



Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland

Business Plan 2019/20

1. Aims

The Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland aims to provide high quality advice and support to the Attorney General for Northern Ireland in carrying out his functions. These functions include:

- Chief Legal Adviser to the Northern Ireland Executive for both civil and criminal matters that fall within the devolved powers of the Northern Ireland Assembly;
- advising on legislative competence and making decisions under Section 11 (3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998;
- protecting the public interest in the Courts;
- acting as the Executive's most senior representative in the courts;
- participating in the proceedings of the Assembly to the extent permitted by its Standing Orders but not voting in the Assembly;
- producing guidance for criminal justice organisations on the exercise of their functions in a manner consistent with international human rights standards;
- taking decisions on inquests pursuant to section 14(1) of the Coroners Act (NI) 1959; and
- discharging responsibilities in relation to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS), including the appointment of the Director and Deputy Director of the Public Prosecutions.

The Office embraces a culture of integrity, quality and independence of judgement in its support of the work of the Attorney General.

2. Office of the Attorney General Priorities

The principal objective of the Office of the Attorney General is to support the Attorney General in the delivery of his statutory and non-statutory obligations. The nature of this work is not amenable to the setting of specific targets but within that principal objective the delivery of service will be to the highest standards, within the required timescales and within necessary resources.

To support the Attorney General:

a. as Chief legal adviser to the Northern Ireland Executive by;

- providing high quality and timely legal advice on a range of issues; and
- effective and appropriate engagement with the Executive's policy development process.

b. advising on legislative competence and making decisions under Section 11 (3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 by:

- working closely with the appropriate Department Legislation Bill Team, the Office of the Legislative Counsel and the NI Assembly to identify any issues of concern;
- addressing any potential issues through effective and appropriate engagement; and
- making timely decisions under section 11 (3).

c. in protecting the public interest in the courts by;

- providing a high quality service on the full range of the Attorney General's public interest functions including:

- in devolution proceedings within the meaning of schedule 10 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998;
- bringing contempt of court applications;
- bringing proceedings to restrain vexatious litigants;
- intervening in the public interest in certain charity and family law cases; and
- where appropriate, appointing "advocates to the court" and "special advocates" to represent the interests of litigants in cases involving sensitive material.

d. as the Executive's most senior representative in the courts by:

- working closely with the Executive and its representatives to identify the key issues involved; and
- undertaking thorough and complete research in preparation for any court appearance.

e. when participating in the proceedings of the Assembly to the extent permitted by its standing orders by:

- liaising with the Office of the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly and relevant Assembly Committees in order to develop appropriate Standing Orders.

f. in producing guidance for criminal justice organisations on the exercise of their functions in a manner consistent with international human rights standards by:

- undertaking thorough and complete research; and
- liaising with the appropriate criminal justice organisations and interested stakeholders.

g. taking decisions on inquests under section 14(1) of the Coroners Act (NI) 1959 by:

- liaising with all appropriate authorities and interested parties;
- undertaking thorough and complete research; and
- Directing an inquest, declining to do so, or referring to other agencies (e.g. the PPS).

h. with responsibilities in relation to the Public Prosecution Service by:

- assisting in any appointment process; and
- effective and appropriate engagement at all levels within the PPS on matters of mutual interest.

i. in the delivery of the Living Law and Fresh Start Programmes.

j. in preparing the Annual Report of the Attorney General.

Plainly the relative significance of some of these duties is reduced by the present absence of a functioning Assembly and an Executive Committee

3. The Values of the Office

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

Valuing our people – to achieve the highest standards in all aspects of our work we depend on the skills, knowledge, experience, dedication and hard work of our people. We will provide the opportunity for our people to perform to the best of their ability and to develop their talents and capabilities to achieve these high standards.

Treating everyone with respect - we value the individual contribution, diverse experiences and perspectives that all of our people bring to the OAGNI.

Acting with integrity - we adhere to the highest ethical and professional standards and take personal responsibility for our actions.

Taking pride in our work - we strive for the highest standards in all aspects of our work. We will continually look for ways of improving the working practices within OAGNI.

Working with others - we engage constructively with other people and organisations and share information, knowledge and good practice. We work with others in order to develop effective relationships and deliver the highest standards in all aspects of our work.

4. People and Budgets

a. Budget

The budget for the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland in 2019/20 is:

Resource (the cost of running the office including salaries) – The Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland has been allocated an initial resource budget of £1.14m (2018/19 - £1.176m). To enable the effective use of resources the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland will ensure the effective management of property assets in accordance with the objectives of the NI Executive's Asset Management Strategy.

b. Organisational Structure

In light of changing circumstances, the functions and responsibilities of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland will continue to develop. As changes in the organisational structure occur, the Office will look to our people to take these changes forward, working to our organisational values and maintaining the highest standards in all aspects of our work

The Attorney General is supported by 10 legal and administrative staff.
(Refer to organisation chart – Appendix A)

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL (NI)

