



Planning Appeals
Commission



Water Appeals
Commission

The Planning and Water Appeals Commissions

Annual Review 2025/26

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CHIEF COMMISSIONER'S STATEMENT

This is the annual review of the Planning Appeals Commission and the Water Appeals Commission (PACWAC) for the financial year April 2025 to March 2026.

This year we have witnessed the culmination of the investment in Commission resources over the last few years. The training of new appointees has been completed, and the new IT system is now fully operational. The improved performance detailed later in this report is testament to the hard work and dedication of both Commissioners and our administrative team. I take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to everyone in the Commission who has contributed to the significant improvement in performance.

The Commission has done everything within its control to deliver quality work in good time. Our action plan has led to more timely appeal decisions with median times in the region of 22 weeks (down from 75 weeks last year). Only a small number of cases are 'longstanding' and the reasons for delay are largely outside the Commission's control. Further detail is provided later in the report.

The improved timelines in issuing cases corresponds with the Commission operating effectively and at full complement even though the latter was for a limited period. We have only 126 cases in hand which has historically proven to be within acceptable tolerance levels. We hope to continue to build on these positive steps. However, this will require continued investment to fill vacancies as they arise, particularly within the Commissioner cohort.

In terms of our 'hear and report' workstream, there have been programming issues due to requests for postponements for example. However, all cases that could be progressed have been and we will endeavour to advance the remaining cases at the earliest opportunity.

We have also delivered on our commitments to:

- Undertake customer engagement exercises;
- Continue discussions with our sponsor body regarding funding and resourcing;
- Engage in meaningful outreach work, and
- Implement updates to the website including updating the keyword facility.

Despite concerted efforts, we have not achieved our aim of being at full operational capacity due to vacancies arising over part of the reporting period. This was largely outside of our control but impacts on our ability to meet our Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). We recognise the importance of resourcing the Commission to assist its ability to perform. We therefore continue to have discussions with our sponsor Department around funding mechanisms to ensure we are sufficiently resourced to build on the progress already made.

We have also identified several opportunities to enhance understanding of the work of the Commission, and we aim to take further customer engagement sessions forward in the

coming months. Feedback from previous sessions has helped with improving performance as has feedback from the Independent Audit Panel who investigate how we deal with complaints. I extend my thanks to those outside stakeholders who have helped us in these ways.

We advised in previous reports that it would take some time to get the Commission back on track given the years of constant change and the need for new appointees to gain experience in their role. We have made significant progress this year and can look forward to the future with a positive mindset. As always, we will continue to deliver to the best of our ability in line with the resources we have available.

SECTION ONE

Our Work and People

Our Work and People

The Commissions

The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent appellate body established under statute to decide a wide range of appeals and to report on various matters under planning and other legislation.

The Water Appeals Commission, while sharing the vision, aims, objectives and core values of the Planning Appeals Commission, is a separate appellate body, exercising a wide range of functions under water, fisheries and drainage legislation.

The Commissions are not part of any Government Department. Financial and administrative support is provided by the sponsoring Department, the Department of Justice, through the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service.

The Commissions are completely autonomous in their decision-making. We are not answerable to any government Department or any other agency or public body. Our decisions are subject to the supervision of the Courts, reflecting our independent appellate roles in planning and environmental matters.

We aim to make the best possible appeal decisions and offer the best possible recommendations in a timely fashion, consistent with the evidential context within which appellate functions are exercised. The underlying values that the organisation seeks to uphold are:

Independence

We are an independent organisation which is free from external influence. We are a key democratic safeguard where citizens can access justice and challenge decisions in front of an independent body. Commissioners act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, based on the evidence and without predisposition towards any party's case.

Quality

We deliver quality decisions and recommendations based on the evidence that is presented to us with high levels of professionalism and accountability. We act in an open and transparent manner. We appreciate the role and purpose of the Commissions.

Continuous Improvement

We have a focus on continuous learning and improvement whilst managing customer expectations. We treat people with respect and recognise individual experience and knowledge. We value the views of our stakeholders.

