



Strategic Direction and Business Plan

2025-26

Independent Reporting Commission (IRC)

Introduction

The IRC was established by an international Treaty (“the Treaty”) between the UK Government and the Irish Government on 13 September 2016.¹

The IRC’s functions as described in paragraph 5.1 of Section A of the [Fresh Start Agreement](#)² and Articles 4 and 5 of the Treaty (with particular reference to paramilitary groups declared to be on ceasefire) are to:

- **Report** annually, or on such further occasions as jointly requested by the UK Government and Irish Government, on progress towards ending continuing paramilitary activity connected with Northern Ireland; to report on the progress of implementation of the relevant measures of the three administrations i.e. the UK Government, the Irish Government, and the Northern Ireland Executive; and inform the implementation of the Executive’s strategy;
- The IRC, in its reports, may **make recommendations** to the Northern Ireland Executive in order to inform future Programme for Government priorities and commitments through to 2021²; and
- **Consult** with a wide range of stakeholders in carrying out its functions, including: the UK Government and relevant law enforcement agencies; the Irish Government and relevant law enforcement agencies; and in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Executive, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, statutory agencies, local councils, communities and civic society organisations.

The terms of reference under which the Commission delivers the above functions and the approach it takes can be found at:

<https://www.ircommission.org/files/ircommission/2022-12/Terms%20of%20Reference.pdf>

Aims and Objectives

The objective of the Commission, set out in Article 3 of the Treaty, is to carry out its functions with a view to promoting progress towards ending paramilitary activity connected with Northern Ireland, and supporting long term peace and stability in society and stable and inclusive devolved Government in Northern Ireland.

¹ Sections 1 to 5 of the Northern Ireland (Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan) Act 2016, Regulations 2 and 3 of the Northern Ireland (Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan) Act 2016 (IRC) Regulations 2016 and the Independent Reporting Commission Act 2017 give full effect to the Treaty.

² The current Commissioners have been reappointed to their roles from 1 April 2025 for a further period ending on 30 September 2026.

The Commission's role can be summarised as follows:



In delivering its functions, the Commission has adopted a 'Twin Track' model, looking at efforts to end paramilitary activity through policing and criminal justice measures (Track One) alongside work undertaken to address the socioeconomic factors which impact individuals and communities (Track Two). This model is the basis on which the Commission focuses its endeavours, direct engagements, and reporting.

Business Planning

This Strategic and Business Plan underpins the core work undertaken by the Commission and its staff to discharge these functions, and those common to all public sector organisations relating to good governance and effective use of resources.

The Plan sets out the objectives in relation to each of the IRC's functions and, where practicable, the date by which they are to be achieved, the stages or milestones along the way, the indicators by which performance will be assessed and identifies who has lead responsibility for achieving the objective.

The Commission and Secretariat monitor performance against the Plan on a regular basis and, where appropriate, adjust it or re-allocate resources to take account of changes in the surrounding environment. Progress is reported in the IRC's Annual Report and Accounts and the Plan is reviewed annually.

The Annual Business Plan is supported by the Commission's Stakeholder Engagement Plan.

Business Plan Objectives

Objective 1: To report annually (or more frequently if jointly requested by UK and Irish Governments) on progress towards ending continuing paramilitary activity, in particular from those paramilitary groups declared to be on ceasefire.

Target	Lead Responsibility	Performance Indicators
To provide a considered analysis of progress towards ending paramilitary activity, analysing progress on two tracks: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• policing and criminal justice interventions; and• measures addressing socioeconomic issues affecting those communities where the paramilitaries primarily operate.	Commissioners and Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In consultation with key stakeholders, understand the impact of paramilitary activity on communities.• In consultation with law enforcement, and other relevant statutory bodies, understand paramilitary activity and its links to criminality and organised crime in NI.• Develop an agreed programme of work with key milestones, including a stakeholder engagement plan¹ and deliver a timely and comprehensive annual Report.• Map progress against baselines and measures to inform the Commission's reports on progress towards ending paramilitary activity.• If requested by the UK and Irish Governments: the timely production of comprehensive ad hoc Reports.

¹ Further detail about stakeholder engagement is set out under Objective 3

Objective 2: To report on the implementation of the relevant measures of the Irish Government, the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, including the Executive's Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime Action Plan and Phase Two of the Tackling Paramilitary, Criminality and Organised Crime Programme.

