goal of eradicating them to ensure fair shift disturbance and overtime rates.

**Ongoing as part of the pay strategy and in discussions on pay and allowances.**

### Motion No 8

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to engage with NICS Management Side at Central Whitley level to negotiate an agreement that a paragraph on "Trade Union Representation" is included in any induction packs.

**Raised with Management Side to include Trade Union Representation.**

### Motion No 9

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to continue to push for internal promotion competitions, career development and AA/AO level entry.

**Raised in all forums with Policy Unit and NICS HR Resourcing. Consultation ongoing.**

### Motion No 10

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to engage with Management Side to demand that no further jobs are lost from the NICS and that all remaining vacancies are filled a.s.a.p.

**Raised in all consultations and negotiations with NICS HR Resourcing. Consultation ongoing.**

### Motion No 13

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to revisit Conference policy on the amalgamation of the EOII and EOI grades to create an EO grade with visible pay progression and actively engage with NICS HR to achieve this.

**Ongoing as policy at the Pay & Workforce Sub Committee.**

### Motion No 14

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to engage with the relevant Departments and business owners in NICS to explore all possible options with a view to providing possible government operated creche facilities for NICS employees.

**Raised at the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Sub Committee and with Management Side in Employee Relations.**



### Motion No 15

Instructed the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to actively campaign for a NICS Carers Leave Policy which exceeds the statutory minimum laid out in the Act and to campaign for making it paid leave.

**Raised at the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Sub Committee.**

### Motion No 18

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to ensure that members who are suffering from the effects of Long Covid are supported by Management.

**Ongoing as policy at the Employee Relations Sub Committee to ensure that HR policy is applied correctly.**

### Motion No 19

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to engage with NICS HR to ensure that anyone who has symptoms of a respiratory infection, including Covid-19, should work from home.

**Raised at the Employee Relations Sub Committee to ensure that members work safely.**

### Motion No 20

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to engage with Management Side to deal with fire warden recruitment, retention and management.

**Raised at the Accommodation Sub Committee.**

### Motion No 21

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to request from Management Side intentions on how work is redistributed among workers following the erasure of numerous vacancies and ensure that Management Side monitors the impact on staff and completes appropriate risk assessments to assess causation levels of stress.

**Ongoing discussions with NICS HR Resourcing. Actual vacancies and locations sought and consultation continued at Departmental level for the detail on how work is covered.**

### Motion No 24

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to fully support NIPSA's Public Service Defence Campaign and to any other action that is required to fight the introduction of water charges and to protect our members and the service from privatisation.

**Ongoing as policy, responded to public consultation and taken forward with political parties and ICTU.**

### Motion No 25

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to apply pressure to the relevant persons/business owners within NICS to ensure that the management of agency workers is brought as close as possible to that of direct NICS workers.

**Ongoing as policy. Taken forward with NICS HR Resourcing resulted in temporary contracts with DWP converted to permanent jobs in DFC and NICS Wide AO Competition launched.**

### Motion No 28

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to make representations to the Union Learning Project to make the Mental Health First Aid Training Course free to NIPSA reps.

**Raised with ULR Coordinator.**

### Motion No 29

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to engage with all relevant bodies in the NICS to promote a wide range of courses to all workers in the NICS for career development.

**Raised with NICS HR and the learning and development portfolio was relaunched and expanded.**

### Motion No 30

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to engage with NICS Management to develop and deliver regular awareness seminars and/or training workshops for all NICS staff to raise awareness on all types of domestic abuse.

**Ongoing as policy, raised at various forums and with the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Sub Committee.**



### **Motion No 31**

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to engage within NICS HR to produce a standalone Sexual Harassment Policy.

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**Ongoing consultation with Management Side in Policy and Development.**

### **Motion No 34**

Instructed the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to:

- Continue to argue for a needs-based budget that will support the development of a socialist economy;
  - Link with the wider Public Service Defence Campaign to protect vital public services; and
  - Continue to play a leading role in the fightback across the wider trade union movement through the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.
- 

**Continued to be taken forward at all forums under Public Service Defence Campaign and ICTU.**

### **Motion No 35**

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to negotiate and campaign for free public transport for all NICS workers.

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**Raised with Management Side.**

### **Motion No 36**

Called on the Civil Service Group Executive Committee to robustly engage with NICS Management with the objective of establishing and safeguarding an estate that provides workplaces and jobs across Northern Ireland.

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**Ongoing consultation at the Accommodation Sub Committee and within Departments.**

# Section A

## NIPSA Headquarters

General Issues

Organisation and Administration

# General Issues

## A1 Irish Congress of Trade Unions

The year began with generalised strike action on pay co-ordinated through the Northern Ireland Committee (NIC) of the ICTU. The action ended in success for all the unions involved. Through the NIC, lobbying continued on the Smart Money document produced in 2023, to make the case that we are underfunded through the block grant. Those points were then reiterated in meetings with political parties and to the Northern Ireland Office and the new Labour Government Ministers and this continued to be a focus of the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI). Another key focus of the work of the NIC was employment law and the NIC produced a document entitled 'The Good Employment Plan' as a contribution to the discussion on the Good Jobs Bill being considered by the Minister for the Department for the Economy. Trade union leaders, including NIPSA's General Secretary, remained involved in the Engagement Forum and met regularly with business leaders. The Northern Biennial Delegate Conference took place in November and Carmel Gates and Tanya Killen were elected to the NI Committee.

## A2 Legal Cases

**Holiday Pay:** Arising from the Supreme Court Judgment relating to Agnew/Smyth -v- PSNI Holiday Pay Case, NIPSA's solicitors, MTB engaged with employers to agree a methodology for payment to members. The issue was continuing.

**Injury to Feelings:** Arising from the McCloud Judgment, NIPSA continued to lodge cases on behalf of members across the public services. MTB continued to deal with the cases.

## A3 Equality Committee

Meetings of the Committee were held on a regular basis throughout the year. Among their Work Programme for the year, the key action areas were as follows:

**Coalition of Carers Organisation:** NIPSA continued to be an active member of the Coalition of Carers Organisation.

**Domestic abuse (Safe Leave) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022:** NIPSA supported the NIC ICTU consultation by the closing date of September 2024.

**Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse:** NIPSA continued to promote and campaign on behalf of all victims of domestic and sexual violence and abuse. NIPSA continued to be active member of the Belfast, Northern, Southern, South Eastern and Western Area Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Partnerships.

**Disability:** Work continued on the NIPSA Disability Champions with the aim to focus on the issues mostly affected workers. A new Disability Network Forum will be launched in 2025.

**Female Participation:** In furtherance of the aims of Resolution No 10, adopted at the 2022 NIPSA Annual Delegate Conference (ADC), the Working Group set up to consider increasing female participation and activity within NIPSA continued work on progressing the Action Plan.

**International Women's Day (IWD):** To mark International Women's Day, NIPSA had a presence at the March and Rally on Saturday 9th March 2024.

**NIC/ICTU Women's Committee:** Tina Creaney (Chairperson of the Equality Committee) And Lucia Collins continued to represent NIPSA on the NIC/ICTU Women's Committee.

**ICTU Women's Conference, Athlone 2024:** NIPSA was represented at the ICTU Women's Conference on 7-8 March 2024 in Athlone. NIPSA moved a on Carer's rights which was moved and carried.

**Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022:** NIPSA continue to keep a watching brief following the consultation to extend statutory paid leave and pay in cases of miscarriage.

**Violence Against Women And Girls (VAWG) Strategy:** TEO: NIPSA continued to lobby for the implementation of the strategy.

## A4 Global Solidarity Committee

The Global Solidarity Committee met regularly during the year and dealt with a range of issues as follows:

## **NIPSA Global Solidarity and Developing World Fund Projects:**

### **Centre for Global Education - Project Nour:**

Educating Palestinian and Syrian Refugees in Lebanon. To provide educational and psychosocial support services to 100 Palestinian and Syrian children in Burj Barajneh refugee camp in Beirut. NIPSA Global Solidarity and Developing World Fund met its commitment for Year 2 of the project and donated £11,500. This payment was the final payment in support of the 2 year project.

NIPSA Global Solidarity and Developing World committed to a project with Tools for Solidarity for Artisan Sewing and Training Centres in Tanzania. The first payment of £9,855 was issued.

The number of donors contributing to the Fund is as follows:

- a. 111 donors contribute through GAYE generating a monthly income of approximately £740.
- b. 2 donors contribute monthly through Cheques for Charity (Gift Aid) creating an additional £15.
- c. One donor donates £4.75 per month through Charities Trust.
- d. One donor donates £60 annually (£5 monthly).
- e. Two donors donate via bank transfer totalling £15 per month.

The overall total number of donors is 117 generating a monthly income of approximately £779.75.

### **Presentation of Annual Report and Audited Accounts:**

The Annual Report and Audited Accounts, presented by GMcG Chartered Accountants, for the year ending 31 December 2023 were approved by the Committee. The Annual Report and Audited Accounts to the Charity Commission by the deadline of 31 October 2023.

GMcG Chartered Accountants were appointed as auditors for 2024.

## **A5 Pensions**

### **The Central Consultative Working Group (CCWG):**

The CCWG covers all public sector pension schemes including NICS, Health, Teachers, Local Government,

Fire, Police, Prisons and Judiciary. Trade Union representation falls under the auspices of the ICTU. NIPSA is represented on the group and again the main issue dealt with remained the McCloud remedy implementation process.

## **A6 Policy and Research Unit (PRU)**

The prelude to and implications of the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive in February dominated the year's work of the Policy and Research Unit (PRU) particularly in relation to consultation responses. Significantly the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) consultations that began under de facto direct rule continued prior to and after the return of devolution. This suggested that the same economic language of "scarcity" was to persist irrespective of who locally was nominally in control and irrespective of the year ending with a change of Government at Westminster. In January, for example, we responded to a consultation "on measures to support budget sustainability and raise additional revenue" and this month also saw further hints of future austerity with the then UK government's re-imposition of hospital car parking charges. A PRU response challenged the democratic affront this represented both in repealing legislation previously agreed by the Assembly and due to the reduced, tokenistic time-frame offered for the consultation.

In February our response to the review of the domestic and non-domestic rating system challenged whether the current 45:55% (domestic:non-domestic) ratio for rates revenue raising is appropriate given what corporate/industrial/property portfolio holders could contribute. The progressive case for updating the (maximum) capital value rating of property was also made. A longstanding issue - the possibility of a new charging system for water and sewerage - re-emerged within March's consultation on this utility's future funding, despite newly-appointed Devolved Ministers stating that such charges would not be introduced. The PRU response reinforced the need for the NI Executive to work with the UK Government to ensure the Treasury provides resources that offer reparation for decades of infrastructural negligence.

# Organisation and Administration

NIPSA is supportive of “buffer zone” protections that act as a prevention of harassment and the facilitation of “safe access” to healthcare. Separate to this, however, and conscious of protecting the role that the broader trade union movement and its allies play in civic society, the PRU’s March response to proposed changes to Belfast City Council’s city centre bye laws (relating to a “permit scheme for activity” “noise nuisance” etc.) argued that this had been ill-defined and risked hindering not only Trade Union but the wider solidaristic work of affiliated groups in and around the city centre area.

In order to assist the fullest development of devolved labour laws, the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NICICTU) set up a

sub-group on the Department for the Economy’s “Good Jobs Bill”. PRU was a member of this group and submitted a number of papers to it as well as a separate response in September to the Department’s full consultation on the Bill’s potential scope.

Despite budget uncertainty, the new NI Executive launched a three-year Draft Programme for Government (PfG). In its November response the PRU challenged a lack of essential financial detail and stressed the overdue need to change the Barnett formula’s devolved funding model to a needs based one. The necessity of the UK Treasury providing an austerity compensation package to give the PfG a solid foundation was also stressed.

## A7 Donations

Organisation	Amount	Purpose Of Donation
Standing Together	£500.00	UK Gives - Support for Humanitarian Guard in Gaza
Belfast City of Sanctuary	£300.00	Refugee Picnic 2024
Belfast Pride	£100.00	Towards 2024 Organising Costs, Belfast Pride Event.
Belfast District Trades Council	£100.00	Towards costs for Family and Social event, May Day Celebrations 2024.
Cork Mother Jones	£200	Mother Jones Festival 2024
Centre for Global Education	£1000.00	Provision of emergency psychosocial support in the Gaza Strip to 180 young people aged 13-18 years.
LGBTQ+ Woman Newry	£100.00	Towards 2024 Organising Costs, Newry Pride Event.
Medical Aid for Palestine	£3000.00	Medical Aid for Palestine
NIPSA Global Solidarity & Developing World Fund	£7,500	Annual General Council Donation
Omagh Pride	100.00	Towards 2024 Organising Costs, Omagh Pride Event
Tanzeem-e-Nau-Jawana	£500.00	Pakistan for emergency Flood Relief.
Trade Union Friends Of Palestine	£500.00	International Workers memorial Day Event.

## A8 Appointment of Auditors

After a tender process GmCG Lisburn Chartered Accountants was appointed as NIPSA Auditors for the 2024 year.

## A9 Headquarters Staff

**Composition of NIPSA's Workforce:** The monitoring return for February 2024 to the Equality Commission showed the composition of NIPSA's workforce as summarised below:

	Below EO	EO and above	Totals
Male	6	10	16
Female	11	12	23
Protestant	6	8	14
Catholic	8	12	20
Unclassified	0	5	5
Disabled	2	4	6

## A10 Membership

The year-end figures for 2024 and comparison 2023 are listed below:

	Civil Service	Public Officers	NIPSA
2024	19,181	27,845	47,006
2023	18,510	27,194	45,704
Increase/Decrease	3.62%	2.39%	2.84%
Male	8,824	5,980	14,804
Female	10,357	21,845	32,202

Membership records continued to be updated throughout the year with information provided by employers and members.

Membership Figures fluctuated during 2024 with the end of year total at 47,006. There was a decrease on the number of applications processed during the year. There were 5,103 applications processed in 2024, a significant decrease of 1,346 on 2023.

**Career Breaks:** The practice of inviting members to retain their NIPSA membership whilst on a Career Break continued with the annual fee remaining at £10.00. A total of 25 NIPSA membership registered or retained their Career Breaks throughout 2024. This included 6 Civil Service members and 19 Public Officers members

## A11 NIPSA Annual Conference

The 2024 NIPSA Conference was held at the Killyhevlin Hotel, Enniskillen, in hybrid format. The Conference took place over 3 days from Tuesday 28 to Thursday 30 May.

The Civil Service Group Conference was held in person at the Clayton Hotel, Belfast on 7 November.

## A12 Services for Members

**Legal Services:** The NIPSA Legal Advice (Personal Matters) Scheme was used by 94 members in 2024.

**Legal Services (Personal Injury):** In 2024, 429 new cases were referred to the NIPSA Solicitor. In the same period, 43 cases were closed. Of these 35 were won or settled with awards totalling £1,331,213. 8 closed with costs of £20,753.

**Welfare Fund:** 61 applications were received in 2024 and all have been dealt with resulting in payments of grants of £17,100.

**Membership Plus Cards:** Joint NIPSA membership/Membership Plus cards for 2025/27 were issued to members in December 2024. New members cards and replacement cards are available to be issued when required. Further offers were added throughout the year and were available at [www.membershipplus.co.uk](http://www.membershipplus.co.uk) and on the Membership Plus App.

**Specsavers:** Premium Club discount vouchers continued to be available through NIPSA Headquarters.

**Financial Services:** Platinum Financial provided independent financial advice on all aspects of financial planning. This included participating in Pre-Retirement and Mid-Career Seminars.

**Abbey Autoline Insurance:** Abbey Autoline continued to offer NIPSA members exclusive discounts on Car, Home and Travel Insurance.

## A13 Trades Councils

NIPSA continued to actively encourage Branches to affiliate to local Councils of Trade Unions.

The Trades Council to which NIPSA Branches were affiliated were:

- Antrim & Ballymena;
- Belfast;
- Craigavon;
- Derry;
- Fermanagh;
- Mid Ulster;
- North Down & Ards;
- Omagh

## A14 Union Learning

The NIPSA Union Learning Project was still within their current bid for 3 years (2023/2026) with The Department for Economy (DfE) and administered by NIC ICTU.

The ULR Conference took place again virtually on Wednesday 20th March 2024 with Maria Morgan, DGS opening conference. The theme of the conference was 'Learning & Disability'. We had a speaker from the ADD NI - Attention Deficit Disorder NI Charity. The CEO Sarah Salters spoke about the services that her organisation offer in relation to this underlying disability with regard to the employment arena and adults. The conference then heard from Nuala McCourt - Access to Work & Diane Ellison Workable NI. They spoke about the services that their sections offer within the Department for Communities for staff in the workplace in relation to disabilities. The final speaker Colin Reilly CMP - Condition Management Programme spoke about a new service that operates through the Health Trusts in relation to a programme that assists staff to remain in work whilst dealing with disabilities. They also work closely with Inspire in the Workplace. Roisin Graham UL Project

Co-Ordinator closed conference and met with the newly elected ULR Committee (see table below). The Chair Stephen Gowdy was elected with the Vice Chair Leah McDonnell also being elected.

### ULR Committee 2024/25

Name	Br	Employer
Martin Johnston	7	DOF
Leah McDonnell	91	DAERA
Amanda O'Donnell	115	DFC
Eugene Donaghy	119	DFC
Stephen Gowdy	119	DFC
Gerald McLernon	119	DFC
Denise Crilly	124	DFC
Lynsey Brush	516	EABR
John McKeegan	560	LNI
Liz Watson	732	SEHSCT



# **Section B**

## Civil Service

General Issues

Personal Management

Group Reports

# B1 General Issues

## B1.1 Accommodation

Following the rationalisation of the NICS estate, which had taken place over the last two years, plans for further building closures, including, Marlborough House, and accommodation moves had been devolved to individual Departments to consult on. The Accommodation Central Whitley Committee maintained an overview of the Estates Strategy and has raised issues in relation to access to HUBs for remote working, which have been affected by planned building closures. Management Side are drawing up an evaluation of the utilisation of HUBs and a report is due to be shared with Trade Union Side once complete. At a CWC Accommodation meeting on 8th July Trade Union Side were advised that Accommodation Group are working on an assumed working model of 40% building occupancy across the NICS Estate. A Strategic Asset Unit was also looking at areas for potential disposals and an office estate strategy to supplement the estate review, and set the plans up to 2035 was being developed. Trade Union Side provided a response including concerns that the estate may not have the capacity to going forward to adequately allow staff to work in the office on the proposed model of 40% given the level of divestment. At the CWC meeting on 25 November Trade Union Side asked to be kept informed of any divestment plans and a schedule of dates were set for 2025 to ensure all issues are picked up.

## B1.2 Pay, Reward and Grading

**2023/24 Pay:** The dispute over the imposition of the derisory pay award of £552 for 2022/23, which commenced with a successful strike ballot in March 2023, continued into 2024. At the start of the year, the NI Assembly was still suspended, and the Secretary of State was continuing refuse to deal with public service pay.

NIPSA secured a meeting with the Permanent Secretary of the NIO to advise that the intended 5% increase on the NICS pay bill, would not be enough to satisfy members in the NICS and that in addition to a satisfactory percentage increase, we would be demanding a lump sum payment of at least the amount paid to civil servants in Britain.

In response to the inaction by the Secretary of State, 16 trade unions representing approximately 170,000 workers took strike action on 18 January. This historic action was the largest ever seen in Northern Ireland and NIPSA played a key part in the organisation and coordination of the strike. Following the strike action, the DUP indicated they were prepared to go back into an Assembly and the first plenary session was held on Saturday 3 February to allocate ministerial portfolios.

Caoimhe Archibald MLA was appointed as Finance Minister and within days of her appointment she sought a meeting with NIPSA to engage on civil service pay. Following this meeting, which took place on 7 February, NIPSA met informally with NICS Management Side on 19 February and were advised of an informal offer.

The Civil Service Executive Committee met on 21 February. The meeting agreed unanimously that although the offer fell short of our claim, it was the best that could be achieved by negotiation and to reject it would require significant and sustained industrial action. On 26 February the formal offer was received. The key elements of the offer were:

- a. all eligible satisfactory performers to receive one step progression, subject to band maximum, with effect from 1 August 2023;
- b. AA and analogous civil service pay scale to be revalorised to £23,177 with effect from 1 August 2023, in line with the Civil Service's continuing commitment to being a voluntary Living Wage Foundation employer;
- c. all points on civil service pay scales A0 and analogous to SCS inclusive, excluding non-NICS retained pay scales, from minimum to maximum to be revalorised by 5%;
- d. any staff receiving less than a 5% consolidated increase, to receive a non-consolidated, non-pensionable payment to bring them up to the equivalent value of 5% of their salary at 31 July 2023 (for those in civil service grades who are in receipt of a salary in excess of the maximum, the 5% would be based on the scale maximum. For those on non-civil service pay scales the 5% would be limited to 5% of the

equivalent civil service general service scale maximum); and

- e. a £1,500 non-consolidated, non-pensionable, gross payment to staff eligible for the 2023 pay award, to be pro-rata-ed as appropriate.

The offer and was issued to branches for consultation and, at the deadline of 15 March, 79% of those who took part in the ballot had agreed to accept the offer.

In order to keep activists apprised at every stage of discussions and developments on pay, activists' meetings were held on 10 January, 13 February and 27 February.

The 2023 pay award was made in June salaries after which NIPSA dealt with many questions regarding those who did not receive the non-consolidated payment because they had not completed 90-days service in the 2023/24 appraisal year.

**2024/25 Pay:** The Civil Service Executive Committee met on 17 June to discuss the 2024/25 pay claim.

Following a discussion the following pay claim was agreed for recommendation to members:

- Inflation plus an additional cost of living increase of 5% on all points and allowances.
- That the 2024 pay claim covers an eight-month period (1 August 2024 - 31 March 2025).
- Future pay awards would be linked to the financial year (1 April - 31 March).
- That we seek the removal of the legacy of performance pay and the removal of the reference to the "90 days' satisfactory performance" in the previous appraisal year.
- That we seek a commitment from the Management Side to engage with Trade Union Side on long term pay / recruitment strategy that has pay restoration at its centre.

It was agreed that the consultation process would last for two weeks closing on 5 July. At the close of consultation, a total of 61 responses had been received, 55 for the proposed pay claim and 6 against. It was clear that the vast majority of Branches supported the pay claim and it was submitted to NICS Management Side.

The Finance Minister, Dr Caoimhe Archibald held an informal meeting on 6 August with NIPSA and the other Civil Service trade unions to discuss the context for the 2024 Civil Service pay awards.

The Minister outlined that the Department of Finance was engaged in an exercise to investigate the scale of the budgetary pressures departments are facing. She advised that this work was needed to give a clear context for pay negotiations. Dates for pay discussions were set for the end of September but were postponed by the Management Side who had not received a pay remit.

NIPSA continued to engage politically to lobby for civil servants and raised a number of issues including the fall in the median pay of civil servants in comparison with the Northern Ireland median wage. NIPSA also raised concerns about the high vacancy rate and high attrition rate, the low morale and the fact that stress was the key reason for sickness absence amongst civil servants.

NIPSA met with management on 26 November and received a first informal offer which we rejected. At a further meeting on 3 December, NIPSA received a slightly improved informal offer but asked that a formal offer would not be made until January following the January monitoring, in the hope that more money would be made available.

**a. Mileage Rate:** Early in the year it was agreed with Management Side that consideration of improving mileage rates would commence when there was clarity over the budget. At the year end, it was agreed to postpone the negotiations to 2025.

**b. On-Call Allowance:** Management Side wrote to NIPSA on 9 July setting out formal proposals to resolve the issue. It was not possible to arrange a meeting to respond before Management Side wrote again on 16 August. They advised that Roads Service management needed to invite staff for the winter service and asked if the proposals could be agreed on a trial basis for this year and then reviewed. Members in Roads Service were consulted, and it was agreed to allow the trial to proceed, on a without prejudice basis, and that it would be reviewed to ascertain

the impact on members. A further proposal was received on 24 October when Management Side made a wider offer to increase the standard on-call across the NICS, up to the equivalent of the Flood Emergency Officer. In some cases that meant that the rates would double. Trade Union Side were asked for urgent consideration of the offer. As the issue had been the subject of discussions over a number of years it was agreed to secure the increases which came into effect from 1 December for the majority of members on the on-call rotas. In order to assess the implications of the changes across all members and to ensure there would be no detriment to anyone, it was agreed that a review would take place in spring 2025.

- c. Agency Workers Issues:** Trade Union Side wrote to NICSHR in February to seek assurances that there would be no undue delay in the implementation of 2023 pay award, as had been the case in previous years. NICS HR advised that they were working closely with all 4 recruitment agencies so that they were aware of and prepared for implementation in the coming months.

Further to the outcome of the Branch pay consultation exercise and the acceptance of the pay offer, Trade Union Side wrote to ask if NICSHR could explore, with the recruitment agencies, the possibility of separating the lump sum payment from the 5% uplift in an effort to get the lump sum to members as soon as possible. NICSHR reported back that agencies had said no to this proposal as separating the 2 elements would essentially cause a duplication of every process and ultimately could cause further undue delay.

Trade Union Side wrote on 22 July and on 15 August asking for the reasons for the delay in the payment of the 2023 pay award. A response was received on 23 August to confirm that all agency staff in DfC (the majority) had been paid their back pay and NCP (if eligible) that day, and the remainder of payments for others had been approved to progress to payment.

## B1.3 Pensions

**The NICS Scheme Advisory Board:** Continued to meet in year to ensure matters of policy and proposed scheme changes were fully discussed and assessed for impact on the scheme and members.

**The NICS Pensions Forum:** The Pensions Forum involves the recognised Civil Service Trade Unions meeting management on all pensions related issues. The main issue for the forum continued to be the McCloud retrospective remedy in line with the legislation to restore eligible pension members with service between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2022, to a position they would have been in had the age discrimination not occurred. Giving them a choice of Alpha or PCSPS (NI) benefits for 2015-2022.

In November The Forum were made aware of a shortfall in the NICS Pension Scheme Employee Contribution scheme yield due to changes made to keep all grades within the same salary band and the effect of taking arrears out of the calculation. The Treasury proposal was to increase the employee contribution rates to rectify the shortfall and a public consultation would issue from 13 January 2025 for a period of 12 weeks.

NIPSA had responded to state that it was our view that any increase in an ongoing cost of living crisis after years of pay stagnation was unfair and whilst we understood the importance of ensuring that the CS Pension Scheme achieved its required yield, we had concerns with the proposed measures outlined and had suggested alternative measures that the government could explore to address the funding gap

The public consultation will run until the 7 April 2025 and NIPSA will respond formally and will continue to liaise with the other CS Unions.

**The NICS Pensions Board:** NIPSA has employee representatives on the NICS Pensions Board. The Board has responsibility for assisting the scheme manager in the effective administration of the NICS pension arrangements and assisting the Department in securing compliance and good governance. The main focus for the Board in-year continued to be the implementation of McCloud and other issues included staffing and resources, legislative

requirements and business as usual work that was ongoing.

**North South Pension Scheme:** The NIPSA representatives on the N/S scheme collective consultation working group continued to ensure the interests of members were met in all scheme arrangements and governance.

advised that Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources is working on a review of this policy and Trade Union Side maintained a watching brief for any issues arising.

## B1.4 Public Service Management

**Integr8 Project:** The Integr8 Programme is an initiative to support the transformation of Finance and HR services across the Civil Service. Current technology systems for Finance and HR (AccountNI and HRConnect) have been in place since 2006 and need replacing; having reached end of contract and are in some areas out of support and may become obsolete.

Trade Union Side met with the Integr8 team during 2024 to discuss the detail of the business case and this consultation included the need for change, the preferred option of in-house services, potential benefits and next steps. The programme, in the main, was stood down due to budgetary constraints. However, Central Trade Union Side continued to receive high level updates on the matter. In February, Central Trade Union Side and DoF Departmental Trade Union Side continued to consult with Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources People & Organisational Development in developing the recruitment and method to fill processes for the Integr8 management structure. In year funding was secured for the programme to proceed and formal consultation restarted. A further meeting took place on 16 December when Trade Union Side were briefed on the programme updates including procurement, recruitment, the co-design approach with input from key operational users from Policy, HR and Finance. Bi monthly meetings were agreed going forward.

**Hybrid Working Policy:** Throughout the year, while Work Style agreements were being agreed by staff at local level, Trade Union Side had alerted Management to directives on quotas of days in the office being demanded in some areas contrary to the central agreement. In March Trade Union Side were



# B2 Personnel Management

## B2.1 Employee Relations

### **People and Organisational Development (P&OD):**

The proposal from Management Side to update the Central Whitley Committee structures and confirm consultation arrangements for non-industrial staff on various policy proposals was received by Trade Union Side in February, initiating the formal consultation process on the proposals. These proposals caused some concerns around the order of priority at the CWC Employee Relations sub-committee, as there are policies within the annex that needed to be given a higher status such as Maternity Leave. These issues were due to be further discussed at a meeting in late August which was cancelled due to documentation on some issues outlined below being still under development and continued to be discussed informally and remained key issues within the Pay Strategy.

**Apprenticeships Policy:** In early July Central Trade Union Side received proposals from Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources Employee Relations and policy officials from People and Organisational Development regarding an Apprenticeships Policy and Guidance under development. Trade Union Side provided comments in late July in relation to concerns around the grades covered by the policy and payment for training days at college. A response was received that provided clarification on the concerns and allowed agreement on the policy implementation.