The Commission has also committed to two further key business priorities:

Focus on Performance

Our stakeholder engagement has confirmed that customers want quality decisions in a timely fashion. Our performance has not been where it needs to be particularly on our 'hear and report' workstream for reasons outlined in many of our publications. We have, however, improved at an organisation level and we intend to continue to build on this.

Looking Forward

We will address existing challenges in terms of resourcing and respond to external factors which affect performance within the Commission.

Our Work

The Commissions have two broad areas of work which for ease of discussion are categorised as 'Hear and Decide' and 'Hear and Report'. The former is the appeal casework. Appellants lodge appeals and the Commission considers the evidence and makes a final decision. In addition to the appeal decision the Commission may have to consider a 'costs' claim if it is submitted.

The Commission is not a planning authority. We do not process planning applications, rather we consider the merits of the decision taken by a planning authority. We are therefore not required to consult with statutory or non-statutory consultees. All Commission decisions are based on the evidence submitted by the parties to the appeal.

Hear and Report is the second area of work we engage with. It is less predictable and more resource intensive. The principal elements are firstly, public inquiries and hearings into regionally significant and called in planning applications, and secondly independent examinations into local development plans (LDPs). In these cases, most referrals are made from the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) to the Commission. The Commission considers the evidence presented and reports back to the referring authority who make the final decision.

The legal remit of the Commission in carrying out a public inquiry is to consider the representations made in relation to a proposal. Ownership of an application remains with the referring authority, as does any requirement to process the application.

There are also a variety of other Hear and Report functions, including public inquiries into development schemes, vesting orders and road schemes, and hearings into the need for environmental impact assessments for planning applications.

Our People

Our work is carried out by several Commissioners supported by an administrative team.

Commissioners

Commissioners in post during the financial year are outlined below:

Chief Commissioner	Miss A Kells BA (Hons) MSc LLB MRTPI
Deputy Chief Commissioner	Ms P O'Donnell BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI
Principal Commissioners	Mr M Watson BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI Mr P Duffy BSc (Hons) Dip UD MRTPI
Senior Commissioners	Ms M Jones BA (Hons) BArch ARIBA MRTPI Mr K Donaghey BSc MRTPI Dr D O'Neill BSc (Hons) DipTP PhD MRTPI (until 31 March 2026) Ms J McParland BSc MRTPI Ms C McDonagh BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI Ms L Roddy BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI PIEMA Mr G Kerr BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI Mrs T Harbinson BSc DipTP MRTPI Ms C McKeary BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI
Commissioners	Mr D Hannon BA DipTP MRTPI (until 27 June 2025) Ms D McShane BA (Hons) MTP MEPPA MRTPI Ms B Stevenson BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI Mr K Gillespie BA (Hons) BPI MLegSc MRTPI

Mr K O'Connell BA MSc MRTPI

Mr G McCallion BSc (Hons) LLM DipTP MRTPI

Ms R Taylor BSc DipTP MRTPI

Ms H Ellison BSc MSc MRTPI

Administrative Team

Administrative support is provided by our sponsoring Department, the Department of Justice, through the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service and consists of the following:

Chief Administrative Officer (1)

Office Manager (1)

Hear and Report Programme Officer (2) (plus 1 vacant post)

Casework Manager (1)

Team Leaders (2)

Casework Officers (4) (plus 1 vacant post)

IT Support Officer (1)

SECTION TWO

What we have delivered

WHAT WE HAVE DELIVERED

As set out in the Chief Commissioner's Statement, 2025/26 has been a positive year for the Commission. We outlined our priorities and objectives in our business plan which were:

Priority: Focus on Performance

Objective 1

To deliver a high-quality service that meets the needs of our customers. To achieve this, we will:

- Continue to reallocate cases as and when resources become available to ensure timely decision making. In all cases, the appellant will be notified if a reallocation has been made.
- Actively review the remaining long-standing cases to ensure they are delivered as soon as practically possible.
- Aim to ensure that new cases entering the system are issued in a timely fashion.
- Continue to invest in the training and development of our workforce.
- Continue to ensure that the quality of decisions is maintained.