Target	Lead Responsibility	Performance Indicators
<p>To provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • visibility on progress; • ongoing impetus to implementation of the Executive's Action Plan and Phase Two of the Tackling Paramilitary, Criminality and Organised Crime Programme; and • visibility on the relevant measures of the Irish Government and the UK Government. 	Commissioners and Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report on analysis of the implementation of measures annually. • Through the stakeholder engagement plan also referenced in relation to objectives 3, 4 and 5 below, conduct focused and constructive engagement with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NI Executive, ○ Those bodies leading on actions set out in the Executive's Action Plan, ○ Targeted recipients of Executive's Action Plan initiatives, ○ The Irish Government, ○ The UK Government, ○ Other stakeholders as set out in Article 5 of the International Treaty.

Objective 3: In carrying out its functions, consult: the Northern Ireland Executive, the PSNI, relevant statutory agencies, local Councils, communities and civic society; the UK Government and relevant UK law enforcement agencies; and the Irish Government and relevant Irish law enforcement agencies. To fulfil this function the Commission will develop a stakeholder engagement plan to facilitate consultation.

Target	Lead Responsibility	Performance Indicators
To develop an annual stakeholder engagement plan that informs the work of the Commission and the understanding of the issues linked to its mandate.	Commissioners and Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build trust and relationships through effective engagements with key stakeholders and enhance the Commission's reputation.• Improve the Commission's understanding of and ability to meet stakeholder expectations and needs.• Drive innovation through engagements with stakeholders which provide insights to inform the Commission's work.• Support proactive engagement with stakeholders and help identify potential issues and areas for improvement that inform the Commission's Reports and Recommendations.

Objective 4: Make recommendations to the Northern Ireland Executive in order to inform future Programme for Government priorities and commitments, and to inform the implementation of the Executive's Programme.

Target	Lead Responsibility	Performance Indicators
To make recommendations where appropriate that influence the Programme for Government (PfG) and to inform the implementation of the Executive's PfG and any successor to it.	Commissioners and Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The identification, from consultation and research, of areas which the Executive may wish to consider for inclusion in the Programme for Government and/or future work in this area. Government decision making reflects Recommendations in the Commission's reports. A review of progress made following Recommendations which indicates that Recommendations have been implemented.

Objective 5: Carry out functions with a view to supporting long term peace and stability in society and stable and inclusive devolved Government in Northern Ireland.

Target	Lead Responsibility	Performance Indicators
To report on practical, comprehensive and effective measures which contribute to ending paramilitarism, and to highlight areas of good practice in this regard.	Commissioners and Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlight practical and effective measures. Highlight areas of good practice.

Objective 6: To maintain high standards of corporate governance and ensure value for money is achieved.

Targets	Lead Responsibility	Performance Indicators
(a) To achieve high standards of corporate governance and value for money.	UK Joint Secretary Support: Secretariat Staff Commissioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key relationships amongst the accounting officer, the external audit team, the Commission and the sponsoring department are defined and facilitated. • Annual Report and Accounts are completed on time and to the required standards with unqualified accounts. • Corporate governance matters are included in agendas for monthly Commission meetings and regular governance meetings held with NIO sponsor team. • Effective, efficient and accurate processes of budgetary and financial management including spend within budget and in accordance with public expenditure requirements, payments processed in a timely manner, and relevant finance processes adhered to. • Procurement is compliant with the regulations stipulated by sponsor department including compliance with gifts/hospitality policies and registration and managing of interests. • Risks identified, assessed and managed on an on-going basis by use of risk register.

<p>(b) To ensure all information and information assets are managed and stored by the Commission in line with relevant policy.</p>	<p>Joint Secretaries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage information in accordance with all relevant legislative requirements and policies. • Monitor information assurance procedures.
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Objective 7: Maintain an effective secretariat to enable the Commission to deliver on its statutory duties and objectives.

Target	Lead Responsibility	Performance Indicators
<p>(a) Ensure that the necessary staff and resources are secured to meet the full requirements of the Commission within budget allocation.</p>	<p>Joint Secretaries Support: UK and Irish Government Sponsors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate numbers and grades of secretariat staff recruited in line with civil service recruitment principles. • Ensure a commitment is in place from UK and Irish Government sponsors to review staff and resources should both governments request ad-hoc reports.
<p>(b) The provision of an efficient and effective service to the Commission.</p>	<p>Joint Secretaries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives set for secretariat staff. • Staff meet performance and developmental objectives, and other corporate responsibilities fulfilled in line with Framework Document. • Ensure that all staff are provided with appropriate training opportunities to help them fulfil their respective roles and meet their objectives.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address any absence of administrative support staff and resultant work pressures.
(c) Seek to uphold the good reputation of the IRC.	Commissioners and Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through engagement and the profile of the Commission, seek to uphold its reputation. • Procure the services of a media adviser to provide public relations advice to the Commission, and to manage all media relations work, including press releases, enquiries, and briefings in relation to report launches.