**Inefficiency Compensation:** In November 2023, Central Trade Union Side were made aware that Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources had adopted what appeared to be a new process in determining compensation levels on dismissal for Inefficiency Sickness Absence that is not established policy, in the view of Trade Union Side. Central Trade Union Side challenged the development and use of this process and arranged a meeting with Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources Employee Relations and policy officials from People and Organisational Development to discuss these issues of concern in February. In April Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources advised Central Trade Union Side that they do not believe that they are operating a new policy. Central Trade

Union Side reiterated that it appears to be a new policy and requested further evidence. A response was received and discussion continued when some individual cases had their compensation increased. A number of cases to the Civil Service Appeal Board had been lodged where issues had not been resolved.

### **Formal Consultation on Review of HR Policies:**

In December People & Organisational Development Management Side sent draft policy documents to Trade Union Side in order to begin formal consultation on the review of the Grievance, Dignity at Work and Standards of Conduct policies. The rationale provided included the promotion of acceptable behaviour in the workplace and to better support diversity and inclusion. Trade Union Side had sought a walkthrough of the substantial documents and the new APEX/Faces case management system and will raise our issues during the consultation period, in particular on the unacceptable length of time that investigations take to progress to conclusion.

**Internal Mobility Policies:** Early discussion took place later in the year with Management Side on the various internal methods to fill, that allowed members the opportunity for career development and progression. These included internal transfers and secondments. Discussion will continue.

**Recruitment and Retention Policy:** Trade Union Side met with Management Side on the 24 September to discuss their proposal. The main concerns raised on the policy intent was that the introduction of a new recruitment and retention policy would not address the larger issues of pay, and paying staff outside of the NICS pay scales could create additional problems in respect of equal pay. Trade Union Side also raised that the policy could undermine the general service and administration grades. A full written response also issued to Management Side on 17 October. Management Side responded on 19 December stating that the Minister had given careful consideration of the feedback received and had decided, on balance, that it was preferable to have a policy in place to ensure good governance of business cases for recruitment and retention allowances, since the demand from some professions and other groups was there. Trade Union Side continued to monitor the issue.

## B2.2 Resourcing and Workforce Planning

**Overview:** Central Trade Union Side continued to engage with the Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources through meetings and via correspondence on resourcing issues (including individual draft Candidate Information Booklets) consistently putting the case for competitions to be advertised internally in the first instance. Trade Union Side have had some success in respect of this with some recent competitions being advertised as Interest Circulars and Trawls. In March, Central Trade Union Side consulted with Human Resources on the introduction of Departmental Transfer Notices in the Department of Finance to internally substantively fill posts by allowing staff to move at grade within their Department, consultation is ongoing.

Detail on the individual competition statuses is outlined below.

**E02/E01 Competition:** Requests were received by Trade Union Side to extend the E02 and E01 competitions to 31 December 2024 and then again to 31 March 2025. In light of the current budgetary issues Trade Union Side agreed to the extensions to enable HR to proceed to maximise the merit lists with offers to successful candidates to take up post up until 31 March 2025.

**Grade 6/7 Competitions:** Trade Union Side were advised in July 2023 that Grade 7 and Grade 6 competitions were ready to be launched but were on hold due to Departmental budgets being assessed. In March, Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources met with Central Trade Union Side to begin consultation on the processes for these competitions. In year the supply position was that there were 30 Grade 6 vacancies and 184 Grade 7 vacancies. In mid-August Trade Union Side were provided with draft CIB's for consideration which sought to launch external competitions for reasons that included increasing the gender balance, community background and age etc. After scrutiny of the equality data Trade Union Side responded and challenged the Management side position and the "external by default" position that had been adopted. A registered disagreement was lodged and after 2 formal meetings it was agreed that the competitions would be internal by trawl. The Grade

7 competition opened on 2 December and the G6 competition was planned for January 2025.

**S0 Competition:** The S0 competition that launched in 2022 remained live with an available supply of four. Initial planning had been underway to bring forward another phase to sift and interview, subject to budget and consultation with Central Trade Union Side, with the competition due to expire in August 2024. A request to extend the competition until the end of March 2025 was agreed by Trade Union Side.

**DP Competition:** The recruitment update at end of January 2024 indicated that final candidates were being allocated and another phase was in initial planning to sift and interview with the competition expiring 14 November 2024. A request to extend the competition until the end of March 2025 was agreed by Trade Union Side.

**AO Competition:** Due to ongoing budgetary issues, Trade Union Side agreed to a requests to further extend the AO competition list until March 2024 and again until September 2024 to allow placement of the six candidates remaining on the list. The Department for Communities- Department for Work and Pensions Administrative Officer competition proceeded to testing and online interviews (with later assessment by panels) with initial merit lists produced in late May and June 2024.

This led to a number of complaints being received by NIPSA centrally and at branch level, mainly from existing members who are Agency Workers. The complaints centred on candidates being advised that they had failed due to technical issues, missing answers, missing ID evidence and allegations of using notes. Central Trade Union Side advised branches to tell their members to lodge official complaints via the HR Connect process outlined in the initial competition literature. Central Trade Union also engaged with NICSHR via correspondence and meetings to try and get some understanding of the perceived high levels of user error from candidates. In early August NICSHR Resourcing indicated that they wished to launch and General Service AO competition and also take another tranche of the DfC AO candidates to interview. Several members of Central Trade Union Side took part in testing the platform via dummy interview questions and sent

feedback which in turn influenced enhanced guidance to candidates allowing Trade Union Side to agree to both competitions progressing with the caveat that there will be a full review of the data following these recruitment exercises.

**Accountancy Issues:** Competition CIBs had been agreed for SO and DP accountants and a meetings took place in early May and on 18 December between Central Trade Union Side, the Head of Profession and Finance Directors. Issues discussed included retention of staff, allowances and resourcing. Further meetings were scheduled to take place across 2025.

**NICS People Plan 2024-2025:** In February, Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources requested a meeting to brief Trade Union Side on the draft NICS People Plan 2024-2025. In March, Trade Union Side met with Management Side and were taken through the four 'People Pillars' of the draft plan.

Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources advised Trade Union Side that they want consultation to result in the production of a final document that is meaningful to, and understandable by, all staff and could be tested by Departmental Focus Groups before staff engagement in April 2024. CTUS provided their comments on the plan and consultation is ongoing. A further meeting took place in September and Trade Union Side will continue to seek updates to ensure that those views reflected in the staff survey etc. will be addressed.

**HR Functional Review:** In December 2023, a review of Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources functionality was carried out and, in February, Trade Union Side received a letter from the Department of Finance Permanent Secretary with an overview of the key recommendations, the main areas of responsibilities post-review, the key changes, and a proposed timeframe for implementation. Trade Union Side considered the documentation and provided a response.

## B2.3 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Trade Union Side welcomed correspondence about the Civil Service Diversity Action Plan 2024/25 which focused on four core diversity and inclusion themes - LGBTQ+, gender, race and ethnicity and disability. Included was a Neurodiversity Line Managers Toolkit and Guide which committed to promote neuro-inclusive workplaces.

**Cross Departmental Mental Health Forum:** Trade Union Side were invited to attend the Mental Health Forum which brought together staff from all departments involved in mental health work, to discuss what departments had done and what worked well. This work continued.



## B3 Group Reports

### B3.1 Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

**Consultation:** Trade Union Side (TUS) liaised directly, every three weeks, with the Grade 3 in Strategic Planning and Corporate Services Group (SPCSG) and other members of the Senior Management Team (SMT) on a range of complex issues to address working arrangements in the Ports and other locations.

TUS continued to engage constructively with Management Side (MS) across DAERA on a wide range of issues.

- a. Climate Change Science and Innovation Group (CCSIG) met with TUS during the year. A full update on vacancies and their future workforce plan were provided. TUS continued to meet with MS with regard to Science Transformation Programme (STP).
- b. Further consultations and Whitley meetings took place. These included Future Implementation Unit (FIU), primarily staffing and new projects for the new schemes. Unfortunately, some College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (CAFRE) and Food Farming and Rural Affairs Group (FFRAG) Whitleys were postponed during this period due to retirement of the Grade 3 in FFRAG. However further updates and informal discussions continued with regard to Inspectorate Grades recruitment.
- c. While initially TUS experienced difficulties with Forestry Service (FS), Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and Marine Fisheries Division (MFD) in respect of consultation on a range of issues, the situation improved as the year progressed. Although there has been improvement across all these areas the failures to consult will continue to be raised at the related Group Whitley Meetings.
- d. Veterinary Service & Animal Health Group (VSAHG) Renewal Project -engagement and consultation on the Renewal Project continued with governance arrangements recently agreed.
- e. Direction to Officers on Veterinary Public Health Programme Duties - the Directions document was initially agreed between MS and TUS in 2012. Consultation and negotiation on the third review of the document continued to be dogged by delays. TUS raised concerns about potential equality issues with sections of the document and asked MS if it had sought legal advice. The response from MS was, at best, faltering. TUS continued to press for progress on this issue and responses to questions put to MS.
- f. On-call rotas - progress on an exercise to rationalise on-call rotas for veterinarians in VSAHG continued to be delayed, with no progress. Equality issues were and continued to be an issue, in addition to the level of cover staff who work part-time are expected to provide. There were also contractual issues, as some staff were not required to participate in on-call rotas.
- g. Shift Patterns in Portal Operations - consultation continued as VSAHG's MS sought to introduce a uniform 12-hour shift pattern for the Veterinary, Technical and Industrial staff completing checks and inspections on relevant goods and livestock entering Northern Ireland through Belfast and Larne ports. An Equality Screening exercise progressed at a slow pace.
- h. Agency arrangements - MS advised that currently there is an existing contract for the provision of agency Official Auxiliaries (OA) (Meat Inspectors) with 20 agency OAs in place. Despite repeated attempts by TUS, MS has failed to provide any details on the new agency contracts.
- i. Field and Contingency Planning - given the shortages of staff in this area TUS considered that clearer direction needed to be provided to staff on the prioritisation of tasks, the ongoing lack of guidance has caused stress and anxiety. MS advised that it was very aware of the demands on staff and, as part of the Winter Work Programme, available staff resource would be factored into deliberations. As part of these considerations the Veterinary Management Board would review priorities.

### **DAERA Estate:**

- a.** Klondyke Building and Dundonald House are closed, with the staff having transferred to Clare House. Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) staff from Klondyke transferred to Lisburn.
- b.** Sperrin House and Academy House staff moves have been postponed until 2028 at the earliest.

### **Vacancies:**

- a.** Given the unprecedented level of vacancies across the Department, TUS continued to raise concerns at every possible opportunity. Management Side prioritised some work, resulting in a pause in a very limited number of work areas. A Grade 5 post was created to oversee the prioritisation of work across DAERA.
- b.** Temporary promotions levels remained very high during the reporting period.

**Well-being of Staff:** The DAERA SMT continued to explore various considerations on the well-being of staff. TUS raised concerns about the backlog with Occupational Health Service (OHS) appointments. The period from referral to appointment has improved but there remained room for more improvement.

### **Windsor Framework (WF):**

- a.** TUS continued to negotiate on behalf of our members at the ports on WF related issues. There was ongoing consultation with TUS across the Department on the many varied and complex issues raised by the WF.
- b.** Work on new facilities has progressed with a proposed handover date of 1st July 2025.

### **Industrial Relations:**

- a.** TUS collaboration with SPCSG's MS to develop an on-line Industrial Relations Presentation for Management and Staff led to its release on 30th December 2024. Delivery was delayed due to the workload pressure on the Secretariat.
- b.** In addition to this, MS agreed to include a NIPSA presentation as part of the DAERA induction programme.

**Departmental Trade Union Side Office:** Work levels remained high across the period of this progress report.

### **Grading Review of some Veterinarian Posts:**

- a.** Following continued engagement by TUS, a grading review of some veterinarian posts was completed in August. All graded comfortably at Grade 7 and Grade 6 level. This cleared the way for negotiations on how the now confirmed grading issue for Veterinary Inspectors will be addressed. This will include the issue of back pay. Preparation for the submission of an Equal Pay case was progressed following initial legal advice having been received.
- b.** The level of engagement by the officers of Branch 97 is worthy of note.

## **B3.2 Department for Communities (DfC)**

**Departmental Whitley Committee:** The Department for Communities Committee (DfC) continued to meet DfC management on a regular basis. The 2024/25 Budget constraints were the main focus of any engagement.

**Finance:** 2024-25 Budget - The Department has faced a severely constrained Budget in 2024-25, with shortfalls of £115.8m (17%) in Resource DEL and £167.3m (48.5%) in Capital DEL against initial Departmental requirements.

To live within Budget, very difficult decisions were taken by the Minister in order to live within the Department's constrained Budget allocation, with over £91.2m in Resource reductions having been delivered and Capital investment scaled back significantly.

The Department has been managing a non-ring-fenced Resource overcommitment of c.£25m throughout 2024-25, mainly due to demand-led and contractual pressures against Budget.

To safeguard against capital project delays/slippage, the Department operated with a Capital DEL overcommitment of c.£10m, relating to overplanning, with these overplanning projects able to be scaled back to live within Budget if no further funding was received in-year.

# B3 Group Reports

Following confirmation of the NI Executive's final funding envelope for 2024-25 in the Chancellor's Autumn Budget announcement, on 30 October, DfC were provided with a further additional Resource (£28.6m), and Capital (£25.0m) allocations, totalling £53.6m.

**Recruitment:** Trade Union Side engaged with management in relation to the 2000 new posts from DWP. Recruitment of members remained a priority with membership increasing by over 15%.

**Hybrid Working:** DfC Management conducted a review of Hybrid working within the department and produced a report on improving staff collaboration which called for a 40% attendance in the office. DTUS, registered disagreement as they felt they were working outside the central. The escalation of the RD was been paused to allow further discussions with DfC Management and this remained the position at the end of December 2024.

**Organisation & Membership:** Trade Union Side continued to progress its priorities of:

1. Recruiting Agency Workers;
2. Training Organisers; and
3. Increasing Female Participation.

Work continued to re-establish Committees in all Branches.

Awareness Sessions on the Criteria Based Interview process was provided to Agency Members.

The Departmental Female Reps Forum, established to assist increase participation of female members within NIPSA DfC structures, engaged with DfC to collaboratively work to have a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment in the workplace. They also produced Desk-aids on NIPSA structures, Facility Time and Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

**Housing, Urban Regeneration and Local Government group (HURLG):** During the year, Trade Union Side (TUS) within the Group met with management on a quarterly basis through the Group's Whitley structures.

TUS were involved in discussions about the new Building Safety Group.

Causeway Exchange Health & Safety Panel met on a regular basis, both formally and ad hoc. Health and Safety issues remained a high priority, particularly regarding outstanding issues following the damage caused by flooding. Risk Inspections were carried out on a quarterly basis and any issues/concerns were brought to the attention of Senior Management to be addressed.

TUS challenged how the hybrid working policy had been implemented and were successful in winning a Registered Disagreement on the matter.

Following The Appeal Service (TAS) AGM, a new TUS Committee was elected. During the year, Local Trade Union Side continued to meet with management through the local Whitley structures. There was regular engagement with The Appeal Service (TAS) Management Side to discuss on-going concerns with regards to the building and staff safety.

TAS in-house Health and Safety Committee continued to meet regularly and liaised with HSENI on several matters of concern.

Throughout the year TUS H&S reps continued to liaise with MS on all outstanding H&S issues highlighted by HSENI.

Budgetary constraints and impact upon both service provision and delivery remained on-going topics for regular discussions throughout the year.

Throughout the year, personal representation remained a key priority for Branches within the Group.

**Move to Universal Credit Project:** TUS continued to engage with management monthly. 37,000 migration notices issued were issued - 31,000 tax credit only by the end of May. Circa 2.5k issued for Tax Credits TC/Housing Benefit HB from early June and 3,700 Tax Credits /Income Support from the end of June into July.

Recently started with small number (100) of ESA/TC migration notices.

Budget pressures will impact on capacity and capability to deliver Move to UC. As a result, management have completed a reprofiling exercise for the remaining rollout of MTUC. The priority focus was

on issuing migration notices to TC customers up to October 2024, as TC will close from 05 April 2025, with legacy benefits to follow. Once reprofiling has been approved, UCP will share with TUS colleagues.

Redeployment exercise still planned MS to notify staff with TUS present, to reassure them they will still get the post they had been offered but only at a later date.

**Finance Support and Project:** There were issues with the new system introduced at the end of the last year and still aren't been resolved. Management, staff, project team and I.T. all worked on it with staff having to attend more regularly to work through issues. Initially I.T believed it may be a problem with the 2 different operating systems used in DfC.

**Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Areas:** Work continued on industrial relations within the Lisahally and Ballymena service Centres, and regular local Whitley and branch committee meetings were held alongside correspondence with the Seconded Office and Nipsa HQ.

Quarterly Whitley meetings were held with Management Side within Child Maintenance Service with Seconded Office representation; these meetings incorporated pensions work within Great Northern Tower.

All staff from the Plaza have been relocated to the Great Northern Tower and Castlecourt. The Plaza building will no longer be used as a DfC Building.

**Operation Delivery Group (ODG) (Formally Supporting People Group):** Group Whitley Council meetings continued on a regular basis. Work continued with branch reps to encourage increased participation within some of the less active branches within the Group.

**Engaged Communities Group:** Group Trade Union Side (GTUS) continued to engage in regular Whitley meetings.

The Group had structural realignment changes and an update was provided regarding a number of the Deloitte recommendations.

Management Side did not the recommendation to merge the management functions of HERoNI and

PRONI but co-location in now complete and no problems reported.

Additional resource has been secured for both the Casement and Sub Regional teams.

**Corporate Service Group (CSG) (Formally Strategic Policy & Professional Services Group (SPPSG)):** Trade Union Side (TUS) within the group continued to meet and are met with Management on a quarterly basis though the Group's Whitley structures. Between meetings of the Group Whitley, TUS engaged on a variety of matters including staffing and temporary promotion.

As part of the update on the Health Transformation Programme it was reported that work is ongoing with regards to changes to the Work Capability assessment. New claimants to Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance will be subject to a revised test from 2025. The cost of providing Work Capability and Personal Independence assessment in-house was estimated at £93 million.

At the Financial Management Group Whitley, it was reported that accountants have left the Department with only 2 replaced. Imminent DoF Integr8 Programme may impact DfC finance staffing levels further. Trainee accountant scheme had launched with approximately 300 applicants moving to online stage.

**Work and Health Group:** Group Trade Union Side (GTUS) continued to engage with management through the Whitley framework..

### **Work and Wellbeing Division**

A significant governance review to refresh the providers of Health and Work Programmes, including the drafting of new OBCs was initiated.

The Jobstart scheme for 16-24-year-olds closed for new applications. Jobstart 50+ launched and has been funded by the Cabinet Office.

### **UC Operations**

Due to budgetary constraints Service Centre vacancies were prioritised with only critical vacancies in JBOs to be filled. A review is currently underway to reconsider the location, team, and affordability of all bids within UC Operations



## Working Age Services & Universal Credit Programme

Migration notices were sent to Income Support and Employment Support Allowance customers.

**Digitalisation:** The expectation that some DfC cases will go through some migration testing, Pension Service Computer System to Get your State Pension (GySP) around January 2025. This will include the ability for the customer to self-serve and add or change their telephone number and email address to the service initially. Work is continuing to add further functionality to allow more cohorts through the GySP service and work with DWP to support testing of DfC claims for migration is going.

**Attendance Allowance:** AA online service went into Public Beta phase in DWP on 07/05/24 with DfC following on 27/06/24. NI Direct service page was created and released on go-live day.

**Pension Age Tax Credits - for Pension Credit:** Background - Tax credits will close 5 April 2025, those who are over state pension age receiving tax credits will receive a notification letter advising them what happens next. HMRC are currently running checks to help identify citizens who will be impacted by the closure, majority of citizens identified as impacted within this cohort will be asked to make a claim to UC (those IRO WTC), however citizens who are IRO CTC only will be asked to make a claim to PC or have their current PC claim assessed.

**DLA Child Transformation:** Discovery commenced to look at DLA child as a whole and to research if they can begin transforming the service at this time.

**DLA Child Automation:** Investigation commenced into building an automation that will read handwritten paper DLA child claim forms, extract information into a digital form to be auto-registered onto legacy systems.

**NICS Work Experience Scheme for People with Disabilities:** A pilot started for people with disabilities to have between 2 and 8 weeks of work experience in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). It and will be evaluated in with a view to rolling out across the NICS.

## B3.3 Department for the Economy (DfE)

**Estates:** Regular Health & Safety checks and inspections continued to be carried out across all buildings occupied by DfE staff.

There was a review of premises functions ongoing which was being run by the Organisational Development and Transformation (ODT) team.

**Fermanagh House:** TU appointed H&S reps had to engage with management throughout the year to have the building temporarily closed due to various issues with heating and some building work that had taken place.

A planned move to Adelaide House was scheduled for early 2024 but was not complete until October 2024.

**Budget:** Trade Union Side TUS continued to engage with management on the budget position. A schedule of meetings was agreed. MS indicated that no vacancies were suppressed because of last year's budget, TUS continued to seek full clarity on this position.

**Staffing:** TUS received regular data from NICS HR and MS on staffing in the department. TUS continued to raise concerns regarding the high levels of vacancies and temporary promotions.

There continues to be a small number of agency workers deployed in DfE.

**Health and Safety (H&S):** H&S reps queried the use of a NICS wide recruitment competition for DP senior H&S Advisers.

The issue of the DP Senior H&S Advisor was resolved following the appointment of an existing DfE staff member who TU appointed H&S reps had previously deemed to be a competent person for the purposes of H&S matters.

H&S Reps continued to review the situation as DfE moved to fill the E01 vacancy in this area.

**New Ways of Working (NWW) Project:** TUS continued to advise members of their entitlements under the Hybrid Working Policy and to work with management on the fair application of the NICS wide policy.

TUS developed a memo for members providing advice on agreeing Workstyle

Agreements entitled Workstyle v Lifestyle.

**Organisational Development & Transformation (ODT) Programme:** TUS continued to engage with Management in relation to the ODT programme.

An agreement on a Permanent Transfer Opportunities (PTO) in DfE paper was made and published.

This programme formally ended in Summer 2024.

**2 legacy branches were permanently created in DfE:**

- Learning & Culture Branch
- Workforce planning Branch.

TUS understood that these 2 branches were initially to be contained in the same Division (Central Services Division), however MS advised that they intended to separate the 2 branches between 2 divisions.

**Careers Service:** After TUS requests for a consultation on an assessment for a pay leads/allowances for Careers advisers, reps met with members of the Business Consultancy Service (BCS) who were carrying out a scoping exercise.

BCS developed a report for MS which TUS responded to.

TUS continued to engage with senior management on this piece of work. MS indicated that they were seeking to identify the budget (estimated at around £150k - £200k per annum) and to seek central approval to pay CAs going forward.

**Insolvency Service:** A grading query at middle management level in Insolvency Service was considered. After an exhaustive effort, TUS could not find any evidence to support re-grading at this level.

Members from the Trainee Examiner (E02) to SO Examiner cohort approached TUS regarding a request for a business review of a section of the area that they believed was required.

TUS approached MS and agreed a review. Following further engagement from members we approached MS and achieved agreement for them to widen the scope of the review to include consultation with the

cohort who had approached us. The outcome of the review is imminent.

**OITFET:** Members continued to report high levels of work-related stress in this business area.

The Departmental Secretary discussed a proposed case management and record management system with the Head of OITFET.

It was expected that the development and implementation of this system would allow for more flexibility in the use of the Hybrid Working Policy.

**Trading Standards:** The Trading Standards Service (TSS) Branch Committee (Branch 35) stated their opposition to the running of a joint competition for Enforcement Officers in TSS and DoJ.

- NICS HR decided to press ahead with the competition.

The departmental Secretary and HQ Official attended a Local Whitley Committee meeting which MS had requested.

A report from the Criminal Justice Inspectorate inspection indicated that TSS posts were graded incorrectly.

- MS indicated that they were exploring how to initiate a re-grading exercise.
- TUS agreed to engage co-operatively in support of the exercise.

**Disability & Reasonable Adjustments:** Reps supported several members who have a disability and have requested a reasonable adjustment through personal cases throughout the year.

Some of these cases have identified evidence of discrimination and members are receiving representation for that.

TUS have become increasingly concerned by the apparent institutional failure of our employer to meet their legal obligations around reasonable adjustments.

- The Departmental Secretary engaged with the HR Business Partner, the Director of Central Services Division and the Director of NICS HR on this matter during the year.

- TUS have suggested that DfE as an employer needs to provide training to line managers around DDA and to empower line managers to enable them to make decisions when they receive an RA request.

TUS will seek a programme of consultation to develop a departmental strategy that best serves our members.

### **Consultation:**

- In addition, Section Office were involved in consultation with MS regarding the filling of numerous posts at various grades.
- TUS agreed to schedule regular LWC meetings with 3 of the 4 G3s in the department.
- TUS agreed to consult with the Head of Economic Strategy Group (G3) regarding a review of the entire group.
- A further schedule of consultation was agreed with the Directors (G5s) regarding resulting restructuring within each of their divisions.
- The Departmental Secretary and HQ Official consulted with the Director of Machinery of Government Division over the method to fill a particular post in the department.

There was a potential for dispute over the proposed method to fill this post, but an agreement was reached following some contractual amendments and further assurances were provided by senior management.

## **B3.4 Department of Education (DE)**

**Permanent Secretary:** On 19 November, DE staff were informed that Ronnie Armour, the then Deputy Secretary for Resources, Governance and Early Years had been appointed Interim Accounting Officer for DE.

Staff were later advised that, following an internal competition undertaken by the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Ronnie Armour had been appointed Acting Permanent Secretary with effect from 2 December.

Shortly after taking up the post, Ronnie met with a number of stakeholders, including the NIPSA Departmental Secretary, and she reported that the meeting had been a very positive one.

### **NICS Estate/Accommodation**

**Rathgael House Complex:** The demolition of the Tower Block within the Rathgael House complex began during the summer of 2024, with the Balloo Annex and the old staff restaurant area becoming the first sections to be knocked down. The next key part of the work was isolating the Tower Block from the entrance lobby of the main building. Contractors built scaffolding the height of the Tower and applied a Monoflex covering to help protect the main building from the work taking place.

As staff still needed to access Rathgael House while the demolition works were ongoing, and staff safety was of paramount importance, Trade Union Side (TUS) monitored the situation and sought feedback from members about how this was working in practice.

All DE staff based within the Rathgael House complex were now solely working in the main building. Management Side (MS) had judged this to be doable since the introduction of hybrid working and because the site incorporates a NICS hub which DE staff could avail of if necessary.

After the demolition was completed, the grounds had to be made good and planning permission had also been sought for the car park, so work would be continuing into 2025.

As it had been rumoured that DE staff would ultimately be moving out of the Rathgael complex and into Bangor city centre, TUS raised the subject with MS who advised that they had been contacted by Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC) regarding the sharing of office space as part of the Bangor waterfront development, in order to get an initial sense of the staff numbers etc. that might be involved.

MS informed TUS that they were currently not aware of any further progress in this regard, as the Department of Finance (DoF) was responsible for estate planning, but that they expected DE staff to remain at Rathgael House in the short and medium term and perhaps beyond.

**Waterside House, Derry:** MS advised TUS that Waterside House would be closing at the end of November 2024 (and would be sold off) and that



Teachers Pay and Pensions Team (TPPT) staff who worked there would be relocated Orchard House earlier the same month. Prior to the move, which took place as scheduled, TUS colleagues visited Orchard House to carry out a health and safety assessment during which an issue regarding access around lifts had been identified but this had since been resolved with staff being granted access to their office via the DAERA offices. Although feedback regarding the new accommodation had generally been good it was expected that some issues might still need to be ironed out in the short term.

A new computer system has been installed in TPPT, the main part of which had now gone live, with training carried out when on-line portals were introduced for staff while they were still based in Waterside House. TUS raised concerns about the high dependency on agency staff within TPPT, not least as it was putting pressure on the permanent staff due to the lengthy and complex training required to ensure new staff were up to speed which was having to be partly delivered by them when they were already fully occupied.

**Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI):** TUS continued to press MS to address the shortfall of Inspectors within ETI, which was still carrying 12 Inspector vacancies. Although these had been put forward for business case approval, only 8 to date had received Top Management Group (TMG) approval to fill, while the remaining 4 were still awaiting approval pending wider structure and budget decisions.

**Departmental Whitley Council (DWC):** The DE DWC meetings continued to take place online twice a year, in March and October. These were initially arranged in this way through necessity, during COVID restrictions, but meeting online had helped facilitate the attendance of participants who were based in both Bangor and Derry.

**Staff Engagement Forum (SEF):** Participation in the SEFs had been viewed by NIPSA as an activity that fell under withdrawal of goodwill when action short of strike action was being observed by members but when a resolution to the last pay negotiations was achieved, TUS agreed to encourage members to play a part in the DE forum again.

When the SEF was reconstituted in April 2024, the SEF group began developing a DE People Plan and identifying priority areas to address, including engagement with the Departmental Business Support Team (DBST) and CPD on the Rathgael House demolition project. However, it appeared not all staff had been made aware the SEF was up and running again and seeking new members. Because of this, TUS sought clarity from MS as to whether the opportunity to join the SEF had been extended to all DE staff and were advised this had been conveyed via staff webinars and the DE Board. However, MS agreed to communicate the open invitation to staff again, and this was done via e-mail on 17 December with a closing date of 10 January 2025.

**Hybrid Working:** MS and TUS were in agreement that hybrid working across DE had, in the main, been implemented well, with any issues being dealt with at local level and staff keen to retain the model.