Priority: Looking Forward

Objective 2

To ensure that the organisation is placed in the best position to deal with future challenges we will:

- Aim to be at full operational capacity by 2026/27.
- Undertake customer engagement exercises.
- Continue discussions with our sponsor body regarding funding and resourcing.
- Respond to any recommendations arising from the publication of the Northern Ireland Audit Office report.
- Engage in meaningful outreach work to ensure all interested parties understand our role in the planning process.
- Implement updates to the website including updating the keyword facility.

RESOURCES

The Commission was operating at full Commissioner complement albeit for a limited period within the last financial year. This combined with those recently appointed Commissioners who have gained experience in the role over the last few years has resulted in significant

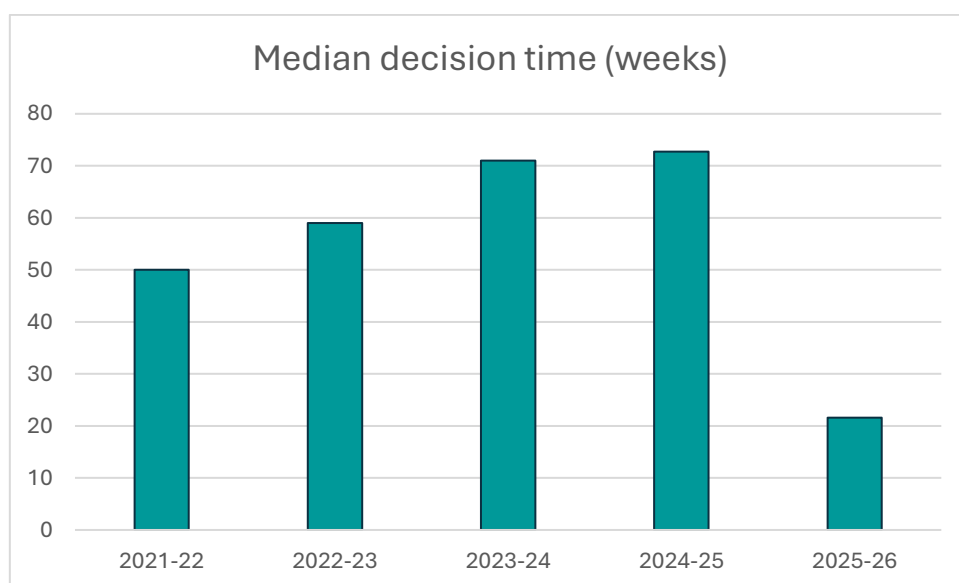
improvements in performance. To build on this, we are in discussions with our Sponsor Body to expedite recruitment exercises to fill current vacancies.

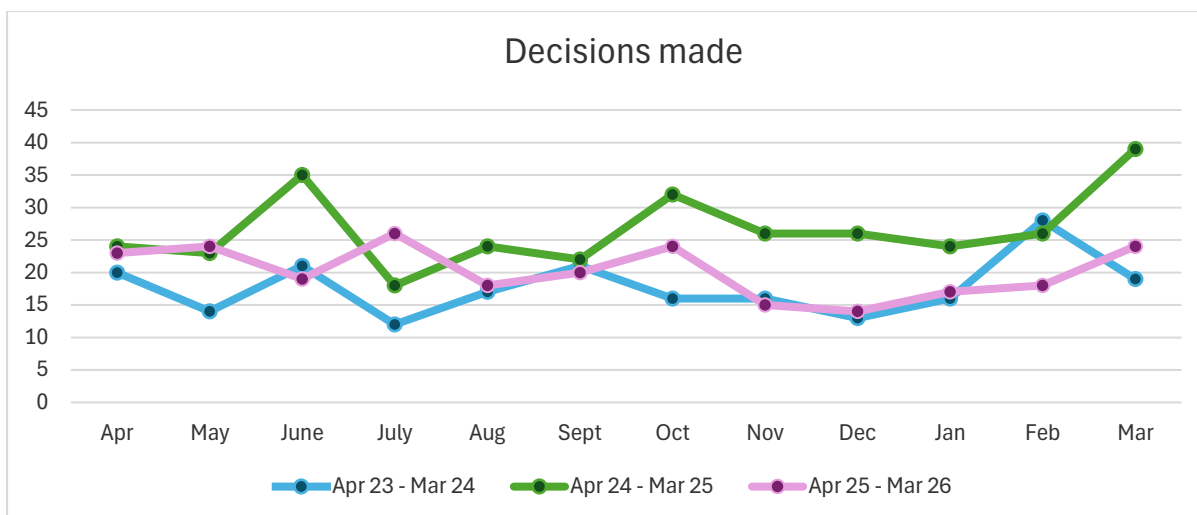
The investment in the IT system is paying dividends as management information is now available to address issues as necessary. As independent decision makers, once a case has been allocated to a Commissioner it is for them to deal with. We do request that Commissioners issue decisions in date order in the interest of fairness to our customers. Of the pre-2025 cases in the system and with 149 at the start of the financial year, only twelve remained at the end. Six cases required information from the planning authority (DfI) to enable the cases to progress, which was received by the Commission on 11 March 2026. At the time of writing five of these have been withdrawn. In respect of the remaining six cases, the presiding Commissioners were asked to expedite them and at the time of writing a further three have issued.

