

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

Inquiry into the Performance and Culture of the Northern Ireland Civil Service

Since it was established in February 2024, the Committee for Finance has considered a wide range of information and data regarding a range of metrics with respect to the NI Civil Service. The Committee has engaged with the Department on this information and data, with Members seeking further extrapolation of this to allow the Committee make suggestions as to how the NICS might improve its performance and support the evolution of its culture.

The Committee agreed to undertake this inquiry at its Strategic Planning Session on 22nd October 2025, prompted by ongoing concerns about the performance and culture of the NICS. The Committee's primary focus is on "People", recognising that a modern, agile, and inclusive civil service is essential for the delivery high-quality public services.

The Committee's concerns include the current structures of the NICS, the capacity and capability of the NICS, the challenges of recruitment and retention, the reasons for high levels of sick absence and the extensive use of temporary promotion, the high number of vacant posts across the NICS, the impact of outdated or inconsistent HR practices and the need for a strategic approach to workforce planning and wellbeing. Members will take evidence through this inquiry to allow the Committee to:

1. **Review the structures of the NICS**, with specific attention to the composition, expertise and status of the Senior Civil Service, and the current role & responsibilities of the Head of the Civil Service;
2. **Consider the capacity and capability of the NICS**, establishing the current fitness of the NICS and what kind of change or transformation might be necessary;
3. **Investigate current recruitment procedures, the use of temporary promotions and unfilled vacancies**, including the scale, cost, and impact on service delivery and the role of agency workers in addressing staffing gaps;
4. **Assess trends in NICS HR**, particularly in relation to sickness absence, reviewing the early impact of the new Hybrid Working Policy and examining the current NICS discipline policy;
5. **Consider the NICS People Strategy 2025–30**, including its strategic priorities and how it aligns with broader Programme for Government goals;
6. **Identify opportunities for policy interventions** at Departmental, Executive, and UK Government levels to support a more resilient, skilled, and inclusive civil service;
7. **Highlight themes and, potentially, make recommendations** on issues raised during the inquiry, including potential areas for further investigation or reform. Members acknowledge that this Inquiry may well be a first step, with the potential for further investigation beyond the end of this mandate by a successor Finance Committee.