**Health and Safety (H&S):** Although in-house risk assessments were no longer taking place, on-line training on H&S and risk assessments were made available to all DE staff on a regular basis.

A higher number of accidents than usual had been reported during the latter part of 2024. TUS was assured that these were neither related nor, in the main, had they resulted in serious injury with the exception of one involving a large paper shredder machine, after which it had been decided to remove all paper shredding machines from Rathgael House.

NIPSA had sought clarification from Departments about the procedures being put in place beyond February 2024, since the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service advised they would no longer deploy appliances automatically, rather they would only attend an incident where confirmation of a fire or signs of a fire was relayed to them.

When the DE Departmental Secretary met with the Premises Officer to discuss this, she was assured that robust procedures were in place to ensure the safety of staff in Rathgael House and, in regard to DE staff based in Waterside House at the time, as DoF was the main occupant there, the responsibility for premises lay with the DoF.

## B3.5 Department of Finance (DoF)

**The Departmental Committee** met quarterly through the year with 20 reps in attendance at the December meeting. DoF Whitley Committee (DWC) meetings also took place quarterly and the Permanent Secretary attended and participated in the December Annual General Meeting (AGM).

**Staffing:** Small increases were reported in staff in post, up to 3251 full time equivalents, an increase in agency workers up to 203 and Temporary Promotions up to 324. A large number of Departmental staffing competitions ran during the year with the addition of Departmental Transfer notices which Departmental Trade Union Side (DTUS) monitored. All saw good consultation processes followed, an average of 40 vacancies were filled each month while roughly the same number of new vacancies came onto the system; overall vacancies ran at 359.

**Budget:** £3m resource and £0.9m capital was returned in October monitoring; an extra round of Budget monitoring will complete in early January 2025.

**Projects:** reported on at DWC included NOVA (LPS), Integr8 and the Proof of Value Building occupancy and sustainability (Goodwood House) concluded with no further action to be progressed.

**Accommodation:** Trade Union Side (TUS) raised issues around Orchard House, Goodwood House, Marlborough House and the need for appropriate, respectful Departmental cultures in our shared buildings.

**Construction & Procurement Delivery (CPD)/ Properties Division (PD):** Staff continued to work from home where possible in CPD. The approach to the implementation of the Hybrid Working Policy in Clare House was discussed between management and Local Trade Union Side (LTUS) and management appear to be taking a flexible approach. Staff vacancies remained an issue, particularly in technical grades and there were ongoing recruitment problems. TUS highlighted concerns over possible workplace behaviours and incidents and proposed additional training for Line Managers. Senior Management agreed to look into the issue and consider appropriate training packages.

Several meetings took place between CPD senior management, LTUS and HR Managers and several new initiatives were developed. Access to information on Bullying and Harassment for managers and staff was created and made available on the NICSHR website. This has proved to be a positive development. Feedback from staff on the content of these information packages was very positive.

DAERA staff completed their move into Clare House during the year and the Clare House Health & Safety Committee comprising of LTUS, DAERA and CPD Management Reps was established.

**Pensions:** Staffing issues continued in Pensions Branch, primarily impacted by the implementation of the McCloud Case Remedy and the additional work that requires.

LTUS fought for recruitment of additional staff to help alleviate the pressure - some additional resources were applied and some additional staff were employed but pressures still exist through training of new staff.

Discussions took place recently between LTUS and Management around the move from Waterside House to Orchard House for Pensions staff and the implementation of the Hybrid Working Policy in the office. Management had proposed a Workstyle Agreement pattern for all staff but TUS felt that the arrangements were not flexible enough for members and advised members who did not feel comfortable with management's proposal to discuss their own proposals with their Line Manager to try to reach an agreement. Management agreed to the LTUS proposal on amending the wording and working to resolve issues. Staff completed the move in November 2024.

Most accommodation issues highlighted originally by Pensions and IT staff were resolved but an issue with air conditioning remains.

**Departmental Solicitor's Office (DSO) / Crown Solicitor's Office (CSO):** DSO continued to consult regularly with LTUS on the implementation of the new Digitalisation Project to update their current IT systems and work processes. The new system works much better with a significant reduction in system faults. DSO have decided to renew the contract with the current provider after weighing up the costs for

moving to another provider. The new contract will be for 4 years.

The implementation of the Hybrid Working Policy has been running smoothly with no major issues reported.

DSO face significant staffing pressures after several senior staff across a number of grades in admin and legal either transferred to other Departments or retired. Management and LTUS continue to consult on the best way of addressing these issues.

Regular Whitley meetings continued to take place with the CSO and consultation continues around the Review of Corporate Services and Admin teams in the office. The Review aims to streamline working practices alongside new computer systems and no job losses are envisaged.

Discussions are ongoing with CSO Management regarding Work Style Agreements (WSA) for staff and the implementation of the Hybrid Working Policy in the office. LTUS rejected a proposal from Management to impose a 3 day office based work pattern for all grades in the office.

**Land and Property Services (LPS):** Members' efforts in LPS were recognised as Rate collection achieved £1.5 Billion in rates against an expected target of around £1.4 Billion. This is the largest amount ever raised. The Permanent Secretary agreed that a non-domestic revaluation would take place in 2026 with relevant legislation being prepared. The interim Deputy Secretary of LPS retired in September and was replaced by a permanent Deputy Secretary from the Department of Health. It is hoped that the long-standing history of constructive industrial relations enjoyed in LPS continues.

**LPS Land Registry (LRNI):** LPS ended a long-standing commercial agreement impacting staffing arrangements meaning that TUPE procedures were applied, resulting in the transfer of 13 workers from the private company to the NICS. Grading arrangements for the staff in question are ongoing and are expected to be completed early in 2025.

The LR Project restarted following the resolution of the litigation, meaning that the Project Team has been re-established and team members are back working on project related tasks. The private

partner is to provide an updated Outline Implementation Plan to reflect the new timeline following the delays caused by the litigation. A Gateway Review has been completed which indicated that the project is currently on an Amber RAG status. This was to be expected.

**LPS Ordnance Survey (OSNI):** Following the completion of the Mapping & Charting Officer (MCO) recruitment exercise, internal competitions were held at Higher Mapping & Charting Officer (HMCO), Senior Mapping & Charting Officer (SMCO) and Principal Mapping & Charting Officer (PMCO). A number of people were placed from the HMCO competition. The Principal Mapping & Charting Officer (PMCO) Board resulted in 2 people being successful. Following extensive consultation with OSNI Management Board, TUS were successful in agreeing partial retirement for members at HMCO Grade and at SMCO Grade alongside a number at the MCO Grade. It is hoped that apprenticeships are to be progressed as an additional route into the profession. Consultation continued on the joint Ordnance Survey/Valuation field collection pilot.

**LPS Revenues and Benefits (R&B):** The NOVA work related to the RAPID system replacing ABBACUS was delayed. A formal request from the supplier was received to explore options for the contract. Project work was paused to enable this to happen. The pause is expected to extend into the New Year. This has meant that staff working within the R&B Project Team have been redeployed to other business areas within LPS. Towards the end of the year, it became clear that a significant number of staff had been successful in various promotion and would be leaving LPS. Whilst it is good to see many of our members enjoy this success, it will likely present some problems going forward.

**Valuation LPS:** TUS continue to discuss proposed methods of filling vacancies in the Valuation Directorate with management and our preference is that Internal Competitions should be run as opposed to External competitions where a sufficient candidate pool exists. There are real problems recruiting at all levels but V2 is particularly problematic where candidates cannot be attracted even through external competitions and there is an insufficient

candidate pool internally. Management have introduced a Graduate Trainee Valuer Scheme which they hope will help address this issue over the next 3-4 years and in the interim have proposed an Interim Re-Profiling of Vacancies Plan to help address the V2 issue over the next three years. TUS continue to be consulted on this.

Workplace stress continued to be an issue and LTUS continued to liaise with Management around staffing levels and prioritising areas of work for staff.

Valuation staff in Waterside House have now moved to Orchard House. A TUS site inspection identified some H&S issues for staff and staff have been relocated within the building until these issues are resolved. The issues involve access to the public area for staff.

LTUS continued to press for a resolution to the V2 Pay issue and Management have informed TUS that they are currently drafting a Business Case for V2 Pay.

**NICSHR:** Occupational Health Service (OHS) continued to experience staffing pressures but the work done with TUS saw these start to ease. More staff were recruited including at the new Technician grades and TUS will keep these under review. Nursing staff will be sought again in the New Year and waiting times for appointments have reduced to 5 weeks.

**P&OD:** recruited for the upcoming major Policy reviews and TUS were fully consulted. TUS Departmental Secretary was involved in the deep dive session work on a new 5 Year People Strategy.

**NISRA:** encountered considerable Budget difficulties and needed to re-organise their structure as a result. NISRA management discussed implementing a Managed Moves process with DTUS, where NISRA staff on loan being released by Departments back to NISRA could apply for several existing vacant priority posts at a number of grades. Departmental TUS agreed to this innovative proposal and the process was very successful. The Managed Moves process may be used again in the future.

LTUS are currently pursuing acquiring access to an Environmental Allowance for PSNI staff for seconded NISRA staff working for the PSNI with negotiations on-going presently.

Relations between LTUS and Management are positive with regular Whitley Meetings taking place involving NISRA Civil Servant staff and the non-civil servants Survey Interviewers. Issues continue to be discussed and, in most cases, resolved through this process.

**Digital, Security and Finance Shared Services (DSF):** TUS were encouraged by the outcome of the ICT Level 3 competition held this year. This resulted in a large proportion of vacancies being filled and around 70 additional candidates been placed on a 'list'. The newly constituted Whitley groups have met as agreed. Additionally, it was reported that a competition had been held at ICT 6 Grade with further competitions to follow at ICT 4 and ICT 5 Grades. The success of the apprenticeship scheme was also highlighted with many of those recruited as apprentices now promoted to ICT 6 level.

**Enterprise Shared Services (DSF):** has seen floor space in Goodwood House freed up for DfC colleagues recruited for DWP work who have now settled in. TUS secured an increase in Whitleys and H&S Committee meetings to three a year and DfC TUS have been invited to the H&S House Committee. The new Whitley constitutions were agreed and signed. The replacement of Goodwood's HVAC heating system began at the end of the calendar year.

**FINANCE CORE - Internal Audit:** staffing pressures and the attached moratorium on transfers out continued. TUS worked with the Business area on maintaining the service in-house. NIPSA will continue work on management initiatives on allowances and the service saw overtime being required at year-end. Audit accommodation saw members move into Castle Buildings which went quite smoothly. **International Fund for Ireland (IFI)** consulted on various staffing competitions throughout 2024.

## B3.6 Department of Health (DoH)

**COVID-19 Update:** Throughout the year, the Trade Union Side (TUS) worked closely with the appointed NIPSA Health and Safety (H&S) officer to monitor COVID-19 considerations across the DoH working environment, including Castle Buildings and the wider Stormont estate. Regular meetings of the



Castle Buildings H&S Committee were held to address emerging risks, with a focus on mitigating potential recurrences of COVID-19. The committee's re-establishment was welcomed by both TUS and Management Side (MS), ensuring proactive oversight of workplace safety.

**Staffing:** The DoH Resourcing Sub-Committee maintained oversight of vacancies and recruitment activity. Over the course of the year, staffing levels were bolstered with the addition of permanent posts, including 1 Grade 7, 2 Deputy Principals (DPs), 7 Staff Officers (SOs), and 5 Graduate Managers. Collaborative engagement through the Future Department Working Group facilitated progress on departmental redesign and restructuring, with TUS advocating for improved career development opportunities and sustainable staffing solutions.

Vacancies were actively addressed through targeted recruitment campaigns, including the allocation of E02 and E01 posts. TUS continued to press for further reductions in temporary promotions and reiterated concerns about the potential designation of staff as "surplus" during restructuring. MS reaffirmed its commitment to avoiding redundancies.

**Homeworking/New Ways of Working (NWW):** Hybrid working arrangements under the NWW policy remained in place, with staff attending their permanent offices for an average of 40% of their working week. While uptake of Connect2 Hubs remained low, TUS and MS collaborated to address individual concerns through local agreements and an internal appeals mechanism. Risk assessments for vulnerable homeworkers were regularly reviewed, and communications on safe working environments were reinforced across the department.

**Consultation:** Regular consultations between TUS and MS included the successful relaunch of the DoH/NIPSA Industrial Relations Guide, endorsed by Permanent Secretary and NIPSA HQ. Proposals for joint industrial relations training for staff managers and NIPSA representatives were advanced, with a focus on improving engagement post-COVID.

Financial updates highlighted ongoing budgetary pressures, with TUS contributing to discussions on departmental restructuring. Priorities included

ensuring appropriate grading of posts, addressing staff morale, and safeguarding opportunities for redeployment.

**Communication:** TUS maintained consistent engagement with Branch 26 members through digital platforms, email updates, and virtual meetings. The DoH Staff Hub intranet site proved instrumental in disseminating information on health and wellbeing, diversity, staff movements, and restructuring updates. NIPSA continued to advocate for improved engagement with Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources (NICSHR), particularly regarding delays in case progression.

### B3.7 Department for Infrastructure (Dfi)

**Closure of Clarence Court:** Clarence Court closed in early 2024 and staff were relocated to James House. The DFI TUS have worked with the Facilities team throughout 2023/24 period and have had numerous meetings with the branches involved and the staff affected by same. The new open plan office lay out was a new experience for some and have taken time to settle in. NIPSA also sat on the working group for same throughout this period.

**Clarence Court Facilities Staff:** This move has had a greater impact on the facilities staff in James House who carried out the facilities work for Clarence Court and TUS have been advised that a review of facilities team including the security guards will now take place in 2025 and we await the terms of ref for same but that may see a reduction in the staff numbers and a change in their roles and rotas going forward. This is piece of work is complicated and on going

**Security Guards:** The guards have been negatively impacted upon by the move to James House in terms of reduction in their conditioned hours and guaranteed overtime. These concerns were flagged throughout the year without much progress being made by the management side and has resulted in members lodging grievances cases and tribunal proceedings.

**Departmental Budget Update 24/25:** It was reported that DFI have spent the allocated budget with an underspend of monies by only 0.5 % and

that was reported as a positive outcome in a challenging environment. The Department had identified a resource need of £ 676 million but were allocated £ 559million, which is short fall of £117 million and this has had an impact on the arm's length bodies.

**Capital:** The department submitted capital bids of £1.2 billion however were only allocated £820 million by the executive for the 24 / 25 period which meant that £189million was spent on specific schemes with the remaining monies being spent on general allocation

The Trade Union Side were advised at Whitey that the Senior Management team continues to monitor the capitol budgets against requirements and that will keep NIPSA updated if changes are required to same.

**Roads Groups:** The Roads group continued to meet throughout 2024 and going forward it is hoped that in 2025 we can start to rebuild the branches that have been weakened after a number of resignations, retirements and the impact of covid.

**Water Group Whitley:** The Water Group continued to meet in 2024 and held several Whitley meetings.

**Rivers:** During the year Rivers developed had produced and 6-year plan and had identified a staff shortage, if it's to fulfil all its functions going forward in 2025b and beyond and is working with NIPSA to achieve same. They are also working with Water and Drainage Policy Division team in DFI to update the reservoir act, which will create a new administration workload and that will require an increased team as well to implement same, noting that staff shortage in the technical world remains a major concern.

The management team also flagged late 2024 that they were going to create a flood forecasting centre, which was one of the recommendations of the flooding review and that when established it would be located in Craigavon. This piece of work is ongoing. The staffing shortages in Rivers remain a concern and put the DFI flood risk plan in jeopardy and the flood event in 2024 confirm same.

**Living with Water and the power of Water:** Living with water team advised that the increased costs was still a concern in 2024 and a review is ongoing centred around Belfast area in 2025.

They also advised that there was no prospect of additional funding to take forward any additional schemes. The Living with water Senior team also advised that they had no staffing issues.

**Water and Drainage Policy Division (WDPD):** A number of technical vacancies were filled in 2024, however a number of admin vacancies remained unfilled awaiting to be filled by NICHHR

TUS were also advised that the first stage of the reservoir act had been passed through the assembly and that there was going to increase the volume of work in that business area.

**DFI Seconded Office:** The DFI Seconded Office is still operating with three seconded officers, and it was hoped that the remaining vacancy could be filled from the ongoing competition in 2025

**Digital Service Branch:** Nipsa met the Digital Services Branch (DSB) management team throughout 2024 and flagged concerns about training, ICT skill sets, vacancy management and have a series of meetings planned in 2025.

**Planning:** NIPSA held a number of meetings with Planning in 2024 but our request to have a formal Planning Whitley put in place, remains outstanding, That said, it is hoped that this can be achieved in 2025.

**Overtime:** There were still ongoing concerns about the amount of overtime being worked in Roads/ Rivers in 2024 and this is largely due to the vacancies in all grades not being filled and will only decrease when posts are filled. This was a generational issue and will only be addressed when the vacancies are filled or the workloads are reduced.

**Vacancy Management across DFI:** Vacancy management remains an issue in 2024 across all grades and disciplines in DFI. TUS continued to flag concerns about same throughout 2024 with limited success this will remain an issue in 2025.

**Strangford Ferry:** The Ferry management side team had requested a joint up Whitley with Unite, as that is a shared work space and after seeking advice from HQ we agreed to attend same, no further progress was made in 2024 but it is expected that this will be organised in 2025.

**Closure of Marlborough House:** TUS were informed that Marlborough House will close as will the hub therein and it's not clear where the staff will be moved to . This is an ongoing central issue.

**Closure of Annex A and B in the Stormont Estate:** Annexes A&B in the Stormont estate, were Rds Eastern division were based, closed in 2024 and resulted in the Rds staff being moved to the new Hydebank offices. This building is shared with DVA .

**Machinery of Government:** It was reported by many business areas across DFI that the machinery of government, with the return of the assembly has caused an increase in workload and that they no longer have the staff required to feed that machine .

This issue has been flagged at the DFI Whitley .

**The Driver and Vehicle Agency**

**Hydebank House:** In February of 2025, the new office accommodation at Hydebank opened, DVA staff were joined by other DFI Staff from the TRAM group in October/November 2025. Unfortunately, the test centre at this location remains closed due to ongoing inspection machinery difficulties.

However, the new Hydebank House accommodation and the test centre itself are extremely impressive.

**Licensing:** Through the hard work of licensing staff, targets for both postal and on-line applications were met. Despite the new Occupational Health Contract,

**Current Position on P&T Competitions March 2023**

<b>Competition</b>	<b>Current Position</b>
Grade 6 Procurement & Commercial	CIB currently being drafted.
PPTO Civil Engineer	Final 5 candidates listed and posted to vacancies with effective date of 19 December 2022. Competition now closed.
SPTO Civil Engineer	Competition initiated with NICS HR 21 December 2022. COMPLETED
SPTO Electrical	Being progressed with NICS HR.COMPLETED
SPTO Ferry Manager	With NICS HR for advertisement. COMPLETED
SPTO Procurement	Competition currently being considered.
HPTO Electrical	Being progressed with NICS HR.
HPTO Civil Engineer	CIB being prepared.
HPTO O&M	With NICS HR for advertisement. CIM meeting being arranged.
HPTO H&S	With NICS HR for advertisement but may change to external recruitment.
HPTO Procurement	With NICS HR for advertisement.
Graduate Trainee	Currently accepting applications until 28th July '23
PTO Apprentice	Interviews should now be complete with aim to have successful candidates in post in Sept'23 COMPLETED
PTO Electrical	Postings ongoing.
PTO M&E	With NICS HR for advertisement. CIM meeting being arranged.
TG Electrical	Postings ongoing.
TG Civil Engineering	Being progressed with NICS HR.
AO Senior Purser	With NICS HR for advertisement. Considering options for wording of eligibility to maximise applicants. COMPLETED



which involves the use of an external company (3five Two Healthcare) meeting the targets for Vocational and Health specific licenses remain challenging. A review of driver licensing fees will be completed next year.

**Enforcement:** Targets continue to be met, helped by the last recruitment competition.

**Testing:** Recent recruitment competitions and the addition of an extra test for each employee per day has helped to increase the test figures significantly, October 2024 recorded the highest number of test results ever conducted in a month. The ongoing issues with the opening of Hydebank Centre has been disappointing but the impact of the issuing of Temporary Exemption Certificates has helped reduce backlogs. Because of private sector wages the recruitment and retention of testing staff remains extremely difficult.

**Vehicle Examiner:** The regrading exercise for Vehicle Examiners is now complete and they are now analogous to the E02 grade.

**Driving Tests:** The backlog of driving tests appears to have been cleared due to both external recruitment and the movement of staff from other disciplines into this work area. A new recruitment competition has been launched recently.

### **Department for Infrastructure - TRAM**

**3-year Budget:** It is still unclear if a 3-year budget will be signed off considering a failure to appoint a new assembly due to the impasse over the NI protocol. The NI Assembly has just started their summer recess.

Apart from this, it is still being reported by the Managements side that things are still going to be very tight from a budget perspective and that Roads and Rivers will have to rely on the in-year monitoring rounds for additional monies.

Things have continued to be tight throughout the 2023/2024 year.

#### ■ Capital

The Trade Union Side continues to meet the senior Management team at the Roads Whitley, albeit by web ex where financial information is shared and

the impact of same debated in full. These updates include items such as capital and maintenance budgets as well as the Direct running cost and over-time costs.

The latest Roads finance update from Feb 2023 is as follows:

Capital Budget            £180.8m

Maintenance Budget    £149m

#### ■ Overtime

There are still ongoing concerns about the amounts of overtime being worked in Roads, this is largely due to the vacancies in all grades and will only decrease when these posts are filled. No change likely.

#### ■ Vacancy Management in Roads.

Vacancy Management continues to be a major issue in Roads at present.

#### ■ External Profession and Technical officer recruitment Competition.

Several issues have been raised with management regarding the External Professional and Technical Officer recruitment competition. It would appear that no great improvement has been made, TUS continue to bring this to Managements attention. SPO competition has been completed and successful candidates posted.

#### ■ Section Office

This work steam is still ongoing, and the TUS await a meeting to discuss the out workings of this piece of work which again has been delayed due to Covid. This has the potential to radical change the way Roads delivers its business in the section office and a further update on same will be provided when that becomes available.

#### ■ ER Standardisation in Roads and Rivers

The two pilots in Roads and Rivers are ongoing and this is adding to the workload pressures of staff in Roads and Rivers. this is unsustainable with the level of staff available. These pilots are ongoing, and an update will be provided when progress is made.

## B3.8 Department of Justice (DoJ)

**Departmental Whitley:** A new Permanent Secretary, Hugh Widdis, joined the DOJ and NIPSA Departmental Trade Union Office and NIPSA Headquarters Official had an introductory meeting with him.

At the Whitley meetings, Trade Union Side (TUS) raised that staff within the Department are frustrated with the lack of career development through internal promotion and that all promotion competitions are now external and the increasing numbers of staff who have had permission refused to apply for elective transfers.

TUS were provided with the sickness absence statistics for the Department. TUS raised issues with the grievance processes and specifically the time taken for decision officers to be appointed and the lack of updates provided by decision officers if there is a delay in a decision being made. Whilst this is a central NICS issue, TUS thought that it was important to highlight the issues with these policies and the effects on members within the Department.

TUS noted the high level of temporary promotions (TPs) that are lasting over 1 year in the Department and have asked that the Department follow the example of Legal Service Agency where TP opportunities are re-advertised for posts in which a person has been in temporarily for 12 months.

**Hybrid Working Policy:** TUS continued to monitor how New Ways of Working was being implemented within the Department and continued to raise any issues that arose regarding this matter.

**DOJ Induction:** Management have been considering how to run future induction events including the potential of a video being produced for new staff. TUS asked for regular updates on this matter and that recruitment content and material from NIPSA is included if a video is to be produced.

**Sickness absence and Wellbeing:** TUS met with the NICS HR Business Partners of the areas within DOJ to discuss sickness absence and wellbeing. NICS HR held two workshops regarding sickness absence and wellbeing held based on grade - AA to EO1 and SO to G5 in October 2024. TUS met with NICS HR Business Partner team and members of Employee

Relations to discuss the results of the workshop. TUS outlined our position that promoting wellbeing and preventing sickness absence is a more proactive approach to workplace stress. TUS were sent an action plan for 2025/26 and will provide comments on same.

**Pay 2023/24:** Departmental Trade Union Side (DTUS) assisted and supported all Branches within Department of Justice in holding pay meetings in January in advance of the 18 January strike date. DTUS assisted Branches with material for 18 January strike and attended all picket lines from all areas within the Department on the day.

DTUS supported all Branches within DOJ in holding pay meetings in June, consulting on the Civil Service Group Executive's recommendation regarding the pay claim for 2024 and ensured that a speaker from the Civil Service Executive Committee was in attendance.

**Review of the utilisation of car parking across the Department of Justice Estate:** A working group was set up and an initial meeting was held on 1 December 2023. The focus of the meeting was regarding the sustainability of the DOJ fleet. DTUS's main concern was how the review will affect members, mainly in Belfast City Centre. The review was suspended as the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) are looking at a wider approach for active and sustainable travel, which is due to be considered in their public consultation on a Transport Strategy for NI. Once this consultation has been completed, DFI will be invited to participate in our working group and will consider any recommendations regarding active and sustainable travel.

**Emergency Planning - Desktop Exercise:** TUS were advised that a desktop exercise had been completed regarding emergency planning considering various scenarios. TUS were content with the information provided but advised that TUS should be consulted in the event of any emergency.

**Environmental Allowance:** Members within FSNI raised an issue around the disparity of treatment between them and PSNI Civilian staff in relation to access to the enhanced Environmental Allowance. FSNI staff work on the same site as the PSNI Civilian

staff and are therefore required to enter a PSNI site. They also receive the same security briefings as their PSNI Civilian counterparts. DTUS contacted the Seconded Officer for PSNI to request a meeting with her and the local reps to help develop a strategy to secure the enhanced Environmental Allowance for FSNI staff.

### **DoJ Core**

**Castle Buildings Refurbishment Project:** There were issues getting planning permission for work to the roof of Castle Buildings, which has now been granted. The issue should not affect the project completion date of July 2026. Decant guidance was sent to TUS and this was shared with affected staff. Staff were decanted into Knockview Buildings whilst works was ongoing. Staff were relocated back to Block 4A, Castle Buildings and were satisfied with the new accommodation. Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) staff were moved into Block A, Castle Buildings and work on their file storage location within Block E is ongoing.

TUS were advised of potential delays with the completion date at the last project board meeting due to the entrance to block A being out of action and needing access to block B. There are also issues with the brickwork with the stairwells in Block B and this may cause delays to the completion date.

**Victims Payment Board (VPB):** TUS were made aware that there had been an ICS report completed on VPB and the processes used to process applications, the recommendations of which could potentially result in JEGS implications for posts within the VPB. VPB are developing a job description for a Business Transformation Manager who would be leading a project team to develop the conclusion of the report and in developing and refining processes within VPB. TUS have arranged meetings with the VPB on a regular basis keep updated on this matter.

**Forensic Service Delivery Review:** A report was completed and sent to TUS in November 2024 regarding the delivery of fingerprint services within FSNI and the PSNI. Within the review paper, there were 3 options given in the paper for the Board to look at - to keep the services within FSNI and PSNI as it is at present; to have all the fingerprint services

delivered by FSNI or to have all services provided by the PSNI. The Forensic Services Project Board are due to consider the report and make recommendations in January 2025.

### **Legal Service Agency (LSA)**

**Location of Work with Directorate Structure:** Management confirmed that four posts were transferred to a different business area. Members were content with this move and issues raised regarding processes going forward will be considered by management. Management raised an issue with output of staff who have transferred. TUS met with management and advised this was due to the move which management accepted.

### **Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS)**

**NIPS HQ location:** Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) moved into their permanent location in Block A, Castle Buildings, transferring from Dundonald House due to the building being unsafe.

**Staff Survey:** NIPS conducted a staff survey with the results published in May 2024. DTUS and local representatives met to discuss with management. Management developed an action plan based on 4 themes in the survey. TUS were invited to take part in a separate forum to discuss all four themes and to put forward proposals. The main area that TUS highlighted was that there needed to be regular updates to staff highlighting visible areas in which improvements, arising from the staff survey, have been made.

### **Youth Justice Agency (YJA)**

**Amalgamation of Youth Conference Co-ordinator (YCC) and Youth Conference Practitioner (YCP):** TUS met with management in March 2024 and were advised there is no proposal to amalgamate the YCC and YCP roles at this stage but that this may be looked at in the long term. Potential legislative changes may also impact this matter however management advised that there were no legislative changes at present. It was agreed TUS would be consulted if there were to be any moves towards amalgamating the roles.

**Senior Practitioner Role:** TUS were advised that the temporary promotion opportunity for this post had been circulated to staff in August 2024.

TUS requested a copy of the paperwork for the TP opportunity and were content with same.

**Regional Care & Justice Project Meeting - Lakewood & Woodlands:** TUS were advised that legal advice received by DoJ found that the current relevant legislation in Northern Ireland prevented this project from continuing in its current form and therefore, it has been suspended.

**Retention Allowance:** A retention allowance business case was developed by management for staff who are at the top of their pay scale and who must have professional qualifications for their role. This is to address the pay differences for staff in similar roles in different areas of the public sector who require similar skills and qualifications. DTUS wrote to the Permanent Secretary who advised that it is hoped that ministerial approval will soon be given for this matter.

### B3.9 The Executive Office (TEO)

The Executive Office Whitley met quarterly during the year and the new Permanent Secretary attended and participated in the September Annual General Meeting (AGM). Budgetary pressures were raised with discussion on the 2024/25 allocations.