PERFORMANCE

Hear and Decide Casework

The focus on performance in the last year has been to reduce the number of cases in the system and improve on the timeliness of decisions being issued. The number of appeal cases in hand at year end is 126 which is well within normal operating limits. We have also made significant progress in terms of timeliness with median decision times now at 25.4 weeks (down from 72.7 weeks last year). This has been due to the successful efforts to clear the longstanding cases in the system. Going forward we would hope to maintain median decision timeframes in line with that which we are now achieving.





The following tables set out detailed information on the volume of casework processed, the means of processing appeals, delivery times achieved and appellants' success rates for each procedure.

Table 1: Key Statistics, by appeal type

Appeal type	Received	Decided	Successful	Success Rate %
Refusal or conditional grant of planning permission	126	133	37	27.8 %
Non determination of planning application	10	8	7	87.5 %
Enforcement related	81	68	22	32.3 %
Other *advertisements, roads, listed buildings consent	35	34	13	38.2 %
TOTAL	252	243	79	32.5 %

In addition to the appeals outlined above, 27 appeals received in 25/26 were subsequently withdrawn (30 withdrawn in total) and a further 21 appeals were deemed to be invalid (5 of these required an invalid finding from the Commission).

The number of decisions issued has decreased from last year, but this was to be expected given the successful efforts to clear the backlog of cases in the previous financial year. At the time of writing, the Commission has now only 4 longstanding cases remaining in the system.

Success rates vary from year to year and between different appeal procedures as each appeal is decided on its own specific facts and individual circumstances. The Commission considers

that success rate variations hold no particular significance and that there is no connection between an appeal outcome and the means of processing employed.

Table 2: Key Statistics, issued and appeals on hand.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Number of appeal decisions issued	189	213	309	242
Number of appeals on hand at year end	379	281	149	126

The Commission has also delivered on its commitment to reduce the number of cases in hand to pre-COVID levels. The figures for the number of appeals in hand is down to 126 from 149 last year showing a reduction of 13%. This is well within normal operating limits.

Table 3: Key statistics, by procedure

Procedure	Number	Allowed	Success Rate %	Median Time
Hearing	130	54	41.5 %	23.9
Written Representation with Accompanied Site Visit	45	3	6.7 %	20.0
Written Representation with Commissioner site visit	68	22	32.4 %	19.0
TOTAL	243	79	32.5 %	21.6

The median time to clear appeals has decreased from 72.7 weeks in the previous year. This is the result of the work undertaken to clear the backlog of the oldest appeals. The Commission has produced a marked improvement in the median decision-making time for 2025-26 appeals as outlined below.

Table 4: Key statistics, median decision-making time.

