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Via email – committee.publicaccounts@niassembly.gov.uk

Dear Daniel

Public Accounts Committee Inquiry on Public Procurement in Northern Ireland

Thank you for the opportunity to brief the Committee on 16 May and for your letter seeking the following additional information:

- data on late payments, including where and why late payments occur;
- the number of vacancies in procurement centres across NICS including comparative figures on vacancies in other areas of NICS; and
- the list of benefits arising from the Social Value criteria.

Late Payments

Details on Prompt Payments can be found at [NICS prompt payment tables | Department of Finance \(finance-ni.gov.uk\)](#).

The latest prompt payment statistics for 2023/24 shows the performance for DoF on its 10 day prompt payment performance is 88.82% and performance to pay invoices within 30 days is 95.08%. The overall 2023/24 NICS payment performance for 10 days was 91.42% and 30 days payment of invoices was 96.80%. This equates to 5,392 invoices of all NICS invoices being paid outside the 30 days.

Analysis indicates that late payments are a result of departments failing to follow the appropriate receipting processes which impact the speed of payments. Finance Shared Services (Account NI) will continue to work closely with departments to address these issues as we drive best practice processes and standardisation

required for the Integr8 solution. It should also be noted that the published prompt payment statistics do not include details of disputed invoices as these are not processed for payment until the dispute has been resolved and the hold placed on the invoice released.

Vacancies

The current number of vacancies in the four NICS Centres of Procurement Expertise (i.e. CPD Construction Division, CPD Supplies and Services Division, DoH Health Estates and DfI Transport Roads and Asset Management) is **153**. The total number of vacancies in the NICS as of end of April 2024 is **3018**.

For completeness, the table at Annex A provides details of vacancies across the four NICS Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) and five CoPEs in the Wider Public Sector (i.e. Translink, HSC Business Services Organisation; NI Water, NI Housing Executive and Education Authority).

Social Value Benefits

The most recent data on social value benefits are listed below:

- 3,500+ people who were long-term unemployed or disadvantaged in the labour market have gained employment
- 90+ social enterprises are now part of government supply chains
- 3600+ hours of volunteering with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises sector
- 8000+ hours of skills development activities
- 2,800+ weeks of work experience
- 3,800+ hours of environmental awareness initiatives
- 2400+ hours of health and well-being initiatives
- 110+ devices (donation of IT hardware to VCSE's)
- 1300+ digital inclusion initiatives

FSB Report

You have also asked for our comments on the 2022 FSB report. I am committed to ensuring my Department pays its invoices within the 10 day target and will continue to focus on this through the Departmental Board structures. I have asked the Director of Finance Shared Services (Rosie Carser) to meet with FSB to see how performance can be improved.

I hope you find this response useful.



NEIL GIBSON

ANNEX A

	Vacancies (as of May 24)			
Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs)	Procurement	Administrative Staff/Non-Technical	Technical	Total No. Vacancies
NICS CoPEs				
CPD Supplies & Services Division (SSD)	8	1	0	9
CPD Construction Division (CD)	0	3	31	34
DoH Health Estates	0	4	10	14
DfI Transport and Roads Asset Management	10	3	83	96
Total NICS	18	11	124	153
Wider Public Sector CoPEs				
Education Authority (EA) Commercial Procurement Services	10	3	0	13
EA Project Managers Construction Delivery	0	5	19	24
NI Water	2	0	0	2
NI Housing Executive	6	1	0	7
Translink	3	0	0	3
HSC Business Services Organisation Procurement and Logistics	21	5	0	26
Total Wider Public Sector CoPEs	42	14	19	75
Total – All CoPEs	60	25	143	228