Trade Union Side (TUS) continued to scrutinise vacancies following last year's review. The paper on Resourcing for 2023/24 was agreed and showed the need for continued recruitment on live vacancies. Staff in post increased by 4.5%. TEO continued to review agency worker needs - which reduced to 31 and Temporary Promotion (TP) arrangements which also showed reductions. The update on the Review on Finance division was received through Whitley discussions.

The Duty Press Officers Rota in TEO is voluntary, popular and works well. The Business area approached TUS with draft updated arrangements and a full consultation process was held with members. This resulted in agreement being reached and the incoming Rota including the number of volunteers will be kept under scrutiny from TUS.

Accommodation developments saw remaining staff coming into Castle Buildings from the Annexes

with the process assisted by the success of Hybrid working.

### B3.10 Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)

**JNCC and Discussions with Management:** JNCC meetings continued as scheduled. Trade Union Side noted the continuing issue of management side not producing timely minutes for JNCC meetings.

Following Trade Union Side recommendations, a JNCC Human Resource Sub-Group was established to facilitate greater efficiency of business.

**Recruitment and Retention:** Recruitment and Retention remained a significant issue for AFBI, with turnover of staff affecting effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery. This has had a detrimental effect on staff morale and wellbeing as managers were having to repeatedly train new staff (including agency staff), with consequential significant demands on managers and staff. The matter was raised with management throughout the year.

Trade Union Side continued to report concerns about the lack of progression of the qualification framework initiative following aspects of the focus group's recommendations not being accepted/progressed by senior management.

Trade Union Side expressed concerns about proposals by AFBI Management Side to introduce through-grading from Assistant Scientific Officer to Scientific Officer and through grading from Higher Scientific Officer to Principal Scientific Officer.

This was mirrored by concern about proposals to explore the use of the EOII pay structure within the science divisions to enable pay progression from Assistant Scientific Officer through to Scientific Officer.

Concerns were expressed about the practicality of such proposals and risks they would introduce regarding fairness and equitability. Trade Union Side noted with concern that the proposal excluded through-grading from Scientific Officer to Higher Scientific Officer and would appear to be creating a 'Technician' sub-grouping, where progression through internal mechanisms was impeded.



Management Side still had not consulted with Trade Union Side on the organisation's proposal to introduce a 'Training Academy' in AFBI for young people being brought into AFBI to undertake an 'apprenticeship' scheme. Trade Union continued to express concerns about such proposals, especially regarding health and safety of young persons, and demands on staff supervising young persons to ensure their health safety and welfare at work.

Concern were raised about the high turnover of directors of Finance and Corporate Affairs Division with three changes in the position this year. The position has been filled by agency staff since 2023. A fully substantive candidate was appointed to fill the position at the end of November 2024.

**Industrial Relations:** Ongoing concerns were expressed by Trade Union Side to the Head of AFBI HR and to the Chief Executive about adverse behaviours towards NIPSA Representatives in response to them carrying out their trade union duties. The matter was highlighted to the Chief Executive and Executive Management Team at JNCC when referring to adverse behaviours towards staff and their representatives in response to staff and trade union representatives reporting matters such as deficiencies in health and safety management, estates management; and employee and industrial relations.

Trade Union Side (TUS) continued to promote Industrial Relations training for Human Resources staff and senior management, based on the Labour Relations Agency training. Despite TUS providing management side with details of proposed joint industrial relations training at the start of the year, Management Side did not commit to undertaking the proposed training.

On a positive note, trade union side provided AFBI with a draft training seminar for safety committees which was previously used in one of the divisions. Management side has responded positively and has approached TUS for collaboration in updating the training seminar for members of all safety committees. The training syllabus includes highlighting the roles and rights of trade union safety reps and will go a long way to helping management understand

the importance of collaborating with trade union safety reps on matters of health and safety, including mental health and mental wellbeing at work.

**Hybrid Working:** Management continued to refer to AFBI's Hybrid Working Policy when staff were making requests for reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination Act to enable eligible staff to work from home continues to be a matter of contention with ongoing formal challenges via grievance procedures. Reports of inconsistencies in the operation of AFBI's Hybrid Working Policy had emerged. Trade Union Side were keeping a watchful eye on NIPSA's lodging of a formal disagreement with NICS Departments regarding the operation of Hybrid working.

**Mental Health and Wellbeing:** Staff continued to report incidences of poor mental wellbeing and poor mental health at work, with a significant increase in staff leaving work on sickness absence, citing work-related stress and work-related mental unwellness/ill health as a contributory factor.

Trade Union Side continued to raise the issue of workplace mental health and wellbeing at work via dialogue with senior management, Human Resources and at Safety Committees. Management side continued to fail to meaningfully consult with Trade Union Side on conducting a suitable and sufficient mental well-being at work, workplace risk assessment at corporate level.

Trade Union Side continued to remind AFBI of its statutory duty to assess and manage sources of workplace stress. Trade Union Side, in line with NIPSA policy, continued to press Management Side to fulfil its statutory duty to undertake a suitable and sufficient mental wellbeing at work, workplace risk assessment based on the HSE/HSENI Management Standards.

**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:** Following Trade Union Side's continued challenge to Management Side on the ongoing lack of inclusion and consultation on AFBI's Equity Diversity and Inclusion (DEI) initiative, Management Side engaged in consultation with Trade Union Side on AFBI's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy document. Trade Union Side broadly supported the strategy document

and stated to Management Side that it was looking forward to being involved in consultations with AFBI on translating the content of the strategy document into meaningful action.

Following TUS making representation and providing guidance to AFBI Human Resources on menstruation, menstrual health and menopause in the workplace, and calling on AFBI to secure free provision of feminine hygiene products buildings, AFBI introduced free feminine hygiene products in all its buildings.

Trade Union Side was represented at the launch of AFBI's DEI Strategy.

Trade Union Side noted ongoing Dignity at Work cases in AFBI on grounds of disability and non-provision of reasonable adjustments, where members were supported by NIPSA. Most of the cases pertained to one work area in the organisation.

Trade Union Side continued to express concern about the impact on staff health and wellbeing and excessive preventable loss of staff time arising from prolonged disability-related absences, and failure of the organisation to manage the issue. Trade Union Side noted some positive change in attitude and actions regarding preventing and managing disability-related absence following the introduction of AFBI's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion strategy document.

Trade Union Side welcomed the bulletin issued to staff by AFBI's Chief Executive in the aftermath of racially motivated attacks and disturbances across the country in August.

Trade Union Side contrasted this positive, edifying action by the AFBI CEO with the widespread media coverage of the actions of a member of the AFBI Board (not in their official AFBI capacity) as spokesperson for a legal entity that represents some illegal paramilitary organisations. Trade Union Side expressed concern about the adverse impact of the board member's public statements to the Education Minister, that were reported by mainstream media, and that were considered by Trade Union Side as inimical to AFBI's commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Trade Union Side expressed concerns to AFBI Executive Management Team about the board member's statements being considered a risk to AFBI's reputation. The Chief Executive stated that AFBI would raise the matter with the Chair of the AFBI Board. Trade Union Side reiterated its continuing commitment to working in partnership with AFBI's Executive Management Team to ensure the organisation fulfils its commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in AFBI.

- Trade Union Side continued to raise concerns and to support members regarding:
- AFBI's treatment of new and expectant mothers, including issues with carrying out new and expectant mother risk assessments.
- Treatment of staff with parental and caring responsibilities: mainly reported by women in the workplace.
- AFBI's failure to introduce the Guaranteed Interview Scheme for external competitions in line with the NICS.
- Industrial relations issues, including issues of reported harassment, victimisation and creation of a hostile and intimidating environment for staff and their union Representatives.
- Treatment of disabled staff, including provision of reasonable adjustments and reports from members that some AFBI workplaces have become unwelcoming and intimidating environments for disabled staff.

**Health and Safety:** TUS presented challenges to management on a range of health and safety issues. AFBI has a significant risk profile, given its agricultural activities; work in the maritime and aquatic environments; and working with hazardous substances and biological agents.

Trade Union Side has raised repeated serious concerns about reports from staff at the AFBI Sustainable Agri-Food Division, Hillsborough site, regarding continued long working hours for some staff that are in breach of Working Time Regulations that are creating a significant risk to staff and others through exhausted staff operating agricultural vehicles and towed heavy agricultural equipment.

There has been an increase in vehicle incidents on the site, several of which that have caused damage to AFBI vehicles and in one case, damage to a contractor's vehicle by an agricultural vehicle being driven by a member of AFBI staff.

Trade Union side has expressed concern about underreporting of accidents and deficiencies in investigations and reporting of incidents and accidents occurring on the site. Trade Union Side has reported to management that there is a reasonably foreseeable risk of serious injury or death to staff or others affected by their acts and omissions arising from such incidents. Trade Union Side were dismayed that senior management in Sustainable Agri-Food Sciences Division (SAFSD) had termed TUS concerns about reasonably foreseeable workplace risks to staff's safety and health on the Hillsborough site as, 'Scaremongering'.

Trade Union Side has been informed of a culture of fear, and concerns about intimidation of staff that is inhibiting staff reporting health and safety concerns directly to management. Trade Union Side has advised staff that incidents (but not accidents causing injury) can be reported anonymously via the organisation's online incident reporting system, which was set up by the previous health and safety team to afford protection to staff who report unsafe acts and incidents.

Serious concern has been raised about multiple staff on the AFBI Hillsborough site being exposed to a toxic, cancer-causing substance, that was previously banned for use in AFBI, that had been officially procured and was being openly used. Issues of lack of risk assessments and controls were highlighted. Despite the incident being reported in early September, Trade Union Side was not provided with a written investigation report, despite requesting this on several occasions. This is potentially a breach of H&S legislation and is being pursued. HSENI has been informed of the incident by AFBI staff.

Following negotiations, Management in AFBI SAFSD have indicated to Trade Union Side that there will not be introduction of compulsory overtime for existing industrial staff and some scientific staff at the AFBI Hillsborough site. TUS had highlighted issues of

staff health, safety and wellbeing pertained, with concerns raised about issues of staff working long hours.

Trade Union Safety Representatives worked with AFBI Health and Safety Unit on revising COSHH Assessment procedures, management of exposure to hazardous substances including revising the format of COSHH Assessment pro-formae; re-introduction of AFBI's Chemical Safety Policy for use by staff; procedures for health surveillance and procedures for monitoring for hazardous substances.

Following representation to management from TUS and latterly, HSENI, on the need for health surveillance at work, TUS worked with management on protocols for health surveillance at work. There was positive collaboration on this.

Arising from negotiations, AFBI has commenced the second tranche of the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, Managing Safely training course to approximately two hundred managers over a period of three years. There has been positive feedback from attendees on the first tranche and to date, attendees at the second tranche of training have provided Trade Union Side with positive reviews. Two NIPSA Safety Representatives attended the course and they provided positive feedback regarding the external trainer impressing upon attendees the importance of working with trade unions on matters of health and safety. The trainer produced a copy of NIPSA's health and safety publication, Spotlight, at the training course as a useful information source for attendees.

Trade Union Safety Representatives positively engaged with management on the outcome of the HSENI investigation and inspection of a work area in AFBI Veterinary Science Division concerning issues with management of health and safety in microbiological containment laboratories on the VSD site. Trade Union Side continued to provide valuable advice and support to managers on matters of health and safety management in these work areas.

Trade Union Side reported to AFBI's Executive Management Team via JNCC, concerns about the abuse of formal AFBI procedures, such as grievance procedures, performance management procedures



and disciplinary procedures to intimidate, harass and victimise staff that have raised concerns about deficiencies in management of health and safety.

**Holiday Pay:** Following Trade Union Side long-term challenge Management Side on AFBI's failure to align with NICS on payment of Holiday Pay, Management Side issued a statement at the end of October stating that AFBI had commenced payments for staff in line with the NICS Policy using an in-house (AFBI) system

### Stage 1

1. Payments for all staff being paid 2 months in arrears.
  - i. Industrial staff received first payment in the month of October for August 2024 overtime.
  - ii. Non-Industrial staff received first payment for overtime beginning August 20

### Stage 2

1. The AFBI Finance team were working to process all back payments to April 2020 with payment of this back pay being tentatively being projected for payment in January 2025
2. HR committed to provide TUS with the formula used by AFBI for payment of holiday pay.

**Dignity at Work and Grievance Procedures:** Trade Union Side called upon Management Side in AFBI to investigate the long delays in AFBI conducting Grievance and Dignity at Work Investigations. The matter was to be undertaken by the former Director of AFBI Finance and Corporate Services but has not been progressed since the sudden departure of the director in April 2024, and their temporary short-term replacement with successive members of agency staff. Trade Union Side made representation to AFBI's CEO on this unsatisfactory state of affairs. By the end of year, AFBI had not provided Trade Union Side with an update or a report on the findings of any investigation. This is being pursued by TUS.

The greatest demands on NIPSA representatives involved working with members and management to seek early resolutions to avoid the need for grievance and dignity at work procedures to be invoked in

matters that can be resolved with suitable dialogue and commitment by management to ensure fairness, equity, diversity and inclusion. Nevertheless, where necessary, grievance and dignity at work procedures were progressed with support from NIPSA side. This continued to be a considerable strain on TUS resources and there was an unprecedented increase in our reps being contacted by members for advice and support.

**NIPSA Recruitment and Membership:** Recruitment of new members continues at a healthy rate with a net increase in membership following a significant number of members leaving the organisation through retirement, and outward movement to other employers. Trade Union Side further engaged with Management Side in AFBI to ensure a suitable data sharing agreement with AFBI is being put in place to enable unimpeded recruitment of members using staff organisational charts and provision of information by AFBI HR on starters and leavers, including agency staff.

Membership recruitment in AFBI contributed to Branch 171 having grown to become the fourth largest NIPSA Branch in the Civil Side of the union.

**Data Sharing and Information Management:** Trade Union Side undertook productive negotiations with Management Side on progressing Data Sharing and Information Processing/Information Controller agreements between AFBI and NIPSA. AFBI agreed to provide NIPSA Representatives in AFBI with dedicated secure server space exclusively for storage of NIPSA Information.

**Assistance to Study:** Following initial complaints from Trade Union Side regarding failure of AFBI to suitably consult in good time regarding changes to AFBI's Assistance to Study Scheme, there was productive consultation and negotiation, with AFBI making significant improvement to the scheme by increasing financial support, from 75% of course costs, up to £1,000, to a maximum of £2,000 per annual application, with the 75% cap removed. The scheme has also increased the maximum period for financial support via the scheme, from 5 years to 6 years.

Trade Union Side negotiated a significant reduction in the period of application of a tapered 'Claw back clause' for staff leaving the organisation following payment of assistance to study financial support.

### **Job Evaluation and Grading Support (JEGS):**

There are ongoing issues with the JEGS reviews in Information Sciences Branch. Trade Union Side had raised issues of deficiencies in the JEGS Review procedures, including failure to consult with Trade Union Side, despite an assurance from Management Side that this would be undertaken.

At the AFBI JNCC, Trade Union Side requested Management Side to undertake an investigation into deficiencies in the procedure that resulted staff leaving the organisation as a direct result of the way the exercise was conducted and despite the stated intention of the exercise being carried out, with the intention of retaining staff. Management side stated that they would review the exercise, but by the end of the year, Trade Union Side had not been informed of such a review being undertaken.

**Organisational Governance, Accountability, Efficiency and Effectiveness:** Trade Union Side has developed a standing protocol for consultation and negotiation with Management Side broadly encompassing the following:

#### **a. Efficiency and Effectiveness:**

- Impact of staff turnover on work programmes.
- Impact of staff turnover on staff health and wellbeing.
- Preventing and managing sickness absences.
- Constant churn of staff impacting on local managers- having to train new staff.

**b. Governance:** how AFBI manages its corporate governance- how policies, procedures and leadership are implemented.

Included in this is reference to AFBI's management of:

- Health, Safety and Welfare at work- including mental health and wellbeing at work. Adverse behaviours towards staff that raise H&S issues.
- Diversity Equity and Inclusion- including the organisation's management of disability,

new and expectant mothers, women in the workplace; industrial relations, guaranteed interview scheme, reasonable adjustments; reports of unwelcoming and hostile environment for disabled staff; reports of unwelcoming environment for women.

- Grievances, Dignity at Work, Disciplinary and Sickness Absence Procedures. Long delays in investigations. This continued to have an adverse impact on staff. Inappropriate use of formal procedures to intimidate and victimise staff. Unsound investigations.
  - Recruitment, Retention, Promotion and Reward, including consistency of competitions, the AFBI Qualifications Framework; recruitment and use of agency staff; retention of staff (including reports on staff turnover).
- c. Accountability:** How AFBI manages its accountability for reviewing its procedures and investigating complaints.
- Issues with length of time taken to investigate grievances and Dignity at Work procedures
  - Accountability for leaving staff on long periods of sickness absence
  - How issues raised by staff and TUS are handled by AFBI
  - Accountability for failure to conduct a suitable and sufficient risk assessment at corporate level for risks to mental wellbeing at work.
  - Accountability for managing health and safety of work, including investigation of accidents and incidents and liaison with TUS.

The AFBI Seconded Officer and the Branch Chair, were invited by DAERA, to attend a meeting with the business consultants undertaking the Tailored Review of AFBI, to a meeting to hear Trade Union Side's views on governance, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness in AFBI. Trade Union Side made a valuable contribution to the exercise and presented a frank and forthright account of trade union interactions and concerns re. the organisation.

### B3.11 Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)

**Organisational Review:** CITB carried out a job evaluation exercise using both the NICS Job Evaluation Scheme and the Greater London Provincial Council Scheme (GLPC). The Job Evaluation Business Case was submitted to the Department for Economy and is awaiting approval.

### B3.12 Human Rights Commission

**NIHRC Pay:** An Independent Review of the Commission was undertaken. The review highlighted that the Human Rights Commission was struggling to fulfil its statutory mandate with the core budget set. The review made a number of recommendations including a budget uplift and the development of a new pay policy to include financial autonomy for the Commission. The Report by the Independent Reviewer was submitted to the Northern Ireland Office and the Secretary of State for consideration.

### B3.13 Invest NI

**Temporary Promotions:** Concerns were raised regarding the high volume of temporary promotions within the organisation. A number of posts were filled permanently; however these were mainly higher grades. Trade Union Side (TUS) continuously raised this matter with management and management advised that a further number of posts were in the approvals process from the Board. The situation continues to be monitored.

**Restructure following Review of Invest NI:** A new Chief Executive and HR Director were appointed following a Review of Invest NI which found that a profound change and Reform was needed in Invest NI. This has continued, at top leadership grades, with a further number of retirements or movement to other jobs.

**External Recruitment:** TUS raised concerns with management regarding the external competitions relating to the recruitment process, timeframe process of the competitions and lack of information provided to members during this process from application to final interviews. Some members were left demoralised with no prospect of career

development through internal promotions such as EO and SO grades. However other grades proved difficult to fill even with external recruitment.

**Working above Grade:** Many members have raised concerns that they feel pressured to take on additional duties due to many people leaving the organisation due to retirement or moving to other jobs. TUS also highlighted the poor treatment of staff, inconsistencies in the recruitment policy and the failure to replace administration staff both at EO and AO grades. Management advised that approval from the board is slow and budgetary restraints impact on the number of approvals. The issue is ongoing.

**Staff Movement:** Staff movements within the organisation increased as a result of leavers and a delay in backfilling. TUS welcomed this opportunity for members as it allowed career progression and personal development within the organisation. This issue is ongoing.

**Hybrid Working:** TUS raised concerns regarding the approach of two days in the office; a split of 40/60 was agreed. TUS raised issues such as increased flexibility, car parking issues and reimbursement of car parking expenses. Management Side agreed and this issue is ongoing.

### B3.14 National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI)

**Terms & Conditions:** The changes in T&Cs for new staff on post 2022 contracts continued to have a negative impact on staff morale, across all affected departments, but also brought operational difficulties. With Bank Holiday Monday working falling outside normal shift patterns, the de-incentivised terms offered have been reflected by a minimum number of members offering their time on those days. NMNI responded by attempting to change the contractual obligations of relevant staff to include compulsory attendance on several Bank and Privilege holidays. NIPSA objected to this approach, as well as pointing out the in the 15 years since NMNI's sites adopted Monday closure this has never been an issue. In May this created a Management Side decision to allocate Bank and Privilege holiday working shifts on all Visitor Services staff, without

prior staff or Trade Union Side (TUS) consultation, producing justifiable anger for many members. TUS immediately entered negotiations with NMNI General Managers and MS, with concerted efforts a negotiated compromise was reached giving the staff the ability to express interest and put themselves forward to work Bank and Privilege Holidays, in the first instance. This has been agreed by MS to be implemented fairly on a pro rata system for F/T and P/T staff effected. Both Branches actively engaged in negotiations with the GM on each site to come to an amicable conclusion in this matter. We will continue to monitor the effectiveness and implementation moving forward. At all times in these negotiations TUS emphasised the impact of the downgrading of T&C's (such as the removal of the 12.5% SDA and overtime enhancement) is the important factor, and NIPSA continues to encourage the organisation to rethink their damaging strategy on this matter. Discussions continued on ways of alleviating the many problems this matter has brought on to the organisation.

**Recruitment:** A Bar Manager (E02 Grade), was recruited after McCusker's Pub at the UFM gained a license for the first time, this post became vacant in August, with a new Bar Manager being appointed in Oct. A number of Visitor Services staff were appointed on varying contracts, particularly on 150 hr (seasonal) with a small number of Guides PT (2) and one F/T. The Assistant Visitor Services Manager (AVSM) role at the Ulster Museum was temporarily filled in September, with a permanent position filled in July. A post of AVSM at the UFM was filled in October, the post holder having acted up into this position for some time. Two new posts for AVSM (Retail) were created for the UM, filled in January and UFM & UTM, filled in April by internal candidates. The Post of Business Support administrator (UFM & UTM) is currently being back filled by personnel Acting Up and interest was being sought for 21 hrs pw for a Living History Supervisor at UFM as the previous holder is now the Part Time NIPSA Seconded Officer.

In November of the previous year, the vacant Director of Public Engagement post was put out for trawl, having been held in abeyance for over five

years, and filled by an internal candidate. The position of Head of Audience Development having been created by this promotion, was filled by an external candidate in September. Due to the resignation of the previous post holder, a recruitment exercise for an Education Manager for NMNI was embarked upon, the post being filled in early October. The General Manager's (GM) Post at the Ulster Museum became vacant, after the resignation of the post holder in October and is expected to be filled early in the New Year. Due to the resignation of the previous post holder the role of Collections System Information Officer became available, with the aim of recruitment competitions taking place early in the New Year.

**Pay/Overpayments:** As reported in the progress reports, a small number of overpayment issues arose. No movement really occurred on this, but that is being seen in a relatively positive light by those affected at this point. A final resolution is still unknown, but the members and NMNI appeared to be on the same page on this matter. Some smaller overpayments were identified by the payroll department in Oct and have been rectified amicably with the reassurance, after negotiation to the TUS that affected staff have been given tailored options for repayment of small sums, and such an occurrence would not happen again, as the issue had been identified and remedied.

**Industrial Action:** Over the course of the previous year the members of Branch 183 and 184 took part in several days of industrial action beginning with Branch 183 taking to the picket lines on 17th March, the first branch to take such as step! culminating with the final day of strike action being the largest since the Ulster Workers strike of 1974- and indeed U.K wide, the General Strike of 1929. The members were vocal in their demand that not only are their own contracts improved, but the NI Civil service will " Not be left behind" in terms of pay parity. This resulted in a minimum 5% uplift for most members, the largest increase in many years but still far below inflation at that point. An issue did arise previously, as it appeared NMNI managers had been given, or had gathered, lists of members/non-members to approach regarding attendance on the day of



action. The Section Secretary at that time continued to press NMNI on this concerning matter, as well as examining any potential GDPR matters arising. Increased recruitment by both branches since this occurrence will hopefully aid in the prevention of the management side deploying this disreputable tactic.

**Site Issues:** Various issues around Industrial Relations, Health and Safety and general terms and condition matters, continued to be at the forefront of TUS activity within the organisation. A positive aspect has been an influx of new activists taking up Committee roles in the two NMNI branches, particularly the high uptake in trade union courses in education and training, making resolutions in multiple areas much more easily achieved. Both branches elected full committees for 24/25 except for learning Reps, Branch organisers continue to strive to fill these positions. New Reps were also co-opted for the first time in some cases.

### B3.15 North South Bodies

#### Waterways Ireland

**Organisational Review:** Given that 21 years have passed since the body was founded, Waterways Ireland, in conjunction with the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and the sponsoring Departments, agreed to carry out an organisational review. Baker Tilly Mooney Moore (BTMM) were appointed to carry out the review and consulted with Trade Union Side and staff separately. BTMM completed their review and made a number of recommendations which are being considered, some of which will require NSMC and sponsoring department's approval.

### B3.16 Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA)

**Pay:** The 2024 pay claim was submitted to Management Side in March. The claim consists of the following elements. That the 2024 pay implementation date is effective from 01 April, with pay progression for those entitled staff who have accrued enough service in the 2023 - 2024 reporting period. To include an inflation rate, spine point pay rise as per CPI figures released for January 2024 (4.2%) with an additional 6% increase on all scales, or £3500 per annum added to each pay scale (whichever is

higher), to address the ever-increasing cost of living pressures. A review and increase of travel and subsistence rates. A review of the on-call allowance; A review of the paternity leave provision. A commitment to evaluate health and wellbeing provision e.g. subsidised gym membership, increased contribution to help with the cost of glasses/hearing aids. That the Assembly Commission, in addition to the existing special leave provisions, consider provision of up to 5 days paid carers leave for employees who provide care for a sick or disabled family member or friend. Meaningful immediate engagement on a proposed reduction to a standardised 7-hour day/35-hour week (pro-rata for part time staff). This will enable staff to benefit from a 54-minute-long lunch break every day.

The 2024 pay claim was discussed with Management Side in September. The Assembly Commission agreed to offer the following: the proposal to increase all pay points by £1,325 for this year only with a commitment to reverting to a percentage increase in 2025 subject to the usual constraints; a 3% rise to all salary supplements; a 3% rise to on-call allowances; and an increase in paternity leave from 10 days to 15 days. The pay offer was considered by members at the branch AGM on 23 October. Whilst there was general disappointment that the offer did not provide an above inflation rise for all of our members, the offer was agreed by the membership. Work has begun on the 2025 pay claim.

**Health and Safety:** Trade Union Side (TUS) Secretary has continued to represent NIPSA members at regular health and safety sub-committee meetings throughout the year. Through representation on the group, TUS successfully negotiated to ensure that the Assembly Commission had implemented a comprehensive range of measures to mitigate a number of identified health and safety risks throughout Parliament Buildings, including issues that were ongoing with the roof and subsequent damp related issues.

**Recruitment:** Trade Union Side (TUS) liaised constructively with Management Side (MS) on the approach to recruitment and selection. A large number of competitions were successfully completed throughout the year. The timetable for recruitment encountered very few delays. A number

of merit lists are now in place to fill both permanent and temporary opportunities that may arise in the coming months. TUS met bi-weekly with MS to discuss the recruitment schedule and to discuss any changes to priority of posts. TUS successfully argued for a number of members to be permanently appointed off a list that was close to expiring.

**Trade Union Side (TUS) Seconded Position:** The TUS seconded position was reviewed for funding in March. Management Side continued to acknowledge the value of this post and the requirement for the position continues to exist. The post will be kept under review. TUS envision no issues with funding for the post being approved on an ongoing basis.

**Employee Relations Group (ERG):** The Employee Relations Group, which consists of the Director of Corporate Services, Head of HR, Deputy Head of HR, Senior HR Managers and Trade Union Side (TUS), met bi-monthly throughout the year. These meetings focused on the continuing impact of the political situation. There was a particular focus on the impact on Assembly staff, including staff morale, health and wellbeing, meaningful work, job security and redeployments. TUS worked with Management Side (MS) on various pieces of work throughout the year, including staff surveys, internal communications, IT strategy, systems review and vacancy management.

**Policy Development:** Policy development with Management Side (MS) throughout the year has progressed quickly. Agreement was reached on a number of revised policies and procedures. Discipline Policy and Procedure, agreement was reached after long negotiations on the appeal stages. This policy is to be considered by the Senior Management Team (SMT). Agreement was also reached on the Managing Attendance, Managing Disability in the Workplace and the handbook chapters on Annual Leave, Public and Privilege Holidays. The proposed changes to these policies were mostly housekeeping and modernisation. TUS provided a number of comments in response which were agreed by MS. TUS considered the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and have provided a response to MS. A review of flexible working was completed, including a survey on hybrid working.

## B3.17 Northern Ireland Audit Office

**Auditor Pay and Grading:** Concerns regarding pay and grading within the Auditor grade have persisted for several years. Despite a comprehensive evaluation of roles and job descriptions in 2019, progress has remained limited. The 2022 staff survey further highlighted the need for clearer definitions of Auditor and Senior Auditor roles, alongside unresolved issues with pay and career progression.

NIPSA became actively involved in 2023, following discussions between HQ and the local branch. In September 2023, NIPSA issued a letter to members, gathering feedback on pay disparities and the distinctions between Auditor and Senior Auditor roles. A subsequent meeting with members in November 2023 reinforced the dissatisfaction with the current pay and grading structure.

Throughout 2024, TUS held several meetings with members to discuss their concerns and ensure alignment on the way forward. Meetings were also held with Management Side to address the ongoing issues. A detailed report was prepared and submitted to Management Side, setting out the evidence for the need for a comprehensive review of the Auditor grade.