	All	IH	WR	ASV
Median decision-making time for all decisions issued in 2025-26 (weeks)	21.6	23.9	19	20
Median decision-making time for all 2025 appeal decisions issued in 2025-26 (weeks)	18.6	18.6	15.2	18.2

Whilst we are close to meeting the KPIs, clearing the remaining historical cases has meant the Commission has failed to meet its commitment to decide 80% of appeals within specified timeframes (excluding cases where delays are caused by the appellant and those developments involving an Environmental Impact Assessment) as set out below:

- Informal hearings within 30 weeks.
- Written representations with an accompanied site visit within 28 weeks.
- Written representations with a Commissioner site visit within 26 weeks; and
- Enforcement-related appeals within 34 weeks.

Significant progress has been made with those cases received in 2025 which are being processed and allocated as normal. Those which have had decisions issued are in line with the KPIs. This demonstrates what can be achieved when everything is moving effectively but we cannot expect to meet our KPIs fully until we are at full operational capacity.

Water Appeals Commission

Appeals Caseload

Table 5: Water appeals

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Water appeals received	1	4	3
Water appeals withdrawn	2	2	4
Water appeals decided	1	1	0
Water appeals in hand	2	3	2

Activity in this area remains at a low level.

Hear and Report Casework

In terms of the Hear and Report workstream, the Commission has progressed all cases that it can. Due to limited legislative powers within this workstream, six cases that remain on the Commissions books, are now back with DfI to undertake matters related to their processing. The Commission awaits instructions as to whether the public inquiry or hearing, as originally requested, will still be required. Further detail is provided later in this section.

Hear and Report is an area of work which is resource intensive due to the nature of the issues raised and the level of public interest. The principal elements are public inquiries and hearings

into regionally significant and ‘called in’ planning applications as well as Independent Examinations. In these cases, referrals are mainly made by the Department for Infrastructure to the Commission. The Commissioner will consider the evidence provided to them and report back to the Department, who make the final decision.

There are also a variety of other Hear and Report functions, including public inquiries into development schemes, vesting orders and road schemes, and hearings on the need for Environmental Impact Assessments for planning applications.

We had committed to the following objectives for this workstream in 2025/26:

- Recommence the hearing sessions in relation to the Dalradian conjoined public inquiry (2021/C005, 2021/C006, 2021/C007, 2021/DR001, 2021/WHR01, 2021/WHR02, 2024/WHR01, 2024/WHR02).
- Issue decisions in respect of legal grounds for the enforcement cases linked to EIA hearing requests and schedule hearings in respect of the EIA determination if necessary.
- Conduct at least two other hearings and issue reports thereafter.

Due to factors beyond our control, the reconvened hearing sessions in relation to the Dalradian conjoined public inquiry commenced on 13 April 2026 which is just outside of the financial year. The other two objectives were met and are reported on below.

Public Local Inquiries

[2021/C005 – Underground Mining, Curraghinalt Project \(Dalradian\)](#)

[2021/C006 - Powerline, Curraghinalt Project \(Dalradian\)](#)

[2021/C007 – Powerline, Curraghinalt Project \(Dalradian\)](#)

[2021/WHR01 – Water Discharge, Curraghinalt Project \(Dalradian\)](#)

[2021/WHR02 – Water Discharge Curraghinalt Project \(Dalradian\)](#)

[2024/WHR01 – Water Abstraction and Impoundment, Curraghinalt Project \(Dalradian\)](#)

[2024/WHR02 – Water Abstraction and Impoundment Curraghinalt Project \(Dalradian\)](#)

[2021/DR001 – Road Abandonment, Curraghinalt Project \(Dalradian\)](#)

The hearing sessions scheduled to take place in January 2025 were suspended at the request of Dfi to allow them to carry out transboundary consultation. This concluded in April 2025. When the Commission was in receipt of all the necessary documents and following

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confirmation from DfI that further environmental information was not being requested, the Commission scheduled the hearing sessions to reconvene in April 2026.

Due to the added resource available with the pause in Dalradian proceedings, the Commission took steps to progress other Hear and Report work that had previously been held in abeyance.

[2021/C010 – Wind farm, Gruggandoo, Newry](#)

A public inquiry was initially scheduled for 12 March 2025 and rescheduled for 3rd September 2025 at the request of the applicant. A new Environmental Statement was submitted in June 2025. The case reverted to DfI to complete statutory processes. The Commission awaits instructions as to whether the public inquiry as originally requested is still required.

[2022/C002 – Wind farm, Carnalbanagh](#)

A public local inquiry was scheduled for 21st May 2025. A postponement was requested by the applicant. The case reverted to DfI in March 2025 to complete statutory processes. The Commission awaits instructions as to whether the public inquiry as originally requested is still required.

Hearings

[2022/C001 – Craigall Quarry, Kilrea](#)

A hearing was requested in relation to the need for an environmental impact assessment. However, the hearing had to be delayed pending court action in respect of the legal grounds of appeal, previously heard. The High Court and Court of Appeal have both ruled in favour of the Commission. However, action is currently being pursued through the Supreme Court.

[2022/C004 – Railroad Energy Ltd., Clonmore Road, Dungannon](#)

A hearing took place in April 2025. The Commissioner's report as to whether an EIA is required was issued to the Council in July 2025.

[2023/EIA0001 – Development at Glenshane Road, Derry](#)

This case was conjoined with 2025/EIA0003 at the request of the applicant. A hearing took place in October 2025. The Commissioner's report as to whether an EIA is required was issued to the Council in January 2026.

[2023/EIA0002 – Quarry, Kildoag Road, Derry](#)

The Commission received notification from the agent that this case was withdrawn in July 2025.

2023/M0003 – Extraction, transportation and working of sand and gravel, Lough Neagh

A hearing was scheduled for 25th June 2025 but was postponed at the request of the applicant to allow for updated survey work. The DfI have informed the Commission that this case rests with them. As such, we await instructions as to whether a hearing is still required.

2023/M0004 – Mixed use development at Blaris, Lisburn

A hearing was scheduled for 18th June 2025 but was postponed at the applicant's request to carry out work on the Environmental Statement. The DfI have informed the Commission that this case is with them. Again, the Commission awaits instructions as to whether the hearing as originally requested is still required.

2023/M0005 – Multi-sport indoor/outdoor facility, Strabane

A hearing took place on September 2025. A report was issued to the DfI in November 2025.

2023/M0006 – Windfarm, Unshinagh, Carnlough

A hearing was scheduled for 16th September 2025 but a postponement was requested by the applicant. The case reverted to DfI in June 2025 to complete statutory processes. The Commission awaits instructions as to whether the hearing as originally requested is still required.

2024/M0001 – Demolition of existing buildings and erection of two new dwellings, Belfast

A hearing has been requested in relation to a proposed demolition of existing dwellings and erection of two new dwellings and associated site works in Belfast. Amended drawings were submitted to DfI in June 2025. The Commission awaits instructions as to whether the hearing as originally requested is still required.

2025/EIA0001 – Holly Park Road, Killinchy

A hearing has been requested in relation to the need for an environmental impact assessment. A hearing on the legal grounds of a linked enforcement case has already taken place and a decision has been issued. As the appeal on legal grounds was unsuccessful a hearing in respect of the need for the EIA has been scheduled for 10th April 2026.

2025/EIA0002 – Craigy Road, Saintfield

A hearing took place on 23rd September 2025 in relation to the need for an environmental impact assessment. The report is pending.

2025/EIA0003 – Lands adjacent to No. 199 Glenshane Road, Derry

A hearing took place in October 2025. A report in relation to the need for an environmental impact assessment was issued in January 2026.

2025/EIA0004 – NIE Networks

A hearing was requested in relation to the need for an environmental impact assessment, but the case was later withdrawn in August 2025.

Local Development Plan (LDP) Independent Examinations (IE)

Within the financial year, the Commission has not received any LDP referrals and has no IEs in hand.

QUALITY

The Commissions' decisions can only be challenged by an application to the High Court for judicial review, on a point of law only. In circumstances where the decision is clearly flawed the judicial review application is not contested. In the event of a successful challenge, following receipt of a Court Order, the appeal is reheard by a different Commissioner from that which made the original decision, and a new decision is issued. In 2025/26, two decisions were quashed with our agreement.