Despite this submission, Management Side did not respond promptly, and TUS had to chase for a reply. Discussions remain ongoing, with TUS continuing to advocate for a fair resolution to the long-standing concerns of its members.

**Pay:** At the start of the year, NIPSA engaged with members to discuss and formulate a pay claim for submission to the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO). After thorough consultations, a comprehensive pay claim was agreed upon and submitted to Management Side.

Following the submission, negotiations commenced, and after several meetings, email exchanges, and telephone discussions, a final offer was received from Management Side in early August. The details of the NIAO's offer were as follows:



## Principles of Pay Award 2024-25

- **Effective Date:** The pay award was applied from 1 April 2024.

### Key Points:

- **General Increase:** A 5.5% increase was applied to all grades on the scale from 1 April 2024.
- **Apprentice Scale:** The new real living wage was applied to the entry level of the apprentice pay scale. Incremental awards were given on 1 April for employees who had been in post before 31 December of the preceding year, with exceptions for apprentices and trainees.
- **Auditor Grade:** Two additional scale points were added to the Auditor grade, with Auditors at scale point 3 moving to point 4 from 1 April 2024, and further to point 5 on 1 April 2025. This represents an additional 5% pay rise for this grade.
- **Non-Consolidated Payment:** An additional £1,500 non-consolidated, non-pensionable, gross payment was made to eligible staff, pro-rated according to contracted hours at 1 April 2024. Eligibility criteria included 90 days of continuous NIAO-paid service during the reporting year and a satisfactory performance appraisal.
- **Allowances:** No changes were made to existing allowances, except for the training allowance.
- **Incremental Pay Awards:** Applied annually on 1 April for employees who commenced before 31 December of the previous year.
- **Pay on Promotion:** Employees promoted to a more senior position started at the first point of the new grade, with temporary promotions receiving incremental increases as if permanently appointed.
- **Living Wage and Dying to Work Charters:** NIAO reaffirmed its commitment to these charters.

The offer was subject to a two-week consultation with members, who voted by a majority to accept it. This concluded the pay negotiations for the year, and NIPSA has communicated the outcome to Management Side.

It's worth noting that this pay deal delivered a 10.5% pay rise for auditors plus an additional £1500 one-off payment.

## B3.18 Northern Ireland Water (NIW)

**Inducement Cases:** Arising from the 2022/23 pay and grading offer, cases have been lodged and are ongoing.

**Age Discrimination:** Cases have been lodged with the Industrial Tribunal due to the employer continuing to have pay points well in excess of 5 points cases. The issue is ongoing.

**NI Water Pay 23/4:** NIPSA lodged a Pay Claim for 10%. Negotiations have been complex as there are now different pay frameworks arising from last year's Pay and Grading Review negotiations resulting in different terms and conditions applying to different pay groups. Without Prejudice negotiations are ongoing.

**NI Water's Access and Acceptable Use Policy:** Management have sought to change the policy. However, issues relating to the recording of staff have raised serious concerns and NIPSA has objected to these parts of the policy.

**Agency Workers:** NIPSA have raised the issue of completing the Agency Workers piece, however, members continue to wait on NI Water completing this action.

**Employee Lead Transfer:** Following consultation, Management wrote to members advising this process was now discontinued. NIPSA ensured each member was offered alternative development opportunities.

**NIPSA Office Accommodation:** NIPSA Seconded Secretary's office space remains inadequate and cannot ensure confidentiality. Alternatives have been suggested which Management continue to consider.

## B3.19 NSL Traffic Attendants

**Pay:** Following acceptances by the majority of unions of the National Joint Council (NJC) pay offer for 24/25, NSL introduced the new hourly rates and back pay from November.

**DFI Contract:** The tender process for the new Department for Infrastructure (DfI) contract ran through 2024 with the successful bidder due to be announced in April / May 2025.

## B3.20 Police Ombudsman Northern Ireland

**Holiday Pay Cases:** Progress on the long-standing issue of Holiday Pay under the Working Time Directive resumed at the beginning of the year following a hiatus due to vacancies at the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The Trade Union Side (TUS) engaged in ongoing dialogue with the Management Side, and a business case seeking approval for a remedy was submitted to the Department of Justice (DoJ). The Management Side reported at the Joint Negotiating Consultative Committee (JNCC) held in March that they were responding to questions from the Department regarding the business case.

The Trade Union Side lodged a further 19 cases during the year as holiday pay continued to be incorrectly calculated or paid. Progress remained slow due to ongoing delays in approving the business case.

**Flexi-Time Policy:** As reported in the previous annual report, the Trade Union Side (TUS) raised concerns regarding discrepancies between the Office's flexi-time policy and the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) policy. TUS emphasised the importance of aligning the policies to prevent any disadvantage for Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (PONI) staff compared to NICS employees.

TUS persistently advocated for changes to this policy, with representation made at the Joint Negotiating Consultative Committee (JNCC) meetings in March and September. A new Director of Corporate Services was appointed and attended these meetings to discuss the issue with TUS. The Management Side (MS) committed to reviewing the policy, leading to an ad-hoc meeting to resolve the matter.

Agreement was reached, and members are now permitted to carry over three days of flexi leave per month, an increase from the previous limit of two days.

**Hybrid Working Policy:** As reported in the previous annual report, a formal arbitration process had been requested following a dispute over the Hybrid Working Policy. Both the Trade Union Side (TUS) and the Management Side (MS) agreed to set aside this request, considering the policy was scheduled for review at the beginning of the year. The review commenced as advised by MS, with a questionnaire

distributed to staff to gather feedback on the policy's effectiveness. TUS encouraged its members to participate in the survey.

At the Joint Negotiating Consultative Committee (JNCC) meeting in March, MS reported a low response rate. TUS raised concerns that the questionnaire could identify staff, potentially affecting participation. TUS subsequently engaged with its members to determine whether they had responded and, if not, to understand the reasons. While most members confirmed their participation in the management survey, a significant minority cited the lack of anonymity as a deterrent. This feedback was formally conveyed to MS.

During the year, several changes occurred within the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), including the retirement of a director who had been acting as Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Following the successful appointment of a new CEO, the case for revising the Hybrid Working Policy had to be reintroduced for consideration.

The issue remained a regular agenda item at JNCC meetings throughout the year. Despite initial optimism that the newly appointed SLT members would bring a fresh perspective to the matter, this did not materialise. NIPSA concluded the year by consulting its members to assess whether the Hybrid Working Policy remained a priority concern. The feedback was overwhelmingly supportive, with members encouraging NIPSA to continue pursuing the issue.

**Agency Workers:** The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (PONI) continued to engage a significant number of agency and fixed-term workers, primarily within the History Investigation Branch. NIPSA consistently advocated for the conversion of these roles into permanent contracts to provide greater job security and stability for staff.

**Legacy Department:** As reported in the previous Annual Report (2023), the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill was enacted into law, leading to the closure of the Legacy Branch, which investigated historical Troubles-related crimes. At the Joint Negotiating Consultative Committee (JNCC) meeting in March, the Trade Union Side (TUS) was informed that there would be no redundancies due to the partnership working approach, which had

successfully identified suitable alternative employment opportunities for affected staff. It was also agreed that additional allowances, such as accommodation, would be maintained, given that many staff members' primary residences are in Great Britain.

A number of staff still remain in the Legacy Department to complete outstanding work, and no issues related to redeployment arose.

**Panic Alarm:** During the year, the Trade Union Side (TUS) emphasised the critical need for comprehensive training on the panic alarm system to ensure all staff were adequately prepared to respond effectively in emergency situations. Concerns were also raised regarding the security responsibilities of G4S, particularly in relation to the management of aggressive or violent customers within the workplace.

At the Joint Negotiating Consultative Committee (JNCC) meeting in March, TUS highlighted that the panic alarm system was not uniformly activated across all floors of the premises. Additionally, it was noted that there was a widespread lack of awareness among staff regarding the sound of the alarm and the procedures to follow upon activation. This posed a significant risk to staff safety and underscored the need for immediate action.

In response, the Management Side (MS) pledged to prioritise addressing these deficiencies in the panic alarm system. At December's JNCC the matter was closed off given the progress made.

**Office Accommodation:** Throughout the year, the Trade Union Side (TUS) engaged extensively in the ongoing office accommodation review process. As part of this work, TUS participated in the Office Relocation Committee and held several meetings with the Management Side (MS) to advocate for provisions that prioritise the safety and well-being of members. Key proposals included the inclusion of screened meeting rooms and a closed-access reception area to address safety concerns.

TUS issued two bulletins to members to keep them informed of developments. Various options for relocation were considered during the year, including the possibility of moving to premises owned by the

Northern Ireland Audit Office. However, this was ultimately ruled out due to logistical constraints. Discussions subsequently shifted to the potential extension of the current lease agreement, which would involve a reduction in floor space to mitigate rental costs.

At the December JNCC meeting, MS advised that a business case had been submitted to extend the current lease for at least one year. This decision reflects the limited time remaining before the lease's expiration and the absence of suitable alternative accommodation. TUS will continue to monitor developments and advocate for the best possible outcome for members.

### B3.21 Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI)

**Revised Environmental Allowance:** PSNI NIPSA Seconded Officers focused on rallying our Members to vote for Strike and Action Short of Strike Action on the one ticket item of an uplift to REA. As there had been no increase in 34 years and all other tactics had been used and had not secured the uplift the decision was made that our Members needed to show their significant strength and to Strike in the build up to the 12th of July 2024 and over marching season. We had an overwhelming ballot result of over 90% vote returned for strike and over 98% for action short of strike action. As Industrial Action would cause significant harm and disruption to law and order and the protection of life negotiations began. Meetings occurred between PSNI NIPSA Seconded Officers, Chief Constable, Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Minister for Justice. At the 11th hour a deal was struck which seen a one off payment of £511 paid to each Police Staff member to pause Industrial Action and ask our Members to vote on the proposals being offered. Members voted yes and a deal of rising REA by 144% was agreed. The new payment of £1365 per year will be implemented in April 2025 with huge improvements to the terms and conditions of our Members ensuring equality with our Police Officer colleagues in terms of sickness, maternity, paternity, paid absences and making REA not pro rata for Police Staff not on full time hours.

**Overtime Divisor:** PSNI did not implement the updated overtime divisor rate at the same time as the NICS resulting in our PSNI NIPSA Members being at a financial deficit. The PSNI NIPSA Seconded Officers raised the issue with Management and after significant negotiations all affected Members received what they were owed in back pay.

### B3.22 Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI)

**Pay Modernisation:** The Business Case for Pay Modernisation was approved by the Department of Finance in April. Trade Union Side concluded formal consultation with members. TUS received legal advice that an agreement could be finalised by collective negotiations as it would not compromise any legal action due to the concerns that the current pay and grading system discriminated against some employees on the grounds of age.

A formal ballot took place ended in early August.

The results of the ballot were:

Branch voting turnout: 99%

Acceptance of the Pay Modernisation Agreement: 100%

PBNI moved staff to the new pay scales and paying back-pay in August's salary.

Correspondence was sent to members to advise of their potential legal rights and asked to confirm if they wish to be included in a group grievance and the legal case. Members were asked to identify if they may have a case and complete their details to allow cases to be lodged in August.

**HR Policy Review:** A joint initiative by MS and TUS resulted in the commencement of a policy review of all HR policies including the current facility time procedures. This work commenced in the Autumn and was supported by the Labour Relations Agency. The purpose of the review is to update all policies and procedures to ensure they reflect best practice and have support from TUS.

### B3.23 Public Prosecution Service Northern Ireland (PPSNI)

The total budget for the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) in 2023/24 was approximately £42m. That was a slight increase on 22/23 budget, although additional funding is off-set by increased costs of specific modernisation and reform initiatives. The Department continued to operate on an under-capacity basis throughout 2024 which presented many difficulties for NIPSA members tasked with delivering extensive departmental objectives.

**Health & Safety and Risk Assessments:** Trade Union Side (TUS) were represented on the Departmental Health & Safety Committee throughout the year, attending meetings, conducting risk assessments, and ensuring matters were resolved satisfactorily. Following a Departmental Health & Safety (H&S) review earlier in the year, an 85 page draft H&S policy was shared by management in May. TUS responded in August raising a number of concerns and setting out draft proposals for significant change throughout the policy. Work was on-going as year-end approached but personnel changes caused delay in attempts to seek agreement. It is anticipated this will be finalised early in 2025 and the new departmental Health and Safety policy will then come into effect.

TUS members of the Health & Safety Committee engaged in issues involving all aspects of mental and physical Health, Safety, Security, Welfare and wellbeing. Other issues include the reduction of the department's carbon footprint with various initiatives including reducing waste and recycling. Business in the Community awarded the PPS silver compliance status in December.

**Whitley:** TUS engaged in regular consultation with Management Side (in person and remotely). Agenda items were varied and included Hybrid Working, PPS Anniversary Conference, Indictable File Build, Legal Trainee Scheme, Committal Reform, PPS/PSNI Working Together Project, Digital Strategy, Recruitment and Promotion, Performance Management, Agency Workers, Special Leave and Carers rights at work among other issues. Other agenda items arose through the out-workings of the plethora



of subgroups and committees in PPS. The Senior Management Group (SMG), Organisational Recovery Group (ORG), People & Resources Committee (PRC), Performance and Delivery Committee (PDC), Policy & Quality Committee (PQC), Strategic Improvement Board (SIB), Performance and Accountability Meetings (PAM's), Health and Safety Committee as well as issues generated through NICSHR, produced a significant workload for the Departmental Committee. In-depth consultation and negotiation occurred throughout the year, delivering favourable outcomes for members across multiple topics.

### IT Projects

**Electronic Signing of Summonses:** This IT project sought to design and implement methods for Prosecutors to sign and authorise legal documents electronically. TUS engaged in lengthy written and oral consultation with Management throughout the year; from Project Initiation Document (PID) stage, to Process Mapping, Digital Presentation and implementation. TUS raised concerns regarding potential impact on members, value for money and potential flaws in the procedures. A number of changes were presented by Management side in October and agreement was established. The project continued to gather pace at year-end and it is expected to roll-out in 3-6 months. It should offer considerable short, medium and long-term benefits for members.

**File Quality & Disclosure Project:** This was identified as one of three strands of the joint PPS/PSNI Working Together Project (along with Modernisation & Transformation and Out of Court Disposals). Terms of Reference (TOR) documents were shared in March 2024 and TUS met Management Side on a number of occasions throughout the year. In-depth progress updates were provided at Whitley and in several online Teams meetings. Numerous inspection reports have examined the issue of file quality and avoidable delay in the Criminal Justice system and in 2023, in their follow up inspection report on file quality, disclosure and case progression, Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland (CJINI), reiterated their 2015 recommendations on Quality & Delay. Gateway is seen as an integral part of the process to satisfy the requirements of the CJINI recommendations.

**Gateway:** Funding was obtained in July 2024 for the legal team required to service the 'summary' case element of the Gateway group and TUS attended a briefing meeting in August 2024 where members of the Strategic Improvement Team outlined the department's aims to deliver a more modern and efficient PPS. Funding was granted shortly after to establish the admin section of the Gateway Team. TUS raised some concerns around grading and also successfully sought a number of additional posts to expand the team. The aims of the project are;

- a. Optimise service delivery.
- b. Develop proportionate case progression arrangements.
- c. Support our staff in the delivery of service.
- d. Achieve a more sustainable financial position.

A 6 month Pilot scheme for Volume Crime Cases was launched on 04/11/2024. Matter on-going.

Several other innovative IT measures were presented and progressed throughout the year. They included the Modernising Services programme a five-year Strategic Plan for the PPS called 'PPS 2027'. The delivery of key operational PPS projects and inter-agency initiatives under the Service Improvement and Innovation Programme (such as Committal Reform, Remote Evidence Centres, Sight-link facilities, and the Joint Digital Justice Strategy) and the implementation of ICT Strategy objectives. The proposals were about transforming the PPS into a more modern prosecution service, including the greater use of digital and IT processes. Trade Union Side continued to engage in Consultation with Management Side at the year-end.

**Review of Admin Processes:** In July the Resource Management Team (RMT) laid out plans for an internal review of all administrative processes. This was borne out of a recommendation from the external PA Consulting review of the department (September 2023). This Organisational Development initiative saw RMT tasked with a review within the regional functions of Case Prep, Case Work Support, Court Support and Crown section and to recommend meaningful performance metrics, identify pressures, bottlenecks and delays, remove inefficiencies,

streamline processes, suggest improvements and scope for digitisation. TUS met with members across all mentioned areas and responded to Management Side in August, raising concerns regarding the targeting of admin staff, misuse of performance metrics, micro-management, as well as Management Side's rejection of other recommendations which would benefit members. TUS had in-depth consultation with Management Side and an agreed way forward was found in September. New legislation and some policy changes impacted the way in which a number of business areas carried out their functions; this hampered the review and resulted in some delay. Work continued where possible and RMT provided an in-depth paper with expected target dates/areas - that has been agreed. Matter on-going.

**New Ways of Working (NWW):** Despite reassurance that PPS would comply with agreed arrangements, issues continued to surface throughout the year. TUS engaged successfully with several business areas, whilst department-wide concerns were resolved via the Whitley mechanism. Most posts in the PPS continued to offer Hybrid Working to members throughout the year, with welcome increases noted in November across the Belfast & Eastern Regional team. TUS will continue to monitor the situation as the policy evolves.

**Policy, Legislation, and Change:** The introduction of significant volumes of new legislation and policy (13 internal Policy and Information notes and 19 entirely new internal policies were implemented this year) was a source of conflict throughout the year. Naturally, members struggled with the constant changes having already attempted to navigate 18 new internal policies introduced in 2023. The ever-changing landscape of the PPS saw implementation of legislation across several complex, sensitive, and difficult topics, including Domestic Abuse and Stalking, Grooming, Trafficking, Special Measures and Hate Crime among others. TUS continued to lobby Management Side throughout 2024 as a combination of issues caused significant difficulty for many members. Among the issues raised by TUS were the volume of policy change, the level and length of vacancies across the department, long-term temporary promotion and back-fills, lack of

training, widespread use of Agency workers, high turnover of staff, volume of legislative change and unrealistic expectations placed on staff. These were all contributing factors to a poor year for the PPS in terms of significant sickness absence. Mental ill health was once again noted as the main cause of sickness absence.

**Pay & Industrial Action:** The disparity in pay between admin and legal work in PPS continued in what has been a constant and long-standing issue.

Reps in Branch 53 worked tirelessly in attempts to gain support for the Industrial Action campaign that continued into 2024, culminating in a positive day of action on 18th January. Healthy numbers of members withdrew their labour and there was major disruption across all areas, with picket lines in place in Belfast and Derry. Engagement continued with the membership and with NIPSA Headquarters where Branch 53 Representatives attended regular activist meetings organised by NIPSA Headquarters. The Branch Committee continued to engage and update members in relation to the 2024 Pay Claim and potential for action short of strike action (ASOSA) and further days of strike action if required in 2025.

Several other issues are also ongoing. They included issues arising from Groups and Committees such as the Criminal Justice Partnership Consultations Group, Operational User Group, the Business Managers Forum and numerous pieces of departmental policy being drafted by the Policy & Information Unit (PIU). These types of issues were constant matters and work was ongoing across all the areas.

## B3.24 Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Services (NICTS)

### Vision 2030: Estates Modernisation

**Estate Strategy:** A new Estate Strategy named 'Making The Place for Justice' for NICTS was launched. The document sets out how the Agency will provide a modern courts and tribunals estate that delivers improved facilities for people who attend or work from NICTS buildings. It has been based around four aims - Improve User Experience, Improve Resilience, Improve Value for Money and Improve Sustainability.



**NICTS Estate Committee:** A new NICTS Estate Committee was established to help support the delivery of the Estate Strategy and advise on how to achieve its aims and outcomes.

**Bishop Street and Royal Courts of Justice (RCJ):** Preparatory work began for the Modernisation of Bishop Street Project and a business case was submitted for approval in respect of the Modernisation of the Royal Courts of Justice Project. It is hoped that the RCJ will be made into the first fully decarbonised Grade A listed building in Northern Ireland.

**Dungannon Courthouse:** Dungannon Courthouse reopened on 1 July after a three-month temporary closure to enable the completion of essential structural maintenance. Improvement works to refresh and enhance some staff areas including the main office and staff kitchen also took place during the closure.

### **Vision 2030: People Strategy**

#### **NICTS People Strategy Year Two (2024-25)**

**Delivery Plan:** This was launched on 21 May.

#### **NICTS Operations Guidance and Training Forum:**

The former Court Clerk Forum was relaunched as the Court Operations Guidance and Training Forum. The key objective of the Forum is to ensure that all Court Operations staff have the knowledge, skills and resources they need to deliver business needs. The Forum meets quarterly and its membership is comprised of local Training Co-ordinators from across Court Operations Division.

**Wellbeing Forum:** The NICTS Wellbeing Forum held its first meeting in June. The Forum aims to provide support and guidance to Well Champions and Safe Place Advocates and inform the delivery of wellbeing activities throughout the year.

**Safe Place Advocates:** NICTS appointed and trained five Safe Place Advocates (SPA). The primary role of an SPA is to signpost staff experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, domestic and/or sexual abuse to the various NICTS and external supports and services that are available. Posters promoting the Domestic and Sexual Abuse (DSA) Hotline were shared with SPAs and Well Champions to display in staff areas across the NICTS estate.

**NICTS Resilience Training:** The first in a series of Resilience training sessions commenced for staff who deal with sensitive information on a regular basis. The interactive workshops shared techniques for reducing anxiety levels in an immediate, stressful situation as well as ideas on how to develop positive habits over time.

### **Vision 2030: Digital Modernisation**

**Themis:** Themis is a Business Transformation Project which will enable delivery of improved services and deliver a new IT solution to incrementally replace four existing NICTS IT platforms. Implementation of a new operating model, digital solution and web portal will be delivered on a phased basis commencing with an initial Small Claims pilot in July 2025, followed by Tribunals in summer 2026, Civil business by summer 2027, Family business by summer 2028 and Criminal business by summer 2029.

Key to the design of Themis is engagement with staff, the judiciary and stakeholders. TUS engagement with the Senior Responsible Owner and Themis Programme Manager commenced in November and will continue to take place on a quarterly basis.

**Fixed Penalty Office Online Payments:** A new online payment system for non-endorsable motoring fixed penalty tickets went live in October.

### **Staffing**

**E01 Court Clerk Recruitment Competition:** A bespoke external recruitment competition to fill Court Clerk (E01) vacancies launched at the beginning of June. The scheme was launched as a result of the inability to recruit effectively for court related posts.

**Grade 7 Court Operations posts:** A joint Department for Communities and Department of Justice (DOJ) Trawl was proposed for Operations posts. Departmental Trade Union Side (DTUS) raised a Registered Disagreement over proposals for the methodology to fill the NICTS Grade 7 Court Operations posts. Whilst DTUS did not dispute the business need for the NICTS posts, the General Principles required to launch an internal promotion Trawl in DOJ were not met i.e. specialist skills and aptitudes were not required. The outcome of the Whitley

meeting in October determined that, in accordance with DTUS suggestions, NICTS should give consideration to filling these posts by using the Elective Transfer process. DTUS noted that these posts may also be filled using the Grade 7 General Service internal scheme which launched in December.

### **Business Areas**

**Craigavon Family Care Centre:** As part of the pandemic recovery process, Craigavon Family Care Centre work temporarily moved to Armagh Court-house in October 2020 and returned to Craigavon from September this year.

**Planning Appeals Commission and Water Appeals Commission Commissioners:** Commissioners are Office Holders and are on terms and conditions that are “similar to” those applicable to civil servants as contained in the NICS Handbook. Negotiations are ongoing although obtaining legal advice has caused some delay.

**Coroners Service (CSNI):** TUS completed a Stress Risk Assessment and Focus Groups with staff. The findings were shared with NICS HR and the CSNI management team and an Action Plan was developed. Implementation of the Action Plan is scheduled to commence in March next year through a series of quarterly engagement sessions.

**Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board:** TUS met with the Board Secretariat to discuss planning for the redeployment of Redress Board staff. The last date on which applications can be accepted is 2 April 2025 and redeployment will take place on a staged basis in the lead up to, and beyond, this date.

**Hybrid Working:** TUS were alerted to a number of cases where senior managers issued correspondence to state that current hybrid working arrangements must increase the number of days required to attend the office. TUS advised members that senior managers do not have the authority to make sweeping generalisations as Workstyle Agreements are individual arrangements between a member of staff and their line manager. A ‘one size fits all’ is not applicable and each member of a team is not required (and may not want) to work the same pattern. Whilst Workstyle Agreements can be reviewed and revised at the request of management, the review process must be followed.

**Induction:** DTUS attended a number of ‘Welcome to NICTS’ Induction Sessions held in Laganside House for new NICTS staff (including Agency staff) throughout the year. Staff are also invited to a ‘Tea and Talk’ Session six months later. These sessions provide staff who joined NICTS in the last year with the opportunity to meet with other new starts and a member of the Senior Management Team to discuss their experience of joining NICTS.

## **B3.25 Serco**

**Pay:** At the beginning of the year, NIPSA consulted with members regarding pay conditions. The overwhelming feedback from members was a strong preference for a one-off payment, particularly after they became aware that Invest NI colleagues had received such a payment as part of their pay deal. In response, NIPSA submitted a claim to Serco, outlining members’ concerns and advocating for improved pay conditions.

After a series of meetings and a detailed case being made, NIPSA successfully negotiated the following offer, which was accepted and implemented in July:

**Real Living Wage Adjustment:** All staff currently aligned with the RLW received an adjustment to reflect the 2024 RLW rate, marking an increase of approximately 10%. This adjustment ensures members’ pay keeps pace with the rising cost of living.

**General Salary Increase:** All other employees received a 3.5% increase to their substantive salary.

**Effective Date:** Both the RLW adjustment and the general salary increase took effect from 1 April 2024, ensuring retroactive application of these improvements.

**Goodwill Payment:** A one-off non-consolidated goodwill payment of £750 gross was awarded to all employees, excluding contract managers. This payment was pro-rated for part-time employees as a recognition of their hard work and dedication.

## B3.26 Sodexo

**MyTime Payroll System:** NIPSA engaged with management representatives from Sodexo just before Christmas 2023 to discuss the introduction of the MyTime Payroll System. This system proposed transitioning staff currently on annualised salaries to an hourly-paid structure, which would result in varying monthly pay based on the number of working days. For instance, May, with 23 working days, would differ from June, which typically has 22 working days.

In January and early February 2024, roadshow briefings were held to inform staff about the new system. During this period, NIPSA received numerous inquiries and concerns from members regarding the proposed changes. In response, NIPSA submitted a comprehensive rejection of the proposal and sought clarification on several critical issues. Key concerns included the calculation of leave in hours, the impact on tardiness, and the enforcement of a 15-minute window for start and finish times for security reasons.

A meeting was held in March with senior management. During this meeting, management agreed to provide a written response addressing the concerns raised by NIPSA. Following this, management confirmed that all current arrangements would remain in place, and manual adjustments would continue to ensure no staff would suffer detriment due to the proposed changes.

The implementation of the MyTime Payroll System has been delayed multiple times. Initially scheduled for January 2025, it is now planned for April 2025. This delay followed further representation from NIPSA, who sought to tie the system's implementation with the month their pay increase is applied. This adjustment would make the change less noticeable in months with fewer working days.

**Environmental Allowance:** NIPSA wrote to members in July 2024 regarding the ongoing issue of the Revised Environmental Allowance (REA). The situation escalated with a planned strike by PSNI civilian staff, who had not received an increase in the REA for several years, despite a business case being pending with the department. This strike was postponed following an interim payment offer to

PSNI staff who were part of the industrial action ballot.

While Sodexo employees were not directly covered by this action, the improvements secured for PSNI staff do not automatically extend to Sodexo staff.

Negotiations within the PSNI concluded, an increased REA was agreed. In response, NIPSA submitted a claim to the contract manager seeking an equivalent adjustment for Sodexo staff. As the year comes to a close, NIPSA is awaiting a formal response to this claim. Unfortunately, the contract manager has been off, but they have verbally assured NIPSA that once they return, they will pursue the matter with the PSNI. NIPSA remains committed to securing a fair REA for our members and will continue to advocate for equitable compensation.

## B3.27 Sport NI

**HR Meetings:** NIPSA continued to engage in monthly HR meetings with Sport NI, where a variety of topics were discussed. These included recruitment, health, safety and wellbeing, policies and procedures, budget, and restructuring.

**Sports Institute Review:** As outlined in the Annual Report (2023), Sport NI initiated a comprehensive review aimed at optimising the Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute (SNISI) as a premier regional high-performance training centre and a provider of sport science and sports medicine expertise. In February, NIPSA held discussions with the consultant leading this review process. During this meeting, NIPSA advocated for a pay system that acknowledges the unique skillset of the staff based at SNISI, many of whom possess qualifications and experience akin to healthcare professionals within the NHS's Agenda for Change pay system.

NIPSA highlighted the disparity between the current pay structure and the potential earnings under the NHS grading system, emphasizing that the previous pay system, established ten years prior to the NICS scales, still offered more competitive compensation. Moreover, NIPSA underscored that many members accepted their current pay conditions due to the opportunity to work with elite athletes and events, expressing concerns that any deviation from this model could result in increased staff turnover.

In March, NIPSA received the final report and drafted a response. Initial observations suggested that the report recommended outsourcing certain roles, a proposition that NIPSA vehemently opposed.