The Commissions' complaints procedure is detailed on our website. All complaints are investigated and a relevant response issued. Where complaints are found to be justified, an explanation and apology are provided. In 2025/26 we received seven complaints of which two were justified. One was justified on the grounds of delay in issuing the appeal decision, and one was justified in relation to the consideration of the planning merits.

The Commission's handling of complaints is scrutinised by an Independent Complaints Audit Panel (ICAP) as referred to above. The Panel comprises one member appointed by the Royal Town Planning Institute and one member appointed by the Bar Council of Northern Ireland. The Panel's purpose is to independently review complaints made to PACWAC and advise if the action taken in respect of the complaint was appropriate and if the complaint was correctly classified as justified/unjustified.

Panel Members are not permitted to audit complaint files in which they could be considered to have a conflict of interest. This may arise in a situation where the Panel Member acted in a specific case or are a retained advisor for a complainant. If this situation arises the review of the complaint file will be undertaken by the second Panel Member. This Panel Member

should report separately on the complaint in the final report identifying that there is a conflict of interest point which has been addressed in line with this document.

The Commission has taken steps to initiate the ICAP review of complaints received in 2025/26. The Commissions' measure of quality is to ensure that the number of appeal decisions giving rise to a justified complaint or successful judicial review challenge in the current accounting year amounts to no more than 1.5% of the total number of appeal decisions issued.

The proportion of appeal decisions which were associated with a justified or partially justified complaint relating to the quality of the decision, or successful judicial review challenge, is three. This means that we have met the performance target in this regard for 2025/26 with 98.8% of decisions being free from challenge. This demonstrates the Commission's commitment to providing decisions of the highest quality.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

During this financial year, the Commission continued to be involved with events to improve the understanding of our role in the NI planning system as set out below:

- Presentations about the work of the Commission to the Institute of Directors and DfI Roads.
- Presentation at the Northern Ireland Planning Law Update organised by the Royal Town Planning Institute,
- Attendance at the launch of Planning Appeals Principles publication, and
- Involvement in various student exercises for the Queen's University of Belfast.

The keyword search facility on the website was identified in previous engagement sessions as an area for improvement. Changes have been made to the way decisions are registered, and guidance has been issued which should improve this aspect of our service. The Commission has recently undertaken further Stakeholder Engagement feedback exercises which will assist in identifying the effectiveness of current procedures and this should guide continuous improvement.

COSTS AWARDS

The Commission is empowered to make Orders as to the costs of the parties involved in planning and other appeals. Costs awards are intended to provide redress where unreasonable behaviour by one party to an appeal has put another party to unnecessary expense. It is on this basis that the Commission assesses claims for costs. Over the last year the following decisions have been made in relation to cost claims:

Table 6: Costs awards

Type of decision	2025/26
No award	11
Partial award	0
Full award	1
TOTAL	12

Further detail in relation to costs awards at Council level is provided under the statistics at Council level section.

Statistics at Council level

Please note the figures below exclude appeals against non-determination, enforcement notices and those categorised as 'other' by PAC. We expect these figures will be replicated in the Planning Monitoring Framework which will be published by the Department for Infrastructure.

Table 7: Percentage of appeals against refusal of planning permission that are dismissed

Council	Number of appeals against refusals determined	Number dismissed (Council's decision upheld)	Percentage of decisions upheld
Antrim & Newtownabbey	25	17	68 %
Ards & North Down	9	9	100 %
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	12	6	50 %
Belfast City	19	7	37 %
Causeway Coast & Glens	9	7	78 %
Derry City & Strabane	3	2	67 %
Fermanagh & Omagh	9	7	78 %
Lisburn & Castlereagh	11	8	73 %
Mid & East Antrim	17	15	88 %
Mid Ulster	1	1	100 %
Newry, Mourne & Down	17	16	94 %
Northern Ireland	132	95	72 %

Table 8: Number of costs claim involving planning authority. Breakdown of awards made by and against the planning authority. The indicator measures the number of instances, not the amount of money.