An action plan was drawn up in collaboration with staff and NIPSA. This alleviated some of the concerns expressed by NIPSA but continued to monitor the process closely ensuring that it delivered fair compensation and job security for members at SNISL.

**JNCC:** During the year, TUS met with Management Side (MS) via a Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee (JNCC) meeting. NIPSA sought an update on the Health & Safety action plan, which had been outstanding since February 2023 and covers all the Sport NI sites. The union stressed the importance of having a comprehensive and effective Health and Safety strategy to ensure the well-being of all staff across various locations.

Work-life balance was another key issue raised by TUS, particularly in light of budget constraints and ongoing vacancies. The union emphasised the need for MS to consider the impact of these factors on employee morale and productivity, advocating for measures that could help alleviate stress and workload pressures on current staff.

Recruitment was a significant topic of discussion. NIPSA highlighted the urgent need to fill several key positions, which included:

- Finance Manager
- Investment Appraisal Manager
- Policy Officer
- Countryside Officer
- Five E02 support posts.

Filling these roles was critical for maintaining the operational efficiency and effectiveness of Sport NI thus supporting our members.

Furthermore, TUS raised the necessity of reviewing and updating organisational policies. The Recruitment and Selection policy was identified as a top priority, along with the creation of a lateral transfer policy. These updates are essential to ensure fair and transparent processes that support career development and internal mobility for staff.

Overall, the meetings were productive, with TUS making clear the urgent need for progress on these critical issues. NIPSA remained committed to collaborating with MS to ensure that these concerns were addressed promptly and effectively. The union continued to monitor developments closely and advocate for the best interests of its members.

## B3.28 Utility Regulator

**Pay:** NIPSA Members in the Utility Regulator voted to accept the pay offer from Management which included:

- One step progression subject to scale maximum;
- All spine points on all scales revalorised by 5%;
- For any staff in receipt of a salary in excess of a scale maximum, the 5% would be based on the scale maximum.



# Section C

## Public Officers

Education & Further/Higher Education

Health and Social Care

Libraries NI

Local Authorities

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Other Bodies



# C1 Education & Further/Higher Education

## C1.1 Education Authority (EA)

### Industrial Action & Pay and Grading Review

NIPSA took industrial action which commenced in 2023 and included a prolonged period of action short of strike action. The dispute was in relation to long standing issues with the pay scales and a moratorium on job evaluation.

Negotiations to settle the dispute took place in June 2024 and continued over the summer months. The outcome was an agreement that the grading structure would be revaluated to address extended scales and discriminatory pay structure. This placed many low paid staff on much higher pay points and created space for those on the top of scales to gain incremental progression over the next few years. The agreement also included guarantees to progress with Job Evaluation and address grading and differential issues in sections of the workforce. Stage 2 of the agreement included a £2550 compensation payment which will reach staff in April 2025.

This proposal was put to NIPSA members and agreed by ballot in September 2024 and industrial action was suspended.

### JNC and Directorate Forums

#### Finance

**Financial Position:** EA's Initial Budget allocation for 2024-25 was £2,426m which was £360m lower than prior year and fell significantly short of 2024-25 requirements, creating a funding gap of £497m across all recurrent budgets.

In August 24, EA received additional funding allocations totalling £306.8m. These allocations were intended to fund the:

- recurrent impact of the teachers' pay award
- increased employers' pension contribution rate
- impact of the 2024 contractual teaching pay increment
- SEN pressures
- Year 1 of the Pre-School Education Standardisation initiative.

The additional budget was allocated as follows:

- ASB: £190.6m (all Teaching Pay)
- Block Grant: £111.7m (Teaching Pay £28.015m + SEN pressures £83.659m)
- Earmarked: £4.5m (Pre-School Education Standardisation)

As a result of these budget allocations and additional savings and net easements, a funding gap of £174m was reported in the October MEMR. This position includes savings measures of £24.7m across a range of budgets.

60% of schools are expected to be in deficit at the end of the financial year. Although this is an improvement on the Initial Budget position where 80% were expected to be in deficit by year end it is still a deterioration on the 2023/24 closing position where 50% of schools were in deficit.

EA continues to work closely with DE throughout 2024-25 to maximise the use of resources across the education sector. EA's financial target is to maintain any underspends within 0.75% of budget and to avoid all overspends. The 2024-25 financial position is extremely challenging. The reality is there is nowhere near enough funding to support all aspects of the Education Sector in Northern Ireland. This has been the case for many years, and it continues to deteriorate further.

**Accounts Payable:** The dispute relating to the structure and grading in Accounts Payable is ongoing, however steps have been taken to resolve the longstanding issues. A new structure and job descriptions have been proposed and NIPSA are engaging in consultations.

### Children & Young People

**SEN & SEND Transformation:** NIPSA holds seats on both the SEN and SEND Transformation boards. An end to end review of special needs was carried out and transformation aims to look at early intervention and support special needs before the child is statemented. There will also be the inclusion of Local Integrated Teams (LIT) which will be assigned to a child. The role of Classroom Assistants in this transformed service has been raised and remains NIPSA's focus. NIPSA will prioritise maintain and building on CA staffing numbers and ensuring the correct grade and pay is awarded for SEN work.

**Education Welfare Officers:** The EWO's continued industrial action (action short of strike action) into September of this year. An agreement was met which placed the EWO's on a new grade and a new structure which included promotion opportunities. The industrial action was suspended and the new grade, duties and structure is in the process of being implemented.

### **Operations & Estates**

**Catering:** Following the pay and grading review, Catering was impacted by a collapsed differential between posts and grades. To resolve this issue, a proposal for new structure is in the process of consultation. NIPSA has raised issues with proposed job descriptions and additional duties. There are also issues with the recruitment process of the new grades/posts. Work to resolve this issues is ongoing.

**Maintenance & Transport:** Transformation in both Maintenance and Transport was also required following pay and grading. The Transport transformation is complete and Maintenance will be addressed following the Catering consultation.

### **Policies and Procedures**

**Flexi & Toil:** NIPSA are opposing detrimental changes being proposed in new Flexi and Toil policies proposed to harmonise staff on TUPE protected terms and conditions. The proposed policies were not satisfactory and NIPSA were unable to engage on the paperwork presented. Management have been tasked to draft a new proposed policy which will see staff harmonised without detriment.

## **C1.2 Education Authority Belfast Region (EABR)**

During 2024 NIPSA members were continued to be represented at all stages of the redundancy process within the Education Authority (Belfast Region). The redundancies are attributed to SEN children leaving the school.

Members in EA Belfast Region have also been consulted within their directorates in relation to reorganisation proposals.

Work during the year also focused on keeping

members informed of the discussions with the Education Minister in relation to the NJC Pay discussions. The EA received approval to meet their contractual obligations for implementing the NJC Pay in December 2024.

A meeting was convened for 28 March 2024 where members were updated on the ongoing negotiations regarding the Pay and Grading Review in EA.

Further meetings were held over several months where members met in person and virtually and were informed of the ongoing negotiations regarding the Pay and Grading Review in EA. These negotiations concluded and members were issued with a consultative ballot in August/September in relation to the EA offer via an email voting system. On 17 September 2024 the Joint Negotiating Council Circular No. 352 on The Pay and Grading Review Agreement was issued.

Late in 2024 the Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) were informed that they were moving from Cliftonville Primary School to Loughshore Education Centre in Jordanstown.

As a result of this news the Full-time facilities officer that had been based in the NIPSA Office there also became aware that they were also moving from Cliftonville PS and had not been formally notified. A lot of negotiations with Management took place to agree a new office for this person and by the end of the year no office was identified. Further discussions will take place in 2025 to resolve this issue.

Mid 2024, NIPSA were approached by Methodist College in the EA Belfast Region regarding the potential of outsourcing their cleaning. They engaged in a tender process and Bidvest Noonan were awarded the contract. There were several TUPE Meetings with management and the new provider. The transfer took place mid November and did not go as smoothly as was promised. Negotiations and discussions are still continuing into 2025.

The Branch Secretary arranged with the Full-time official for an evening where School Reps would be trained in what their role would involve as a school based rep and contact. This training took place virtually on 21 October 2024 from 7-9pm. More training of this type will be organised for 2025.

### **C1.3 Education Authority North Eastern Region (EANER)**

The year started with a major day of action across the public sector, NIPSA and Education played a significant role on the day and despite the very poor weather credit must be given to the Branch for organizing lines and supporting the action across the region.

Music Service staff within the Northeastern Region identified issues with the payment of mileage for compulsory overtime. This has led to a detriment for those within this region so a grievance was lodged and heard in June with considerable evidence having been gathered and presented to the panel. Management have taken some time to review and reconcile the evidence provided so there has been a delay in providing an outcome however this is expected by the publication of this report.

Issues have been raised in regard to legacy arrangements around leave within a part of the catering service, this is still under investigation and has been escalated to Assistant Secretary to raise directly with management.

School management continued to misinform members in regard to questions relating to redundancy and permanency. These issues continue to be managed locally by the Branch Secretary and supported by the Headquarters Official.

Notice was issued by management in regard to its estate plan and a number of meetings were held throughout the region to explain the future of some key sites within the EA estate. These meetings were attended by the Branch Secretary and Full-time Official as well as a number of affected members, in particular there was a significant turnout in Ballymena which is earmarked for closure in 2026. Antrim remains a corporate site for now but is included in the EA review.

### **C1.4 Education Authority South Eastern Region (EASER)**

The year started with a significant day of action in the public sector and in particular education. This day of action along with the restarting of the NI

Assembly saw some movement in relation to the implementation of the Education Authority Pay and Grading Review. Despite this movement the Branch continued to be active and identified a number of schools within the Integrated Sector prepared to join in the action. Thanks go to those members in Lagan College and Shimna College who, via consultative ballots, agreed to support the action should an agreement not be reached.

September saw the completion of the merger of three schools in Downpatrick into a new voluntary grammar school. The move of many of our members from EA to the voluntary grammar sector was implemented via TUPE regulations and all terms were protected. Some issues in regard to hours of work were identified after the merger but following meeting with members assurances have been provided and agreement with management reached on the way forward.

A significant grievance case taken by a number of Assistant Directors in EA saw a positive outcome for those involved. This has now prompted the launching of legal action supported by NIPSA.

As with other regions of EA members were invited to meeting with management regarding estate planning and in particular the future of the Dundonald site. This saw a significant turnout by members and robust discussion in regard to managements plan to transform the site from corporate to special needs in order to manage the considerable increase in demand for that sector. It is expected that Dundonald will close as a corporate site early in 2026.

### **C1.5 Education Authority Southern Region (EASR)**

During 2024 NIPSA members were continued to be represented at all stages of the redundancy process within the Education Authority (Southern Region). The redundancies are attributed to SEN children leaving the school.

Members in EA Southern Region have also been consulted within their directorates in relation to reorganisation proposals.

Work during the year also focused on keeping members informed of the discussions with the

Education Minister in relation to the NJC Pay discussions. The EA received approval to meet their contractual obligations for implementing the NJC Pay in December 2024.

A meeting was convened for 28 March 2024 where members were updated on the ongoing negotiations regarding the Pay and Grading Review in EA.

Further meetings were held over several months where members met in person and virtually and were informed of the ongoing negotiations regarding the Pay and Grading Review in EA. These negotiations concluded and members were issued with a consultative ballot in August/September in relation to the EA offer via an email voting system. On 17 September 2024 the Joint Negotiating Council Circular No. 352 on The Pay and Grading Review Agreement was issued.

Membership in Branch 521 has been steadily growing throughout 2024 with the branch having 3213 members at the end of December resulting in it being the largest NIPSA branch.

During 2024, NIPSA were informed that Newbridge Integrated College were going to outsource their cleaning and catering services. The contract was awarded to Mount Charles.

Mid 2024, NIPSA were approached by St Ronan's College in the EA Southern Region regarding the potential of outsourcing their cleaning. RYAK Noonan were awarded the contract. There were several TUPE Meetings with management and the new provider. The transfer took place just after the Halloween break, and at the start of November members became RYAK staff.

The Branch Secretary arranged with the Full-time official for an evening where School Reps would be trained in what their role would involve as a school based rep and contact. This training took place virtually on 1 February 2024 from 6-9pm. More training of this type will be organised for 2025.

## C1.6 Education Authority Western Region (EAWR)

NIPSA continued to represent its members' interests in regard to redundancy, reduction in hours, mergers and closures and engaged with school management and members at each stage of the processes offering guidance and support..

NIPSA supported members affected by the ending of CASE Peace IV Programme.

NIPSA attended a meeting with management and HR in March on the restructure of the music service and followed up with member queries.

NIPSA supported members with varying issues at meetings with management to informally seek resolution to issues to avoid entering into formal procedures.

NIPSA supported members with personal cases under policies and procedures including Absence at Work, Dignity at Work, Disciplinary and appeals and referred a number of personal injury cases to MTB for advice. NIPSA supported members with a number of individual and collective grievances and appeals.

NIPSA supported members within the Education Other Than Schools Service (EOTAS) in meetings with management following a reduction in teaching hours with exploration of additional work within the service.

Following a number of consultations NIPSA met with affected members to aid with formulating comprehensive responses to managements proposals.

NIPSA arranged meetings across the Western area in July to consult on the pay and grading review. NIPSA continued to support members with queries with regards to the Pay and Grading review right throughout the year.

NIPSA supported members in a Voluntary Grammar school where an overpayment to members had been identified and agreed a way forward with management to support for members.

NIPSA attended a consultation meeting in November for members who were previously TUPE'd from WELB to Northgate, then to Capita. It was further proposed being TUPE'd to Fujitsu. Initial meeting



raised significant concerns on a number of issues. NIPSA met with members to take these forward. However in November when consultation meetings had started, NIPSA and GMB were informed that the Education Authority and Fujitsu had mutually agreed on a no fault basis, not to continue with the proposal for transfer and members would remain employed by Capita.

NIPSA attended meetings re review of corporate services across Western Region.

## **C1.7 Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC)**

NIPSA and other unions met with BMC Management again in January 2024 regarding the ongoing redundancy process. The Department for Economy Minister had concerns in relation to the Redundancies happening in Further Education and for a period of time the process was halted. Once approval from the Minister was given on 23 February 2024 the discussions continued regarding the voluntary Severance scheme (VSS) that had been offered out to staff in mid January 2024. These redundancies were to be concluded by 31 March 2024. On 26 March 2024 the first batch of voluntary redundancies were processed with the Labour Relations Agency - LRA present as well as TUS to assure that the CO3s were explained fully and completed properly. The voluntary redundancies had a completion date of 30 June 2024 as agreed with TUS and the Department for Economy due to business needs in the College. There are to be discussions regarding potential restructuring following this exercise. As a result of the VSS scheme in BMC there have been several changes internally that have not been discussed with TUS and we raised this as a concern as members were contacting us with regard to these changes without consultation with NIPSA.

Towards the end of 2023 BMC wrote to Trade Unions to advise that they were withdrawing from the CEF - College Employers Forum due to governance issues. When pressed the Principal would not go into any further detail. The NTSNC - Non Teaching Staff Negotiating Committee had also been cancelled several times too. A meeting was held with all our members to update them on the Redundancy process and in

this meeting a vote of 'No confidence' in the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) was proposed and seconded with it being carried unanimously. The other unions - UNITE and Unison and their members were also present at this meeting. TUS wrote to the Principal on 23 February 2024 to advise of the outcome of the vote taken at our joint meeting. Interim measures were put in place to address the withdrawal of BMC to allow for implementation of pay agreements. A review is ongoing of the CEF by the Department for the Economy. There is a new interim Principal in place now in BMC as the previous Principal took up another position in the NI Civil Service. This interim Principal remains in post at the end of 2024. The next Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) meeting is scheduled for 24 January 2025.

NIPSA and other Trade Unions were informed of a 12-week consultation exercise that was issued to all stakeholders in October 2023 in relation to a proposal to close their Castlereagh Campus. This 12-week consultation exercise sought feedback to assess the impact of this proposal on the College, staff and the wider community. Consultation with staff commenced in November through several campus briefings so that the College could discuss this proposal with them and the trade unions in more detail and seek our feedback. The Consultation closed on 16 February 2024. The college considered the responses that were submitted and were to respond to Trade Unions when this was complete. This was discussed with BMCs Board of Governors at their June 2024 meeting and no decision has been made with regard to the consultation process and responses, therefore no decision on the future of the Castlereagh Campus was made and courses continued to be recruited for the 2024/25 academic year.

NIPSA also wrote to BMC in relation to the NJC Pay award and were advised that the CEF would meet to issue a circular for this to be implemented. A circular was issued in December 2024 with the NJC pay and arrears being implemented in January 2025 pay.

## **C1.8 Northern Regional College (NRC)**

Redundancy discussions continued with the voluntary redundancy scheme being offered out to staff in mid January 2024 for redundancies to be concluded by 31 March 2024. The Department for Economy Minister had concerns in relation to the Redundancies happening in Further Education and for a period of time the process was halted. Once approval from the Minister was given on 23 February 2024 the discussions continued regarding the voluntary severance scheme - VSS that was offered out to staff in mid January 2024. These redundancies were to be concluded by 31 March 2024.

The Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) Meeting that had been scheduled for June 2024 was postponed. Several requests to Management were made to get another date set up. TUS had been asking for dates to be scheduled for the incoming academic year, largely due to NIPSA being made aware by members of internal changes taking place in NRC. These changes were not consulted with TUS and as a result the 3 unions for the Support Staff, namely NIPSA, Unison and Unite have written jointly to the Chief Executive/Principal and the Head of HR at the beginning of November to advise that they were unhappy at the lack of consultation and engagement with TUS. A date was then scheduled for a JCC on 24 January 2025.

Work concluded on the new build Causeway Campus in Coleraine with the building being officially opened on 2 October 2024 with lots of dignitaries and guests in attendance. Work continues with the new build at the Farm Lodge Campus in Ballymena. The new build is to open in 2025, when the other Campus in Trostan Avenue Ballymena will be closed.

NIPSA also wrote to NRC in relation to the NJC Pay award and were advised that the CEF would meet to issue a circular for this to be implemented. A circular was issued in December 2024 with the NJC pay and arrears being implemented in January 2025 pay.

## **C1.9 North West Regional College (NWRC)**

NIPSA continued to meet with HR throughout the year with updates given on the College's financial position, Digital Transformation in HR, Recruitment

& Selection, Health & Wellbeing initiatives, Learning and Development, & the Hybrid Working Scheme.

NIPSA continued to attend meetings re the voluntary severance process in the college and supported members throughout and represented their individual concerns and wider concerns re the process of consultation to management at scheduled meetings.

NIPSA followed up with information to members re holiday pay case class action.

NIPSA supported members with job evaluation processes including appeals both on an individual and collective level.

NIPSA's Branch Equality Officer attended the College's Equality Working Group and successfully called for College representation for the first time ever at Foyle Pride.

NIPSA supported and assisted members with personal cases including return to work meetings and long-term absence meetings.

## **C1.10 Southern Regional College (SRC)**

This year saw the completion of a voluntary severance scheme within the sector and Southern Regional saw the departure of a number of staff though this was kept to a minimum with no NIPSA members coming forward to seek support.

We also saw the election of a new committee with representation now available across a number of the sites and with an increasing membership the committee hope to see support across all sites. Thanks go out to the outgoing Branch Secretary who held the Branch on their own for a number of years and who continues to support the current Committee.

## **C1.11 South Eastern Regional College (SERC)**

Due to the financial pressure within the FE sector Southeastern Regional College initiated a voluntary severance scheme. This saw the departure of approximately 19 staff mostly within the management grades. While this had a lesser impact on our membership there remains concern about the



cascade of duties to other grades. This continues to be a point of discussion locally and with the newly appointed Chief Executive.

Locally issues regarding policy, personal cases, and restructuring continue to be managed by the Branch with more complex cases being referred to the Full-time Official when appropriate.

## **C1.12 South West College (SWRC)**

NIPSA attended joint Trade Union and management meetings throughout the year with updates given on: SWC financial position, appraisals, sickness absence, student targets and recruitment, workforce development, fixed terms contracts in the college, culture and well-being Initiatives, Social and Wellbeing committee, data management, Culture/Change programme, Further Education (FE) review and management realignment and college priorities. The terms of reference for joint TU college liaison were reviewed in October.

NIPSA wrote to the college in March to request details of the HR portal seeking to standardise the processes on the notification and recording of sickness absence. HR responded that the sector was working collectively on developing the HR Portal and agreeing a common approach and it was a work in progress.

NIPSA followed up with information to members to submit claims on holiday pay.

NIPSA continued to attend meetings re the voluntary severance process in the college and supported members throughout and represented their individual concerns in addition to wider concerns re the process of consultation to management at scheduled meetings.

NIPSA supported members affected by the realignment of departments.

NIPSA wrote to the CE to request that the college addresses the lack of any job evaluation process in the college. The college position was that they evaluated posts only when the need arose such as when restructuring, but members were not able to request an evaluation of their post. NIPSA sent management the pilot best practice Procedural

across the four UK regions, proving what can be accomplished through focused and determined campaigning. The results can be seen below -

A Northern Ireland specific set of mileage rates have been agreed through partnership working. The new rates, which will be effective from 1 April 2024, shall be:

- 58 pence per mile for the first 4,500 miles travelled in any financial year (1 April - 31 March); and
- 30 pence per mile for each mile thereafter in that same financial year.

These rates are in recognition of the integrated nature of the HSC, and the rurality of large parts of the local population.

The rates are not to be considered as static and may be reviewed at the request of either Employers' or Staff Side at JNCF should evidence suggest that the prevailing costs of motoring have increased or decreased.

### **Safe Staffing Legislation**

NIPSA's relentless fight for safer staffing levels has brought about significant progress. The draft legislation for safe staffing is now moving through the Stormont Executive, represents a major step forward. NIPSA's HSC Central Panel have acknowledged this progress, are also fully committed to achieving not just legislation but results on the ground. Our action therefore still continues, this includes:

- All NIPSA members whose employment contract does not include providing statistical returns as a core function are instructed to cease all additional routine tasks associated with the provision of statistical returns to employers.
- All NIPSA Members to withdraw use of personal mobiles for work related activity and withdraw telephone cover for calls associated with other teams or absent colleagues outside of their substantive role.
- Hours of work will be strictly within normal paid hours;
- No unpaid work;

Framework Policy document as devised by NIPSA and asked the college to consider this. This would have allowed members to have their posts evaluated when requested. Management put forward a draft procedure 15th October, however, NIPSA wrote to the college 11th November to request a meeting to discuss due to having a number of concerns. At end of year a meeting to discuss was to be arranged.

NIPSA wrote to CE 19th November re the NJC pay award 2024/25 asking for details of plans for implementation and requesting that members were given the option to have payments paid in instalments for those in receipt of benefits. CE responded 27th November stating that a business case was being prepared for DoE for uplift and back monies and that no definite date for payments could be confirmed at that point. CE also noted request re admin of payment.

NIPSA supported and assisted members with personal cases including, investigations disciplinarys, dignity at work and grievances.

Branch AGM held in November saw new committee elected.

### **C1.13 Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)**

Following a breakdown of industrial relations between the Branch and management the LRA were approached to support a restoration of the JCNC. As a result of the support provided by the LRA and meaningful discussion on both sides JCNC restarted after 21 months. This saw a significant shift in industrial relations however it has also identified a considerable number of outstanding issues that are still under discussion. Recruitment, job evaluation, pay and grading, holiday pay and location are all matters yet to be resolved. A new Branch committee will take these matters forward over the coming year.

### **C1.14 Queens University Belfast (QUB)**

There has been significant change within the Branch this year with a new committee being elected. Thanks go to the outgoing Branch Secretary and Branch Chair for their support during their time in post.

The new Committee had little time to settle in as Queen's University began its first local negotiations on pay. Local negotiations are a result of the university being suspended from the national negotiating body (UCEA) following the settlement of industrial action by UCU. This provided an opportunity for a deal to be struck that is not defined by the poorest institution within the national negotiating framework.

Discussions on pay have resulted in a three year deal for members with further discussion to held in regard to grading structures. Despite the deal struck over pay pressure will remain on the university to achieve the Real Living Wage Employer status that they undertook to obtain in 2023.

At the time of writing Queen's have informed NIPSA, and its sister trade unions, of the launch of a voluntary severance scheme despite the collective push-back by all three recognised trade unions. This could see a decline in industrial relations despite any gains made this year.

### **C1.15 Stranmillis University College**

Stranmillis Branch continue to engage with management over a range of local matters with reference to the Full-time Official when something more complex arises. Issues of a collective nature are passed to the Official for discussion with management and the latest matter for discussion is around a restructuring of pay arrangements. Discussions have already taken place in regard to grade structures following an increase in the minimum wage earlier this year. Relations remain positive and it is expected that this will continue..

# C2 Health and Social Care

## C2.1 NIPSA Health Branches

Western Health and Social Care Trust  
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust  
Northern Health and Social Care Trust  
Southern Health and Social Care Trust  
South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust  
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust  
Business Services Organisation

### Introduction

This year, our collective voice has been heard loudly and clearly. Together, we have demonstrated unwavering solidarity and determination, and the impact of your efforts has been felt throughout the region. From historic industrial action to groundbreaking legislative achievements, this has been a year to remember for NIPSA Health Branches.

This success has come during a period of significant change to the staff and structures within headquarters which make the results even more remarkable and is reflective of the format of this year's annual report being overarching for all branches.

### Achievements and Key Highlights

#### Historic Industrial Action and Pay Negotiations January 23/24

The year began with the biggest industrial action seen in a generation. On Thursday 18 January 2024, NIPSA's solidarity with other public sector unions led to the achievement of a 5% pay offer and a one-off payment of £1,505 in Health but also contributed to similar pay offers for our members in civil service and education. This result was a testament to NIPSA's resilience and unity, setting the tone for the rest of the year.

#### Mileage Rates Victory

NIPSA's ASOSA (Action Short of Strike Action) efforts to secure better mileage rates were hugely successful, while other unions industrial action concluded with the pay offer. NIPSA Health Branches continue to struggle to achieve appropriate mileage rates taking into consideration the cost-of-living crisis. Through this action NIPSA health branches achieved the highest mileage payment per mile

- No coverage provided for vacant posts;
- No coverage for long term sick or maternity leave;
- Take all normal breaks.
- Ensure Employer adheres strictly to health and safety protocols
- Refusing to cover the work of other workers taking industrial action (except in life and limb emergencies)

There are other elements that are specific to each individual branch and are available from the Branch Secretaries.

While there is still much to be done, this achievement to date within the legislation highlights the power of consistent advocacy and action.

#### Family And Childcare (FAC) Dispute and Selective Strike Action

The FAC dispute remains ongoing and some progress has been made. Three periods of successful selective strike action took place in May, October and November of 2024 in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT), South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT), and Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT). The Strike action included marches and rallies to Castle Buildings and Erskine House in Belfast City Centre. These actions led to intense negotiations and meetings with Senior Management and ultimately the Health Minister, Mike Nesbitt. As no firm offer has been made, NIPSA's Central Panel is moving to increase the Action Short of Strike Action to include a cap on the amount of cases our members can handle if management can't determine what safe staffing levels are, NIPSA will not be found wanting in deliver the message.

#### Pay Negotiations 2024/25

The 24/25 pay offer of 5% that was imposed falls short of achieving parity and remains incomplete. As it stands NIPSA has not or cannot agree to Management's imposing action. The offer falls short of pay parity something that NIPSA has long campaigned for and achieved in the previous pay offer. We were therefore not in a position to accept anything less. While other trade unions have accepted this offer as parity appears to be re-established from June 1 2024,

it is not fully parity for the tax year 23/24. NIPSA are continuing to pursue the remaining funds owed and will not rest until this money is returned and full parity is realised for this year. As it stands, NIPSA has not agreed to this offer, recognizing that it does not meet the standards our members deserve. We continue to pursue the remaining funds owed to you and will not rest until pay parity is fully realised.

## Legal Redress for Health Workers

NIPSA continues to pursue legal redress for health workers in several key areas. These include:

- **Holiday pay cases:** (Agnew judgement) Management have presented trade union side with an offer on how to address the payment of holiday pay going forward. It has not been accepted to date as further clarification is being sought before it can be put to membership. To date management have not made an offer to address the retrospective payments we have claimed and legal redress is still being sought through MTB )
- **Wakefulness payments:** Following the judgement on this case it became clear that our members were not seeking this payment as it was unclear as to the process. NIPSA has sought clarity from each of the trusts and the responses have led NIPSA to seek advice on how we move this issue forward.
- **Injury to feelings claims:** related to pension changes. This case is ongoing and at time of press no substantial progress can be reported.
- **Senior executives pay/ legal case:** Management have made a Pay offer to regarding these members, the offer has elements that NIPSA cannot accept and we are not in a position to put to our membership. As the offer does not address the retrospection required to settle the civil court action lodged by our members this case is still ongoing

These ongoing efforts highlight our commitment to securing justice and fair treatment for all members.

## Supporting Members

Beyond headline successes, NIPSA branches in Health have worked tirelessly to support members on a wide range of issues, including:

- Disciplinary and grievance cases
- Facility arrangements
- Organisational reviews
- Service reviews

This dedication to both individual and collective concerns underscores the essential role NIPSA Health Branches have played in improving conditions for workers across the sector.

## Changes to Health Structure in HQ

In response to feedback from health branches, NIPSA HQ committed to several initiatives to better support your vital work:

### 1. New Negotiating Structure

- A dedicated health official will represent your branch at the highest levels of negotiation. The individuals will work to strengthen connections between branches and HQ.

### 2. Bespoke Training for Branch Officers

- Training programs provided by the newly appointed training officer in Harkin House and covers all aspects of Agenda for Change procedures, including job evaluation, disciplinary processes, and grievance handling.

### 3. Enhanced Communications Strategy

- A new strategy will focus on improving engagement with members, ensuring timely updates and clearer messaging.

### 4. NIPSA Website Improvements

- Significant upgrades to the website will provide health members with better resources, easier access to information, and a more effective platform for sharing updates.

These initiatives highlight NIPSA HQ's commitment to empowering health branches and acknowledging the critical role they play in the union's success.

## Challenges Ahead

While we celebrate the achievements of the past year, the ongoing year promises to be equally challenging. The imposed 24/25 pay offer has already proven contentious, breaking parity in real terms by failing to align with GB agreements. NIPSA remains committed to securing the pay and conditions you deserve through all means necessary including continuing industrial action.

## C3 Libraries NI

The long running Branch Library Manager dispute has been resolved with the majority of members accepting the offer from management as a result of the protracted negotiation process. Payments were made to members in late summer following the signing of CO3 agreements at Labour Relations Agency.

This in turn has led to the resumption of the local negotiating forums and engagement with management on the resolution of local matters.

As a result of this, members in the Library Assistant grades raised concern on how additional training they were enrolled on could lead to them taking on responsibilities above and beyond what is included in their job description without proper remuneration.

Management have advised that these concerns will be dealt with during the course of their upcoming restructure however as a top down approach is being adopted, members are dissatisfied as no definitive date can be given and have lodged a collective complaint based on this.

Lone working continues to be a concern particularly in areas outside of central Belfast where staffing numbers are low with vacancies not being filled or only on a temporary basis through agency. Despite being consistently raised with management of what can only be described as a staffing crisis, in their refusal to acknowledge this, it could be perceived as a deliberate running down of the service making it unsustainable to keep these Branches open.

Due to the steady decline of staff leaving, this has had an impact on membership numbers with not enough new staff being recruited. Owing to this, a Branch mapping exercise is being carried out to identify areas we may be lacking in numbers so that we may direct resources were required.

The standard of Health & Safety continues to improve in Libraries NI with more members requesting inspections of their work areas, whilst awareness is being raised of specific issues for resolution.

The reporting of incidents has improved as members have been advised to ignore directives from area and district managers to not record incidents or

near misses on the internal system for recording and investigation.

This in turn has led to improved interactions of the local Safety Committee with genuine attempts being made to improve worker safety throughout the organisation.



# C4 Local Authorities

## C4.1 Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council (ANBC)

**Staffing Structures:** Following the appointment of the new Chief Executive Officer, he has sought to dismantle what was agreed previously to accommodate budgetary constraints. This has led to conversations on a further potential Voluntary Severance scheme running, despite Council having just come through this under its previous regime and a further restructure.

Vacancies continue to remain at various grades throughout the organisation with retention of staff also posing a problem due to the lack of a hybrid working policy. This has proved to be a major barrier particularly when recruiting for critical roles particularly within the Health & Safety section.

Initial discussions have taken place with a view to selling Antrim Civic Centre and relocating all staff within this building to Mossley Mill. To date, nothing firm has been received by Joint Trade Union Side.

**Terms & Conditions:** Following the claim by the new Chief Executive Officer on the affordability of the proposed Terms & Conditions, as it would cost an additional £500k per year, a brake has been applied to progressing this with a view to renegotiation otherwise it would require an increase on rates. This is a position Council is keen to avoid.

Proposals have been put forward by Council on how to address this, with the most likely, and cheapest option being to rely upon natural wastage to even this out. Given that there are over 230 employees this will affect, a further Voluntary Severance scheme is being proposed, with it being aimed at workers among this group to slim down and speed up the process of full alignment to ANBC Terms & Conditions.

NIPSA has continued to raise the point of perceived fairness on this issue as Councillors continue to receive increases to their allowances while not sharing the financial burden workers are being subject to. Once again with this Council it is a case of labour must wait.

To attempt to make this more palatable, Council are now proposing to shift focus on to a Pay & Grading

review to correct any financial imbalances on job descriptions. The timeline for this has been envisaged to take until mid-2027 providing that work can commence immediately.

**Policy Review:** In consultation with the Joint Trade Unions, policies have been agreed on bereavement, personal development and Health & Safety.

As a result of the abandonment of the Terms & Conditions, policies on pay protection and voluntary severance are taking priority and being fast tracked.

## C4.2 Ards and North Down Borough Council (ANDBC)

**Job Evaluation:** Unfortunately, the process for job evaluation has not yet been agreed, talks are ongoing. Trade Union Side submitted a draft Job Evaluation Scheme Procedural Framework agreement which we are waiting for a response from management. We are hopeful that this will see movement early in 2025.

**Restructuring:** Following the appointment of Susie McCullough as Chief Executive in May 2024, Joint Trade Union Side met with her, at the meeting she indicated that she would be taking some time to visit all areas within the council with a view to looking at structures and making sure they are fit for purpose and operating in the most efficient way. Assurances were given that it was not a cost-cutting exercise and she didn't see a need for redundancy. Dates are in the Diary for engagement early 2025.

**Policy Review:** In consultation with the Joint Trade Unions, as part of the review process, Council have reviewed the following core policies:

- Disciplinary Policy
- Capability Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Managing Attendance Policy
- Dignity at work

**Absence Management:** The Council noted, the increasing amount of mental health related absence. The Council looked at new initiatives which are proactive in nature. The Corporate Leadership Team agreed to a pilot scheme for 50-60 employees.

Insula Wellbeing provided 1 to 1 sessions with staff, during which they completed a clinical mental health wellbeing check. A confidential report was sent by Insula Wellbeing to the individuals post session. This was not shared with the Council. Participation in the pilot scheme was entirely voluntary. The council reported the scheme was oversubscribed and follow-up engagement with staff was very positive. The Leadership team have extended the pilot for another 100 staff and are hoping to continue the scheme in 2025. NIPSA members also reported that the sessions helped them, and the experience was positive.

### C4.3 Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council (ACBC)

Due to Industrial action involving NIPSA and GMB at the beginning of the Year, and further industrial action involving UNITE. Relationships between the three unions have not been without difficulties. In an attempt to address interunion issues a meeting was attended by officials and local representatives to clear the air and discuss a way forward for better working together. We continue to build on this, communication and relationships continue to improve.

As a result of the strike action engagement with management on issues other than that of the disputes has been limited.

**Job Evaluation:** Unfortunately, the process for job evaluation has not yet been agreed, talks are ongoing. Trade Union Side submitted a draft Job Evaluation Scheme Procedural Framework agreement which we are waiting for a response from management. We are hopeful that this will see movement early in 2025.

**Policy Review:** There has been ongoing engagement/negotiation with management in relation to producing ABC Council policies while considering legacy council policies. This is a lengthy process and while management are frustrated by time delays it is important to take time to analyse and compare each policy.

**Additional Facility Release:** The Council agreed to release one full-time union representative from each

union to help facilitate negotiations, gather and correlate information/feedback from employees in relation to proposals that would affect them. After a few setbacks we now have identified the three individuals and expect them to be released early 2025.

### C4.4 Belfast City Council (BCC)

**Pay & Grading:** Following the agreement of the NJC pay award for 2024/2025 of £1290 on all spinal column points, this was implemented throughout the year and paid in a timely fashion to all eligible staff. JTUS and MS were engaged in negotiations on a Pay & Grading review throughout the last year. The aim of this review was instigated to address a number of issues such as; providing a two point incremental progression to all staff in line with other local government areas and addressing issues of overlap in certain grades. Following protracted negotiations between management and TUS the terms of this review were agreed and the following outcomes achieved. All eligible staff on BCC NJC terms and conditions received a second incremental progression, overlapping of grades was addressed by the amalgamation of certain existing grades, providing increased headroom for staff previously on the maxima of their pay scale. Further to this TUS were able to secure an additional one off payment of 7/12 of one incremental progression for all staff. Members within BCC were then balloted on this offer and this was agreed with an overwhelming majority. Following the successful ballot the structures were implemented and all relevant arrears paid in the latter part of 2024. As a result of this review a small number of issues were identified with staff who had transferred for previous councils and other employers who had not been offered a transfer opportunity to BCC terms and conditions. TUS are currently engaged in discussions with these members and making representations to management. On completion of this review management have committed to engagement on resolving any outstanding single status issues.

**Job Evaluation:** In the latter part of 2023 issues were identified with the process used to carry out job evaluation within BCC as they fell outside the provisions outlined in the GLPC scheme, this was

initially identified as a result of a grievance raised by Nipsa members. Following on from this, tentative steps were taken between management and TUS with a view to addressing these issues and a commitment to resolution provided by management. Due to the prioritising of completing the BCC Pay & Grading review this project was put on hold due to a duplication of necessary resources within HR. On completion of the Pay & Grading review the necessary resources were allocated within BCC HR to advance this project and in the last quarter of 2024 initial meetings were held between TUS and management. To date a sub-committee of JNCC has been established with TUS agreeing their nominees and terms of reference agreed.

**Average Holiday Pay:** As per a previous agreement between TUS and management members previously received back pay of two years in respect of average holiday pay. It was further agreed that a further two years back pay would be paid if the appeal by the PSNI was unsuccessful. On this unsuccessful appeal process were put in place whereby arrears would be paid to all eligible staff and these were paid throughout 2024.

**Policies:** The following policies have been progressed, updated or agreed this year:

- Neonatal Leave Policy.
- Driver GPS protocol.
- Car Parking Policy.
- Leave arrangement- Negotiations remain ongoing via discussions between BCC and TUS legal counsel.
- New and expectant mothers Code of Practice.
- Attendance Policy.

**Industrial Relations (IR) Framework:** As a result of identifying a number of training issues in the previous year further training for managers in relation to the IR Framework was proposed and delivered throughout the year with improvements being noted. A final review of the IR framework was undertaken and agreed.

**Notice of Motion- 4 Day Week:** As a result of a notice of motion tabled at a full council meeting, the proposal for a 4 day week has remained an ongoing

issue and is a standing agenda item at JNCC meetings. Despite reluctance from management TUS continue to press the issue at JNCC level with a view to piloting the scheme in an operation area. To date no agreement has been reached, however TUS and management continue to engage in benchmarking exercises across a variety of sectors.

**Notice of Motion- Irish Language/Bi-lingual Signage Policy:** As a result of a notice of motion tabled at a full council meeting it was proposed that BCC signage adopt both English and Irish language. This has been discussed at JNCC and a number of staff consultation exercises completed with a further public consultation carried out. Due to the high number of responses the results of this consultation are still being worked through.

## C4.5 Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council (CCGBC)

**LRA Observer:** The independent person appointed to oversee the JCNC, Health & Safety and Action Group meetings, as an outcome of the mediation at LRA in 2023, has so far been unable to complete an Industrial Relations Framework document due to a prolonged absence. No substitute was provided by LRA as a reserve list was not drawn up.

Discussion is currently ongoing with a view to the extension of the twelve month timeframe, to take into account the length of absence, to facilitate completion of the document. This has yet to be agreed.

**Council Structure:** Discussions took place throughout the year with members affected by this review to hear their views and concerns on each of the potential options.

Structure options have been shared with JTUS and meetings have occurred with the Local Government Staff Commission to provide greater clarity and insight.

Anticipated timelines have been adhered to with a draft document prepared however due to lack of availability for JCNC meetings, this has yet to be formally presented to JTUS.

**Policy:** Consultation is ongoing on the Fleet Management Policy which encompasses CCTV, mobile phone use and asset management. Concern was raised in that the Memorandum of Understanding regarding this, states that Fleet Managers do not have full control of fleets. It also transpired that Council is paying twice for the same job in that hire vehicles, once leased, are sent to Councils contracted mechanic to ensure roadworthiness. As yet this has not been agreed.

Council proposed changes to its redundancy policy however concern has been raised with scoring matrixes and criterion being used to assess posts. Feedback has been provided by JTUS however due to the postponement of JCNC meetings this has yet to be agreed.

Council reported that changes to its Annual Leave policy where agreed, in that leave would be recorded in hours for all non-standard work patterns and would be pro-rata'd as they occur. This agreement has been disputed by JTUS as concern on the legality of this has yet to be resolved considering that it is not in keeping with the terms of the Green Book.

## **C4.6 Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC)**

NIPSA continued to attend local Joint Negotiating and Consultation Forum (JCNF) with updates given on Voluntary Severance and sub structure reviews, hybrid working review, Be Well, internal training and E learning, electronic payslips and leisure updates.

NIPSA commented several policies under review.

Throughout 2024 NIPSA continued to liaise and meet with HR and management to progress the Planners assimilating over to Councils T's & C's. The Planners were TUPED from Civil Service to Council in 2015. NIPSA requested information for members in this process as to the direct impact on them if assimilating over. In addition to wider group of affected members NIPSA also sought recognition for HPTO grade who experienced detriment over a longer period. Negotiations concluded in June and the final offer was put to members. The majority chose to transfer over and arrangements were put in place to progress this following approval at September Council Committee

meeting. Process almost concluded at end of year.

A number of members in planning contacted NIPSA in relation to several issues within the department. NIPSA wrote to the Chief Executive in April who agreed to meet and a number of meetings have taken place throughout the year to support the members and deal with the issues.

NIPSA continued to follow-up on previous request to the Council following the pay uplift negotiations in 2022 to request that the council consider moving beyond the previously agreed PO6 grade in the interests of fairness and equality and in light of the fact that other Councils have awarded beyond PO6. NIPSA raised again at June's JCNC and the Chief Executive agreed for this to be brought forward at a later JCNC towards the end of the tax year. NIPSA wrote again in December and so continued to pursue at end of year.

NIPSA met with Head of HR in January to discuss Job Evaluations processes historically and moving forward. HR gave a commitment to consider the councils position. At JCNC NIPSA raised the issue of Job Evaluations proposing that Council consider the implementation of NIPSA's pilot Job evaluation. Council agreed that NIPSA deliver a presentation at September JCNC. In September NIPSA Assistant Secretary gave a presentation on NIPSA's pilot proposal of Job Evaluations to Joint Negotiation Consultation Committee (JCNC). NIPSA approached sister union UNITE re moving forward, however, at end of year progress on this remained still.

NIPSA met with HR and management in February to raise concerns as to the circulation of what appeared to be an ad hoc Terms of Reference document that was circulated to coaches in Leisure by managers asking for sign off. NIPSA raised concerns about the content of this and requested that any such document go through the proper channels i.e. Joint Consultation & Negotiating Committee and that all copies circulated and collected by managers be recalled.

The branch asked NIPSA to consider attending (or seeking an alternative representative) the Council's Sustainability and Climate Commission - part of the UK Innovate Programme consisting of 24 organisations from various sectors to collaborate



on reducing carbon emissions across the Council district and City. Follow up arranged to take forward at end of year.

Branch AGM held in November saw a new committee elected.

NIPSA supported and assisted members with personal cases under policies and procedures including Final Case Reviews under Absence At Work, disciplinary, grievances and appeals.

## **C4.7 Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (FODC)**

NIPSA attended Local Joint Consultation & Negotiation Forum (LJCNF) meetings throughout the year with updates given on Environment & Place Working Group, Capital Development Project at Fermanagh Lakeland Forum, Corporate Plan, Employee Policy reviews and Health & Safety and Wellbeing. NIPSA requested staff exit data and it was agreed management would provide this going forward. NIPSA also raised concern at the volume of policies requiring review, management side agreed to review this, with no more than 3 policies put forward for review every two months.

NIPSA commented on a number of Fermanagh and Omagh policies under review. The Branch also submitted comments on the regional Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC) Disciplinary Policy and Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill.

NIPSA joined sister unions UNITE and GMB in writing a letter to the CE regarding the closure of Lakeland Forum due to its redevelopment. At the June LJCNF management side had given assurances that members' employment would be protected and every effort would be made to ensure that they would be redeployed seamlessly within the council. The joint TU letter to the CE raised concerns that members had received correspondence on 25th June stating that their roles were 'at risk' and they have to compete for positions. Joint TU side requested an urgent meeting regarding the decanting of staff from Lakeland Forum. Meeting took place 30th September with reassurances given by management to consider points discussed. HR wrote to joint TU side 4th December to inform them that there was a

delay in the closure timeline due to an outstanding report from the project management team.

There continued to be no formally agreed job evaluation process in the Council. Management were to provide a draft procedure in early summer but this did not materialise, management then informed staff side that a best practice document was due for circulation in November. By end of year this remained outstanding with no agreement reached on moving forward with Job Evaluation.

Branch committee under Freedom of Information had requested scores for a number of posts, this request was initially refused and also refused under appeal. The Branch then forwarded the request to the Information Commissioner who determined that the scores should be released. Council appealed this decision but the scores were then provided. NIPSA continue to support members with job evaluation requests and additional queries following outcomes.

HEO liaised with HR in relation to time out for reps to attend training and the NIPSA annual conference following difficulties around getting release for committee members.

In March the Council declassified a group of members from essential car users status to casual users resulting in the loss of the lump sum. NIPSA supported members in lodging a grievance to have member's classification reinstated, grievance outcome received 28th August with grievance not upheld. NIPSA lodged an appeal which was heard 5th November and outcome of appeal was received 18th December, appeal was upheld and NIPSA linked with HR re implementation of same.

NIPSA requested 'in person' training and clarifications on declarations of 'perceived' conflicts of interests following members raising concerns about a member of staff being terminated due to a conflict of interest.

NIPSA supported members affected by the Review of Waste Services proposing to remove Task and Finish. Meetings held on 8th April, 6th June, 24th July followed by Collective Conciliation with the LRA on 15th August and 28th November. Conciliation ended in November and joint TU ballots remain outstanding at the end of year.



Water Quality Inspectors contacted NIPSA early November following proposals to install tracking devices in vehicles. The vehicles are owned by Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) but staff are employed by the Council. NIPSA wrote to the Council 8th November raising concerns re the proposals and the lack of consultation. Response received from the Council 19th November stating that the Council was not aware of the proposal and had sought information from NIEA but nothing was forthcoming. NIPSA arranged a meeting with Council Officials and NIEA management and reps on 10th December. Agreement for all concerns to be forwarded to Assistant Secretary (Civil Service) for NIEA management consideration and response.

NIPSA supported and assisted members with a number of personal cases, including investigations, disciplinaries, grievances and in particular a change of working practices in the Planning Department, refusal of an extension to a career break, refusal of a request to reduce hours and a proposed change to moving animal welfare admin function to Building Control.

Branch AGM was held in November and saw new committee elected.

## C4.8 Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC)

**Planning Division:** The transfer of planning division staff from NICS terms and conditions to NJC was completed in this year. All eligible staff were transferred over to the relevant NJC pay scales with most receiving an uplift in pay and grade. A small proportion of staff underwent voluntary exit and redeployment exercises.

**Efficiency Review:** The LCCC efficiency review continues to proceed with engagement from JTUS on matters of structure and assimilation. The review is being completed on an incremental basis by directorate and is currently review structures within Sports Services. JTUS remain committed to meaningful negotiation with management in respect of this review.

**Kerbside Model:** The Kerbside Model sought to introduce an alternative recycling model with

varying sizes of bins being issued dependent upon need. TUS and management have been engaged on this proposal over the last year. Consultation on the model remains ongoing and a DAERA lead consultation has been completed with the responses under consideration.

**Job Evaluation:** Initial proposal were provided by JTUS in respect of job evaluation and adopting the correct GLP protocols. An initial meeting was held in May 2024 and JTUS have been advancing these proposal since. Despite numerous attempt any JTUS to advance this issue, terms of reference have yet to be provided by LCCC management which has restricted the ability of JTUS to advance the matter. Job evaluation remains an ongoing agenda item at meetings of the LCCC JCNF and JTUS continue to pursue management to engage in dialogue on this matter.

**Trade Union Facilities:** In the latter part of 2024 the trade union facilities arrangement policy was agreed between JTUS and management, Matters relating to trade union accommodation within the council remain outstanding pending an overall review of accommodation within the business area.

**Pay:** Following the agreement of the NJC pay award for 2024/2025 of £1290 on all spinal column points, this was implemented throughout the year and paid in a timely fashion to all eligible staff.

## C4.9 Mid and East Antrim Borough Council (MEABC)

**Council Structure:** The interim Chief Executive confirmed mid-year that they will remain in post for the following two years, providing some degree of stability for a dysfunctional Council.

Consultation on the changes to its Corporate and Support Services division completed, with some degree of concern from the Joint Trade Union Side as to how this was being implemented.

Agreement was reached on pay protection, giving members three years security, however those whose roles were affected and transferred to new roles are working under generic job descriptions. Council willfully ignored the rules contained within the

Green Book in not consulting on job descriptions for new roles, instead choosing to ignore JTUS concern and continue on.

Concern raised previously by JTUS on the overloading of posts through the condensing of posts as Director level has come to fruition, with Council realising it was unworkable and offering temporary promotions to assist with additional workloads.

**Finance:** Beginning the year with a reported deficit of circa £12m, this has significantly reduced, not through extreme cost control measures but by the realisation that a miscalculation had occurred making the financial position not as dire as first thought.

This has put Council in the position where it may potentially breakeven when accounts have been finalised, through a combination of cost control measures, restructure and correction of accounting errors.

The Voluntary Severance scheme has completed with the majority of members who have been made offers accepting therefore taking Council close to or thereabouts of achieving its target of a salary saving of almost £2m.

The Council owned Smiley Building in Larne was sold in August for around £350,00, while a sale was agreed for an additional three plots of Council owned land for £1.1m.

**Policy:** Considering Council's intent for a restructure it was imperative that a pay protection policy was agreed therefore giving members who were affected three years at their current scale before any detrimental impact would occur.

Notice was given of Councils intent to implement a drugs and alcohol policy for testing of workers, particularly those who are operating machinery. Assurances have been received that this will not be random.

Council are looking at amending its hybrid working policy requiring workers to attend more regularly. This in turn creates accommodation issues due to the downsizing of its estate, with hot desking becoming a real possibility.

Concerns were raised on the intent of this and how it may become an equality issue if not managed correctly. This has been managed out with a rota system, rather than desk booking system being implemented.

## C4.10 Mid-Ulster District Council (MUDC)

**Job Evaluation:** NIPSA has had long standing concerns that LCCC and a number of other councils were incorrectly completing job evaluation exercises for a majority of grades by outsourcing these to a single person panel who completed a desktop exercise without employee engagement. Further to this no appeals policy existed and it was thought that the process was neither tendered nor underwent an equality impact assessment. As a result of this NIPSA submitted an FOI in LCCC and a number of other councils which confirmed this. A new process is currently in draft form for tabling at JCNF which will bring job evaluation in line with the principles of the GLPC scheme, ensuring employee engagement in the process and full appeal rights. This remains an ongoing agenda item at all meetings of the JCNF and NIPSA remain fully committed to engaging management on correcting this issue.

**Pay:** Following the agreement of the NJC pay award for 2024/2025 of £1290 on all spinal column points, this was implemented throughout the year and paid in a timely fashion to all eligible staff.

**Policies:** Following the renewal of the MUDC HR Policy working group the following policies were agreed, updated or progressed:

- Adult Safeguarding Policy.
- Children & Young People Safeguarding Policy.
- Drugs, Alcohol & Substance Support Policy.
- Travel & Subsistence Policy.
- Social Media Policy.

**Seamus Heaney Homeplace/Bellaghy Bawn:** Over the last year MUDC management and TUS have been engaged in discussion regarding a possible movement of staff in the Seamus Heaney Homeplace Centre which is based upon access to external

funding. Regular staff engagement sessions have been held with TUS representation present. NIPSA maintain the position that any potential meetings of such a forum could not replace the established negotiating forums with recognised trade unions and this position was agreed by management. To date an interim executive for the project has been appointed along with an external consultancy firm. NIPSA remains committed to ensuring that all members current terms and conditions are protected and where possible enhanced.

#### **C4.11 Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC)**

**Pay:** Following the agreement of the NJC pay award for 2024/2025 of £1290 on all spinal column points, this was implemented throughout the year and paid in a timely fashion to all eligible staff.

**Trade Union Facilities:** Following on from a dispute that lasted in excess of two years management side withing NM&D district council agreed to provide TUS with full time release for two representatives from JTUS with a view to progressing a management lead work programme which was on hold for the duration of the dispute. To date these posts have been filled by Nipsa and Siptu representatives.

**Industrial Relation (IR) Framework:** Throughout the year discussions have been ongoing regarding the creation of an IR Framework. This framework is aimed at creating an updated constitution for consultation and negotiation mechanisms, creating an inter union protocol and hopefully solidifying the role of the two TU representatives on full time release. This process is being led by ex Nipsa General Secretary John Corey and is following the model adopted within Belfast City Council. Throughout the year a number of meetings were held with TUS and correspondence returned from management. TUS comments on a final draft have been returned to management via John Corey.

**Planning Division:** Throughout the year negotiations commenced around the transfer of staff within Planning Division from NICS terms and conditions to NJC. A number of meetings were held between members within the division and TUS with further

joint negotiating meetings between TUS and management. Following this members concerns were relayed to management and proposals tabled around personal to holder arrangements and pay rates on assimilation. On agreement of the members regarding the terms of the transfer the LRA was engaged to facilitate the final transfer process.

**Representation:** Throughout the year TUS were engaged in a number of group grievances on a variety of issues, these included : an ongoing investigation regarding engagement with procurement team staff which was facilitated by the Local Government Staff Commission and a long standing group grievance regarding rates of pay for museum staff. Both of these issues are currently ongoing.

# C5 Northern Ireland Housing Executive

**NIHE Budget:** Trade Union Side (TUS) pressed Senior Management Team on ongoing budgetary pressures particularly those potentially affecting frontline services in Homelessness and New Build programme. Due to further monitoring rounds in the last quarter and currently, immediate pressure was relieved however the outworkings were being closely monitored.

Whilst there had been significant pressure on New Build programme there is now an additional 20 million. There is the likelihood, therefore, that additional homes will be built however the target cannot be met. With the publication of the Draft Programme for Government and a focus on Social Housing there was renewed confidence that Ministers will prioritise this issue. TUS was pressing Senior Management on this issue on a continual basis.

TUS had a rolling series of meetings with MLAs and MP Party Leaders highlighting the impact of a derisory budget on NIHE tenants, customers and citizens including Section 75 citizens. TUS made clear that public housing must be the priority, and citizens should be free to access any and all services offered by NIHE particularly those services that provide for the most vulnerable in our communities.

The political representatives we met supported the TUS position and agreed these critical services, indeed all services offered by NIHE, are needed and should continue. TUS discussed at length the impact of the budget and particularly the benefit to citizens and the wider economy if NIHE was allowed to borrow as a public organisation.

**Social Housing Reform (Revitalisation):** Whilst having several items on the agenda, TUS pressed a range of political parties that had responded to our invitation on the future of Public Housing and the need for public borrowing to be reinstated for NIHE. TUS met with leaders from PBP, SDLP, DUP, Alliance and UUP. All those leaders stated their support for NIHE as an organisation, the wider work carried out by NIHE and their desire to see NIHE building again. Disappointingly TUS had not met the DfC Minister Lyons by year end. This meeting is critical to TUS but we understand that the Minister has agreed to meet and TUS was awaiting.

A pilot of new build was released to tenants in Autumn, Senior Management when pressed by TUS, advised there was commitment to programme other small new build pilots to keep the momentum going.

At the September and December JCNC meetings, Senior Management continued their commitment to advise of the outcomes of meetings with the Departments and Treasury in relation to decision on NIHE publicly borrowing and commencing a programme of building. The CEO advised she was awaiting communication in relation to this and was hopeful of receiving it soon. There was no sense of any other direction being examined. TUS continued to press on "classification" of NIHE.

TUS asked the CEO about issues, highlighted in media, around land availability and water/sewage. She stated these were not necessarily factual and that the numbers do not reflect what is being reported. She was confident that builds can and should continue.

**Pay and Grading Review:** Due to legal advice received TUS did not enter into discussions nor consultation with Management Side on the pay and grading review.

In early Autumn NIHE initiated the installation of their Pay & Grading review, a bulletin was issued on Huddle (internal digital staff comms) advising all employees of this and that it was commencing "without prejudice" to members' grievances and subsequent legal proceedings. TUS copied the communications to NIPSA and MTB.

Following AGM season a large number of members lodged their grievances with the employer and these will be provided to MTB in January 2025 for inclusion of a further cohort admission to the ongoing cases. TUS hoped for permission for these to be added to the previous cohorts.

**Policy Development:** At JCNC Management Side announced they had been awarded GOLD IIP status which was a first for the organization. TUS asked for the report produced by IIP in order to examine this and also further issues raised by members across the organisation in relation to their Health & Well-being. Members have varying experiences particularly in relation to those members who work in areas

outside of Belfast, with equity needed in rural locations.

TUS pushed for a “Carer’s Policy” and provided samples from a range of employment areas and also best practice in developing a carer’s policy. Management agreed this is a priority due to members’ experiences, especially as NIHE has an aging work force and this is evident across society.

**GROW:** the new appraisal system is still in pilot stage. TUS met with Senior Management to discuss a range of issues and conclude same. There was a large uptake to date and TUS secured a discussion on Flexible Working and individual feedback for our members participating in this process.

At JCNCs in September and December TUS pressed Senior Management on the need for Job Evaluation. A draft policy had previously been provided by the NIPSA Official. TUS advised this would be a priority for 2025 and Management Side (MS) agreed this would be on the rolling policy programme for 2025.

**DLO:** Meetings to take place around introduction of multi-skilling for employees and banding of Bronze, Silver, Gold.

**HR advised the following policies are being developed:**

- Annual Leave Policy
- Leave & Pay for Parents
- Code of Conduct (including professional boundaries)
- Drugs & Alcohol Policy
- Travel & Subsistence
- Acceptable Use of Technology.