Council	Costs claims involving planning authority	Costs claims made by planning authority				Costs claims made against planning authority			
		No award	Partial award	Full award	Total	No award	Partial award	Full award	Total
Antrim & Newtownabbey	4	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	4
Ards & North Down	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Belfast City	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Causeway Coast & Glens	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Derry City & Strabane	4	1	0	0	1	3	0	0	3
Fermanagh & Omagh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lisburn & Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mid & East Antrim	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mid Ulster	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newry, Mourne & Down	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern Ireland	12	0	0	0	1	10	0	1	11

FINANCE

The budget of the Commission is set out below. The income received from planning appeal fees £63,052. The remainder of the budget for the Commission is provided by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS). Please note that these figures may be subject to slight adjustment.

	£	%
INCOME		
Appeal fees	£63,052	
Photocopying charges	£69	
TOTAL	£63,121	
EXPENDITURE		
Commissioner salaries	£2,009,776	71.71%
Administrative staff salaries	£343,143	12.25%
Travel & subsistence	£9,194	0.33%
Accommodation charges	£163,597	5.85%
Advertising	£27,181	0.97%
External training	£1,549	0.06%
Legal fees	£110,392	3.94%
Postage & telephone charges	£3,649	0.13%
Electricity	£9,922	0.36%
Library	£16,420	0.59%
Stationery & printing	£1,403	0.05%
Contract cleaning	£15,228	0.54%
Office equipment	£1,152	0.04%
Incidental expenses	£10,610	0.34%
Software maintenance contract	£66,805	2.39%
Refund of fees	£12,671	0.45%
TOTAL	£2,802,692	100%

SECTION THREE

Looking Forward

Looking Forward

We have set out several objectives in the 2026/27 business plan. These are:

Priority: Focus on Performance

To deliver a high-quality service that meets the needs of our customers. To achieve this, we will:

- Actively review those cases received in the penultimate business year to ensure they are delivered as soon as practically possible.
- Aim to ensure that the timeliness of our decisions is improved upon.
- Continue to ensure that the quality of decisions is maintained.
- Review and agree revised performance measures across all workstreams.

Priority 2: Looking Forward

To ensure that the organisation is placed in the best position to deal with future challenges we will:

- Aim to fill existing vacancies by the end of the financial year.
- Continue to invest in the training and development of our workforce.
- Review the findings of recent customer engagement exercises within three months and action any recommendations as appropriate.
- Continue discussions with our sponsor body regarding funding and resourcing.
- Respond to any recommendations arising from the publication of the Northern Ireland Audit Office report.
- Continue to engage in meaningful outreach work to ensure all interested parties understand our role in the planning process.

In addition to these objectives, we have several 'Hear and Report' cases in hand which have been referred to us from government departments. As outlined earlier in the report, we conducted six hearings in relation to such cases during the last financial year. Of the cases that remain, there are ten requests for public inquiries, six of these are referrals from the DfI. Four of those referred by the DfI are included in the Curraghinalt Project (Dalradian) conjoined public local inquiry (consisting of eight applications). The inquiry is to be reconvened at the start of the 2026/27 financial year. Six cases are currently with DfI and the Commission awaits instructions as to whether the public inquiry or hearing as originally requested is still required. One EIA hearing request case has been heard and the report is pending. Another hearing has been scheduled. One EIA hearing request case requires the legal grounds on a linked appeal case to be heard first and another EIA hearing case has been postponed pending the outcome of court action in respect of a linked appeal case.

In respect of the above area of work, for the business year 2026/27 we intend to:

- Undertake the hearing sessions in relation to the Dalradian conjoined public inquiry (2021/C005, 2021/C006, 2021/C007, 2021/DR001, 2021/WHR01, 2021/WHR02, 2024/WHR01, 2024/WHR02).
- Issue a decision in respect of legal grounds for the enforcement case linked to the EIA hearing request and schedule a hearing in respect of the EIA determination if necessary.
- Conduct at least two other hearings and issue reports thereafter.
- Where cases revert to us (by virtue of the outcome of court proceedings or the conclusion of Dfl statutory undertakings) we will aim to assign a Commissioner to the case within three weeks of such notification.

The Commission has successfully addressed the backlog of cases and is significantly improving on the timeliness of its decision making. We will continue to use our best endeavours to improve on delivery times where these are within our control and subject to the resources available.