Ongoing consultation continued on the Standby/Call Out Policy and Overtime Policy. TUS to date have successfully held off on Management Side implementing these particular policies which were due to be implemented in early 2023. TUS have already sought a legal opinion and will invoke further should it be necessary. TUS insisted that NIPSA members within NIHE will be remunerated fairly. Management Side advised at JCNC they would be revisiting this.

Equal Opportunities Policy is ready for implementation.

**Job Role Investigation:** At Previous JCNCs and ER meetings, NIPSA TUS expressed serious concerns in relation to stress being experienced in Housing Services and in particular Patch Manager and Housing Advisor roles. TUS have represented an increasing number of members in these roles and some also have repeated absences linked to their work. TUS therefore insisted these two roles must be examined and a redesign is necessary including, possibly, service delivery and location. Management Side are undertaking a large-scale piece of work to determine individual and collective issues with a report due for both roles, commencing with Patch Manager. TUS met with the Housing Services Director in November to hear an overview of activities with a report to follow in early 2025.

The Housing Advisor role remained a priority for TUS and this is actively being followed up by TUS.

**Working Time Regulations:** Following concern raised by TUS a series of meetings were held with Senior Management. Those members working in DLO consistently were carrying out work after 5pm in the evenings and throughout weekends. TUS needed assurances of the safety of these members including their health & wellbeing in the long term. The outcome of this issue is close monitoring of these members, ensuring they are aware of their rest periods and Risk Assessment including dynamic RAs are undertaken as standard and active ongoing health surveillance. TUS agreed to monitor closely and return to the issue.

**NIPSA TUS Additional Resources:** TUS successfully gained the release of Panel Chairperson on a full-time facility basis in the short term. Following further discussion, the Management Side agreed to this on a permanent basis. NIPSA Official is planning to trawl the post in January 2025.

## **Restructuring**

**Regional Services:** Following TUS pushing for a permanent structure in regional services directorate a long-awaited structure was received in December 2023. This was widely consulted upon. The areas



outside of Belfast have been concluded and it is now in the final stages centrally in Belfast.

**Facilities Services:** Mid-year Management Side finally presented the above structure to TUS. This was consulted upon with members based across Northern Ireland, feedback was received and a meeting took place to discuss. The consultation continues with further meetings planned and awaiting job descriptions.

**Accommodation Strategy:** Following plans to amalgamate offices in West Area - Derry/Londonderry a further meeting was held to advise Management Side is near finalisation of selection of an office location. TUS again made it clear that we could not agree to closing an office on one side of the city. Stakeholders would/do not agree and the ethos of the organisation is to serve every part of the community. Further meetings are planned and TUS will be engaging with stakeholders in the community should it be necessary.

The South Region accommodation is currently being examined with more meetings to follow.

**Car Parking Policy:** Management Side held a meeting with TUS to discuss car parking and a policy is almost ready for consultation. TUS were given assurances that those employees with a disability will be provided with a car parking space.

**Health & Safety:** TUS continued to highlight stress as a key issue for members across the organisation but particularly those in frontline roles. TUS sat on various working groups and subdivisions and this engagement was reflected by Management Side undertaking Stress Risk Assessment, Role Risk Assessment and 1 to 1s to allow individual members to highlight their concerns.

Abusive Behaviours is being paused until a recruitment process can be carried out to employ someone to exclusively deal with this issue. TUS awaited a new policy.

**NJC Pay:** TUS asked Management Side for processing times for implementation once agreement has been reached. Management Side advised it would be sent to DfC as soon as possible however there could be a slight delay due to preparing Pay & Grading plus

answering questions from the Department. TUS advised this was disappointing as NJC is contractual and applicable to everyone. This was again raised at the December JCNC and the CEO gave an assurance she would actively progress.

# C6 Other Bodies

## C6.1 City of Derry Airport (CoDA)

NIPSA and UNITE met with management on 1st March to set out the joint TU pay claim for 24/25 as 12% with a cost of living element of £1,500 and with a follow on to commitments given throughout the previous year by management for the Airport to look at areas where it has been identified that there exists a pay differential in contracts for members carrying out the same role.

On 10th May management put forward a final pay offer in response to the joint TU pay claim. The offer included 3 proposals with varying percentages of a pay uplift and varying or without a one-off payment. Included in the offer were proposals relating to members in RAMP and Terminal Services and the pay differentials with their TUPED counterparts in the same roles. Additional elements included proposals for members in security posts that sought to address the additional responsibilities of their roles and a review of corporate team and refuelling allowances. Given that the pay offer was to some degree complex NIPSA requested that management meet with members to clarify any questions, meeting was held 7th June, at this meeting members raised other concerns to be taken forward also. NIPSA consulted with members and opened a ballot on the pay offer on 3rd July, the ballot closed 10th July and 72% voted yes to accept the pay offer, 28% voted to reject. Of the 3 proposals in the offer 85% of all respondents voted for Proposal 1. Unite members also voted to accept and so the pay offer was accepted by joint TU side with uplift payments and back monies paid in August pay.

Continuing funding under Public Services Obligation (PSO) up to March 2025 for the City of Derry to London Heathrow route was confirmed in February.

Members who had been identified as not having been paid the National Minimum Wage received the outcome to their grievance in February. Members appealed on a number of points and other avenues of resolution through Industrial Tribunal process were explored. Negotiations opened up and concluded in July with a satisfactory conclusion for affected members.

NIPSA requested information from management re Health & Safety concerns raised by members a number of times but this was not forthcoming so referred the concerns to the Health & Safety Executive NI (HSENI) on 25th May. Following this, NIPSA repeatedly requested to meet with management to follow up on the concerns after the HSENI visit, management procrastinated but a joint TU meeting was finally scheduled for 20th November. NIPSA were then informed that following the referral to the HSENI the Airport was put on 2 improvement notices. There followed agreement to set up a Health & Safety committee with TU representation and further meetings to take place in 2025.

On 16th October NIPSA wrote to management to seek reassurances as to the situation in relation to funding of the Airport, given media coverage of the same which was indicating that there was notice of intent to move funding for the Airport to Central Government. Management responded with reassurances that the Airport was secure until March 2025 and that both CoDA and Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC) were working with Department of Economy (DoE) on a business case. This then to be submitted to the Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) with responses expected early 2025.

NIPSA wrote to management in September re the lack of local TU side engagement and again wrote in November querying the Employee Consultative Forum that had fallen by the wayside. NIPSA and UNITE raised further concerns at a meeting with management 10th December that the staff forum that the Airport had established in August for all staff was not a replacement for joint consultation and that any changes needed to be discussed and agreed with staff side.

NIPSA wrote to management in October re rotas (and other issues) in the Fire Department causing issues for members and in response management arranged to meet with affected members to work together to improve rotas. NIPSA continued to monitor this progress. Reassurances were given at a meeting on 10th December but NIPSA continued to link closely with members on a number of issues.

NIPSA wrote to management in October re issues for members in Terminal Services and again followed up at a meeting in December with further follow up planned in 2025.

NIPSA supported and assisted members with personal cases under policies and procedures including investigations, disciplinaries, dignity at work and grievances. NIPSA referred a number of cases to MTB.

## C6.2 Controlled Sector Schools Council (CSSC)

The Controlled Sector Schools Council (CSSC) were contacted by NIPSA to ask that the NJC Pay increase and arrears be implemented for members.

Management wrote back to advise that it would be in members pay for December 2024.

## C6.3 Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)

NIPSA met with management towards the latter part of 2024. These discussions were in relation to the fact that Management wrote to staff advising of a return to the office on the basis of a hybrid model with staff all attending on Wednesdays. This was decided following a staff away day where more people wanted interaction with their colleagues. There was no notification or discussions with TUS before the communications were issued to staff and some members raised concerns with NIPSA. As our discussions were usually with the HR Director, who has been off on long term sick absence, Management conceded that this was an oversight on their behalf. There was also another meeting in relation to the redundancy of a funded post where the funding was not renewed under budget cuts and TUS were consulted in this instance.

An all members meeting is to be held early 2025 to address any concerns that members have.

Management were written to with regard to the NJC pay award to ask for it to be implemented for all staff.

Management wrote back to advise that it would be in members pay for December 2024.

## C6.4 EXTERN

**Personal Representation:** Personal representation remains a high priority at branch level and accounts for the majority of the branches work. In the previous year there has been active engagement on members behalf on a variety of casework including attendance management, disciplinary and grievance, with a large degree of success on behalf of NIPSA members.

**Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC):** Unfortunately due to absences and conflicting commitments the usual meeting of the JNC was not able to occur. It is aimed to hold this meeting in the very near future and this will enable TUS to proceed with matters such as potential policy reviews and future pay claims. Despite the inability to hold a formal NJC TUS and management remain engaged on a local level and with Extern Human Resources in respect of any ongoing issues.

**Employee Relations:** Throughout the year TUS and management via Human Resources have been actively in improving employee relations within the organisation. This came about as a result of issues raised throughout the year and TUS remain committed to proactively engaging with management to improve employee relations on an continuous basis.

## C6.5 General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI)

The GTCNI were contacted by NIPSA to ask that the NJC Pay increase be implemented for members of staff.

Management wrote back to advise that it would be in members pay for November 2024.

During 2023, there has been no further update on the future of the GTCNI following a consultation that was launched in September 2022 for 16 weeks by the Minister for Education. There is an interim CEO/Registrar - Ian Gallagher. To date there is no further update but NIPSA have followed this up for more information.

## C6.6 Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL)

**Pay Dispute:** Following the signing of a trade union recognition agreement in September 2023, TUS submitted a pay claim in December 2023. This claim sought to bring all staff in line with NJC pay scales in order to provide a meaningful pay award and to allow for transparency of pay (as the current payroll system within GLL does not allow staff access to hourly rates). This pay claim was acknowledged by management and then disregarded in the first quarter of the year when management imposed the GLL national pay award to all Belfast staff. Following this TUS entered into the three stage dispute resolution process as outlined in the recognition agreement with the decision to impose the award being upheld. TUS had further meetings with the Chief Executive of Belfast City Council as a way to engage in meaningful consultation on the issue. Further to this TUS held 2 consultation meetings in each of the sixteen Belfast Centres on the issue of pay and held a consultative ballot on industrial action which gave a result of 98% of members in favour of industrial action. A further tripartite meeting between TUS, management and the BCC Chief Executive is scheduled for early in the new year.

**Average Holiday Pay:** In following the agreement of Belfast City Council, members were due to receive a further two years arrears pay on the unsuccessful appeal by the PSNI. This was agreed by management in an agreement which was facilitated by the LRA. Throughout the year it was discovered that the relevant payroll information provided to GLL by BCC had been destroyed during an HR handover and incorrect rates of arrears were being paid. TUS are involved in engagement with the LRA regarding potential conciliation or arbitration on this issue.

**Attendance Policy:** Management and TUS met several times throughout the year regarding proposed changes to the GLL attendance policy. TUS raised a number of concerns in respect of the proposed policy and whilst some of these were addressed and rectified a number of issues remained outstanding. As a result of this the policy was imposed by management without TUS agreement and this was communicated to members.

## C6.7 Linen Hall Library (LHL)

The Linen Hall Library were contacted by NIPSA to ask that the NJC Pay increase and arrears be implemented for members.

Management wrote back to advise that it would be in members pay for December 2024.

## C6.8 Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS)

**Introduction:** Throughout the past year, NIPSA has continued to play a vital role in representing and advocating for its members within the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS). The branch remains committed to protecting the rights and working conditions of our members by engaging in negotiations, attending key committee meetings, and addressing workplace concerns.

**Representation and Negotiations:** NIPSA has actively represented members in disciplinary and grievance matters, ensuring fair and just outcomes. Our representatives have attended the Local Joint Negotiating Forum (JNF) meetings, bringing forward key issues, particularly in the areas of health and safety, working conditions, and flexible working arrangements. A key focus this year has been negotiating improvements in flexible working policies, including the introduction and expansion of home-working options.

**Pay and Grading Review:** At the beginning of the year, NIPSA initiated negotiations for a comprehensive Pay and Grading Review aimed at restructuring pay scales and ensuring incremental progression for all staff. This process has been overseen by a dedicated Project Board, comprising representatives from HR, Finance, and Trade Union members, ensuring that the review remains fair and transparent.

The primary objectives of the Pay and Grading Review have included:

- **Examination of Scale 3 - Scale 6 grades:** NIPSA has successfully secured a number of higher-scale posts and anticipates further improvements in the coming year.

- **Restructuring of pay scales:** Addressing discrepancies and inefficiencies in the current pay structure.
- **Ensuring fair pay progression:** Reviewing the length of pay scales to eliminate discriminatory risks.
- **Overtime arrangements:** Negotiating fair overtime pay structures for relevant grades.
- **Addressing overlapping pay bands:** Ensuring that lower-graded staff do not earn more than those in higher grades due to anomalies in the pay system.
- **Eliminating leapfrogging:** Preventing cases where newly promoted staff earn more than those already in the higher-grade position.
- **Correcting pay anomalies:** Justifying and rectifying inconsistencies in analogous grade pay levels.
- **Labour market adjustments:** Considering appropriate market-related pay supplements where necessary.
- **Improving maternity and paternity policies:** Advocating for enhanced parental leave and pay provisions.

**Progress and Achievements:** Since securing the Pay and Grading Review agreement, NIPSA has made significant progress:

- **45% of our membership has been successfully regraded:** with some members receiving increases of up to three scales.
- **Promotions from Scale 3 to Scale 6:** Many members have seen significant pay progression.
- **Advancements in senior positions:** Higher-grade staff have progressed from P01 to P03 and from P05 to P07, ensuring fair career progression.

**Looking Ahead:** Over the next year, we will continue our efforts in:

- Finalising outstanding elements of the Pay and Grading Review.
- Pushing for further enhancements in flexible working policies, including increased home-working opportunities.

- Strengthening workplace health and safety standards.
- Negotiating improved employment terms and conditions for all NIFRS staff.

**Conclusion:** The past year has been marked by significant achievements in securing better pay, fair progression, and improved working conditions for our members. NIPSA will continue to fight for the rights and well-being of all staff within the NIFRS, ensuring that fair treatment, equity, and transparency remain at the forefront of our negotiations.

## C6.9 Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)

NICIE were contacted by NIPSA to ask that the NJC Pay increase be implemented for members.

Management wrote back to advise that it would be in members pay for December 2024.

As the result of a case recommendation, all policies including the Equality and Diversity policies in the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) were being updated.

## C6.10 Radius Housing Association

**Pay:** Salaried staff within the organisation continue to be paid in line with NJC Pay Scales. Following the agreement of the 2024/2025 NJC pay award of £1290 the pay award was implemented and all relevant arrears paid in the December salary.

**Policies:** The association continues to review its policies on a regular rotational basis and TUS have been consulted on these reviews with no amendments being proposed from management or TUS in this year's rotation.

**Absence Management:** Throughout the year the TUS requested review of the use of the Bradford Factor was completed and the results shared with TUS. Despite the review outlining criticisms on the use of the Bradford Factor management stated they intended to continue with its use but subject to further review after 12 months. Following further representations made from TUS management agreed to enhanced training for managers and HR personnel in the use of the Bradford Factor and the



application of discretion in decision making. To date TUS have noted measurable improvements in the outcomes of sickness disciplinarys.

**Staff Wellbeing:** Staff wellbeing remains a priority for TUS and a number of representations have been made to management on this matter. TUS continue to engage on a frequent basis on this respect and management have stated they are committed to progressing the issue by a variety of means including improved access to welfare support services.

# Branch Organisation at 31 December 2024

## Civil Service Group

Branch	Employing Authority	Branch Location	Branch Secretary	Members and Votes	CS Group Delegates	NIPSA Delegates
1	DOF	CPD & Properties Division, Clare House	David Gillian	167	2	2
2	DOF	CS Pensions & Recruitment	Martin Bradley	109	2	2
3	DOF	Enterprise Shared Services	Michael Cassells	91	2	2
4	DOF	Legal Admin	Gerard O'Connor	47	1	1
5	DOF	Legal Service	Wilma McKeegan	138	2	2
6	DOF	LPS Land Registration	Colleen Bonner	85	2	2
7	DOF	LPS Ordnance Survey	Enda McAtamney	170	2	2
8	DOF	LPS Rating	Kate McKeating	337	3	3
9	DOF	LPS Valuation	Justine McNally	151	2	2
10	DOF	NICS HR	<b>Vacant</b>	163	2	2
11	DOF	NISRA	Nichola Coburn	233	3	3
13	DOF	Digital Shared Services	Noel Gunn	267	3	3
14	TEO	Stormont	Philip Devlin	218	3	3
15	DOF	Core	Edith Toppon	142	2	2
22	DE	Inspectorate Rathgael	Deirdre Robson	27	1	1
23	DE	Rathgael House	<b>Vacant</b>	135	2	2
24	DE	Waterside House, Derry	Marie Stewart	80	1	1
26	DOH	Policy	<b>Vacant</b>	284	3	3
31	DFE	Adelaide House	Elizabeth Cameron	432	4	4
32	DFE	Careers Service	Joan Fegan	118	2	2
33	DFE	Insolvency/OITFET	Ross McQuillan	99	2	2
35	DFE	Trading Standards	Kevin McNamara	47	1	1
45	DOJ	Core	Sean Brown	262	3	3
46	DOJ	Legal Services Agency	Gerard Patterson	93	2	2
47	DOJ	NICTS	Lorna Glass	459	4	4
48	DOJ	NIPS	Stephen Hayes	138	2	2
49	DOJ	YJA	Meghan Spence	113	2	2
50	NIPB	Policing Board	<b>Vacant</b>	12	1	1
51	PBNI	Probation Board	Wendy Thompson	231	3	3

Branch	Employing Authority	Branch Location	Branch Secretary	Members and Votes	CS Group Delegates	NIPSA Delegates
52	PONI	Police Ombudsman	Elaine Moore	69	1	1
53	PPSNI	Public Prosecution Service	James Murphy	209	3	3
70	DFI	James House	Declan Sloan	248	3	3
71	DFI	Driver Vehicle Agency	Stewart Moore	468	4	4
73	DFI	Rivers Agency	Thomas McCloy	86	2	2
74	DFI	TNI Ballymena	James Scullion	70	1	1
75	DFI	TNI Belfast	Conor Boyd	109	2	2
76	DFI	TNI Coleraine	<b>Vacant</b>	44	1	1
77	DFI	TNI Craigavon	Val Russell	79	1	1
78	DFI	TNI Downpatrick	Corrie Carr	52	1	1
79	DFI	TNI HQ	Danny Norton	76	1	1
80	DFI	TNI Omagh	Sean McDermott	151	2	2
91	DAERA	Central Belfast	Stephen McCorry	182	2	2
92	DAERA	Clare House	Jan Davidson	272	3	3
93	DAERA	Forest Service	Brendan Mulholland	49	1	1
94	DAERA	Inspectorate	Gerard Higgins	523	5	5
96	DAERA	Province Wide	Stephen Canning	634	6	6
97	DAERA	Veterinary Service	Abigail Armstrong	124	2	2
110	DFC	Andersonstown	<b>Vacant</b>	114	2	2
111	DFC	Antrim & Magherafelt	Clare Skelcher	132	2	2
112	DFC	Appeals Service	David Magill	68	1	1
113	DFC	Armagh, Banbridge, Lurgan & Portadown	Simon Richards	156	2	2
114	DFC	Ballymena, Carrickfergus & Larne	William Brooks	195	2	2
115	DFC	Ballymoney, Coleraine & Limavady	Collette Logan	152	2	2
116	DFC	Ballynahinch, Bangor, Downpatrick, Kilkeel & Newcastle	<b>Vacant</b>	90	2	2
117	DFC	Belfast Benefit Centre	Mark Gibson	1235	12	12
118	DFC	Castle Court Disability Benefits	Martie McKee	514	5	5
119	DFC	Child Maintenance Service	Brendan O'Reilly	973	9	9
120	DFC	Communications	Jim Smith	31	1	1
121	DFC	Community Cohesion	Andy Boal	110	2	2
122	DFC	Cookstown	<b>Vacant</b>	27	1	1
123	DFC	NI Pension Centre	Denise Conway	196	2	2

Branch	Employing Authority	Branch Location	Branch Secretary	Members and Votes	CS Group Delegates	NIPSA Delegates
124	DFC	Design Centre	Eamon Doherty	187	2	2
125	DFC	Dungannon	Stacey Cheevers	81	2	2
126	DFC	Enniskillen & Omagh	James Carey, Patricia Toal	120	2	2
127	DFC	ESA	Kerrin Joiner	199	2	2
128	DFC	Falls Road, Newtownabbey, North Belfast, Royal Avenue & Shankill	Gerard McLaughlin	205	3	3
129	DFC	Foyle	Ann Coyle	246	3	3
130	DFC	Hollywood Road	Paul Meredith	73	1	1
131	DFC	Improving Benefits Uptake Unit	Ryan Meekin	45	1	1
132	DFC	Knockbreda, Newtownards & Shaftesbury Square	Peter McCormack	108	2	2
133	DFC	Legislation	Gary Donaldson	35	1	1
134	DFC	Benefit Security Division	Alexandra McKee	152	2	2
135	DFC	Lisahally	Martin Neeson	305	3	3
136	DFC	Lisburn	Hugh McMahon	86	2	2
137	DFC	Lisnagelvin & Strabane	Martin Rouse	92	2	2
138	DFC	Guidance, Learning & Development	Tim Eaton	36	1	1
139	DFC	Newry	Liga Lasmane	144	2	2
141	DFC	Public Record Office	Angela Campbell	57	1	1
142	DFC	Regeneration	Carol Curran	91	2	2
143	DFC	Strategic Policy & Resources Branch	Brendan Callan	134	2	2
145	DFC	Universal Credit	Anthony Rice	206	3	3
146	DFC	Engaged Communities	Ruth Bonnar	186	2	2
170	ACNI/NIS/PLTUM	Arts Council, NI Screen, Armagh Planetarium	Gavin O'Connor	45	1	1
171	AFBI	AFBI & Departmental CS Scientific Officers	Paul Soto-Kelly	580	5	5
172	AMK/EUREST/ G4S/MCG/ NOONAN/ SERCO/SODEXO/ ORCHARDVILLE SOCIETY	Cleaning & Catering Contractors	<b>Vacant</b>	175	2	2
173	CC/COPNI/ CVSNI/EC/GCCN/ NICCY/VSS	Charity Commission, Commissioner for Older People, Commission for Victims & Survivors, Equality Commission, General Consumer Council, Commission for Children & Young People, Victims & Survivors Service	Gerard Stewart, Samantha Murdock, Claire McCloskey, Rachel Woods	122	2	2

Branch	Employing Authority	Branch Location	Branch Secretary	Members and Votes	CS Group Delegates	NIPSA Delegates
174	CITB	Construction Industry Training Board	Joyce Savage	13	1	1
175	EONI/NIAUR/ NIHRC/NIPSO	Electoral Office, Utility Regulator, Human Rights Commission, Public Service Ombudsman	Ivanka Antova	135	2	2
176	HSE	Health & Safety Executive	John Murphy	64	1	1
177	INI	Invest NI	Sharon Atkinson	190	2	2
179	ITI/LA/SEUPB/ TIL/USA/WI	Cross Border Bodies	Nuala Reilly/Andrew King/Marion Thompson	61	1	1
180	LRA	Labour Relations Agency	Desmond Woods	63	1	1
181	NIAS	NI Assembly	Suzanne Walsh	230	3	3
182	NIWL	NI Water	Tracey Mitchell	426	4	4
183	NMNI	Ulster Folk & Transport Museum	Claire Brown	112	2	2
184	NMNI	Ulster Museum	Oisín Hill	89	2	2
185	NSL	NSL	<b>Vacant</b>	72	1	1
186	PSNI	Belfast City	Joyce McCready	727	7	7
187	PSNI	Districts B,C, D, E	David Irwin	164	2	2
188	PSNI	Districts F, G, H	Kimberley Hill	197	2	2
189	PSNI	Districts J,K, L	Stephen Dickey	205	3	3
190	PSNI	ICS	Norman Murray	121	2	2
191	PSNI	Scientific Support	Tanya Coulter	108	2	2
200	SPNI	Sport NI	Christine Rea	62	1	1
201	TAO	The Audit Office	Colette Connolly	73	1	1
202	TNI	Tourism NI	Alice Murray	55	1	1
203	UDF	United Dairy Farmers	<b>Vacant</b>	18	1	1



## Public Officers' Group

Branch	Employing Authority	Branch Location	Branch Secretary	Members and Votes	PO Group Delegates	NIPSA Delegates
501	NIHE	Housing Centre, Castlereagh Office, Lisburn, Dairy Farm, Shankill Office, DLO Glengall Street & Stockman's Way	Sheelagh Agnew	716	7	7
503	NIHE	Lanyon Place	Christina Girvan	204	3	3
508	NIHE	Craigavon, Armagh, Portadown, Banbridge, Lurgan & DLO Portadown	Oisin McQuillan	147	2	2
509	NIHE	Derry/Londonderry, Strabane & DLO Pennyburn	Elizabeth Lynch	222	3	3
510	NIHE	Ballymena, Larne, Carrickfergus, Antrim, Newtownabbey, DLO Pennybridge, Rathenraw & Rosslea	Louise Carey	155	2	2
511	NIHE	Downpatrick & Newry	Conor Curran	58	1	1
512	NIHE	Enniskillen, Omagh, Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt	Gary Hemphill, William Loane	114	2	2
513	NIHE	Newtownards & Bangor	Christopher O'Neill, Brian Cassidy	105	2	2
515	NIHE	Coleraine, Ballymoney, Ballycastle, Limavady, DLO Coleraine, Ballymoney	Kelly Harbinson	51	1	1
516	Education Authority	Belfast Region	Jane Scott	1132	11	11
517	Education Authority	South Eastern Region	Frances O'Neill	2256	22	22
519	Education Authority	North Eastern Region	Eamonn Lavery	1427	14	14
521	Education Authority	Southern Region	Helena McSherry	3470	34	34
522	Education Authority	Western (Derry Area) Region	<b>Vacant</b>	321	3	3
523	Education Authority	Western (Omagh Area) Region	<b>Vacant</b>	639	6	6
524	Queen's University/Stranmillis College	Belfast	Morgan Lindsay, Michael Nolan	296	3	3
526	City Council	Belfast	Mary McKenna	524	5	5
527	Borough Council	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	David Mayers	485	4	4
528	Borough Council	Mid and East Antrim	Nigel Devine	286	3	3
529	Borough Council	Antrim and Newtownabbey	Stephanie Boyd	224	3	3
530	Borough Council	Ards and North Down	Dawn Phillips, Lorraine Ringland	255	3	3
531	District Council	Newry, Mourne and Down	Patricia Manley	316	3	3
532	District Council	Derry City and Strabane	Karen Henderson	449	4	4
533	District Council	Fermanagh and Omagh	Andrew Boyd	210	3	3
534	City Council	Lisburn and Castlereagh	Julie Casson	225	3	3
535	Borough Council	Causeway Coast and Glens	Sharon McQuillan	219	3	3

Branch	Employing Authority	Branch Location	Branch Secretary	Members and Votes	PO Group Delegates	NIPSA Delegates
536	GLL	Greenwich Leisure Ltd	Sharon Jordan	52	1	1
540	District Council	Mid - Ulster	Phelim Marrion	279	3	3
545	NILGOS/LGSC	Belfast	Julian Coffey	41	1	1
546	NICCEA	Belfast	Melanie Mulligan	187	2	2
547	NI Fire and Rescue Service	Province Wide	Ciara McCloskey	136	2	2
548	Vountary Housing Associations	Province Wide	<b>Vacant</b>	95	2	2
549	Radius Housing Association	Province Wide	<b>Vacant</b>	230	3	3
551	FE Colleges	Belfast Metropolitan College	Martin Murphy	169	2	2
552	FE Colleges	South Eastern Regional College	Alison Ferguson	171	2	2
553	FE Colleges	Northern Regional College	<b>Vacant</b>	108	2	2
554	FE Colleges	Southern Regional College	Ciaran Flood	147	2	2
555	FE Colleges	South West College	Matthew Markey	155	2	2
556	FE Colleges	North West Regional College	Sean O'Neill	114	2	2
560	Libraries NI	Province Wide	John McKeegan	357	3	3
701	Business Services Organisation	Province Wide	Cathi Tregaskis, Patricia Quinn	879	8	8
703	Business Services Organisation	IT	Brian Crawford	114	2	2
704	NI Ambulance Service	Province Wide	George Preston	176	2	2
725	Voluntary Sector	Province Wide	Adam Murray	261	3	3
726	Extern	Province Wide	Sean Conlon	91	2	2
727	Disability Action	Province Wide	<b>Vacant</b>	45	1	1
728	Credit Unions	Province Wide	<b>Vacant</b>	3	1	1
730	HSC Trust	Belfast	Damien Maguire, Tanya Killen	2066	20	20
731	HSC Trust	Northern	Sabine Antal, Fionnuala Anderson	1937	19	19
732	HSC Trust	South Eastern	Debbie Barlow	1205	12	12
733	HSC Trust	Southern	Gerardette McVeigh, Joanne Martin	2437	24	24
734	HSC Trust	Western	Tony McLaughlin, John Havord	1799	17	17
735	Charities	Province Wide	<b>Vacant</b>	65	1	1

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Protecting Public Services  
Supporting Public Servants

Ag Cosaint Seirbhísí Poiblí  
Ag Tacú le Seirbhísigh Phoiblí



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