

NICTS AGENCY BOARD MEETING: Monday 30 March 2026 at 3.30 pm (5th Floor Conference Room)

Present:

Paddy Butler (Acting Chair)	Director Coroners Service and Legacy Inquests
Presiding District Judge Keown	Presiding District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)
His Honour Judge Gilpin	Recorder of Belfast
The Hon Mr Justice Kinney	High Court Judge
Claire Duffy	President of Appeal Tribunals
Elaine Topping	Acting Director Court Services
Karen Ward	Director Modernisation, Digital and Estates
Catherine Rodgers	Acting Director Tribunals and Corporate Services
Debbie Maclam	Acting Principal Private Secretary to the Lady Chief Justice
Elaine Higgins	Deputy Director of Finance
Albert Hamilton	Independent Board Member
Katy Denkowski	Secretary

1. Welcome and Apologies

1.1 The Board expressed their sympathy to Glyn on the passing of his mother. Paddy chaired the Board in Glyn's absence.

1.2 Apologies –

Glyn Capper	Chief Executive
The Rt Hon Dame Siobhan Keegan	Lady Chief Justice
Vilma Patterson	Independent Board Member

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

2.1 The minutes of the meeting on 8 December 2025 were agreed.

3. Declarations of Interest

3.1 No declarations of interest were noted.

Strategic Issues

4. Chief Executive's Update (Paddy Butler)

4.1 Paddy noted the huge amount of work going on at the minute across NICTS, including a number of high profile cases, transformation work and work on the year-end accounts and budget.

5. Head of Division Updates

5.1 Paddy updated the Board on:

- Noah Donahoe Inquest, which is expected to run until May.
- CSNI death report volumes remain high.
- Legacy legislative picture remains unclear.

5.2 Elaine updated the Board on:

- Criminal Bar Association (CBA) action ongoing, situation being managed and staff redeployed to help in other areas.
- Resourcing remains an issue and training needs identified.
- Preparatory work for direct committals is ongoing, date expected in November.

5.3 Catherine updated the Board on:

- NIAO report on PAC final draft due to be shared this week - the Minister has been briefed.
- Dalradian expected to re-commence after Easter.
- Truth Recovery Redress Scheme – team working on preparing governance documents, accommodation is being secured and IT solution is well advanced. Legislation is subject to proposed amendments to be considered by the Executive.
- Work continues on Security & Ancillary Services contract which should go out to tender after Easter.
- On TAS side, work continues on a solution to the issue of tribunal members being removed from UK Judiciary platform.

5.4 Karen updated the Board on:

- On the Themis side, work continues on the Small Claims project, with design phase complete. Delivery discussions ongoing with supplier.
- Tribunals high level design complete and detailed solution design commenced.
- Early discovery work commenced on Civil business.
- On Estates, Karen noted the procurement on Bishop Street Modernisation Project is progressing.
- RCJ Modernisation Project – decant works in planning stage and assessing design proposals for Laganside Courts.
- Preparatory work for Old Townhall procurement is with CPD.
- User experience surveys results received and have been presented to Estates Committee and SMT.
- Sale of Larne Courthouse nearing completion.
- Pre-consultation work continues on Limavady Courthouse with consultation expected to launch in May.

5.5 Debbie updated the Board on:

- Easter Recess.
- Work continuing on CBA action.
- Engagement on RCJ Modernisation has been welcomed.
- Office supporting Speeding-up Justice initiatives.

The Board noted the various Business updates.

6. Performance Update (Paddy Butler)

- 6.1 Paddy, referring to the paper provided, updated the Board on the Quarter 3 position.
- 6.2 At the end of the Quarter 3, 10 Strategic Objectives published in the 2025/26 Business Plan were on track for achievement, three targets were achieved, three targets were partially achieved (related to estates projects) with the remaining one currently not achievable within the target timeframe (Themis).
- 6.3 In relation to the 27 performance standards, only three standards were red and one amber (within 1% of being achieved). A commentary paper was provided. The Board noted that work continues across teams and further improvement will hopefully be seen at year end. Some targets will be considered for revision going into the new reporting year.

Decision: The Board noted the performance update.

7. Strategic Resources Committee Update (Elaine Higgins)

- 7.1 Elaine, referring to the paper provided, updated the Board on the current position.
- 7.2 Year-end work continues and it is hoped we will come in with an underspend of under 2%.
- 7.3 She drew attention to the fact that final budget allocations for next year have yet to be received, the Board will be kept updated of any further developments. It was noted that while draft budget allocations presented difficulty across capital and resource allocations, the draft capital allocations in particular will present significant challenges and that some tough decisions will need to be made.
- 7.4 Elaine noted the increase in civil fee income which will increase by 5% from April 2026.

Decision: The Board noted the paper provided with no further comment.

8. NICTS Risk Register Quarter 4 2025-26 (Catherine Rodgers)

- 8.1 Catherine, referring to the paper provided, highlighted the top scoring risks for the Agency for this quarter.
- 8.2 There are 11 risks on the register. In Quarter 4, nine scores remained the same, one score increased, one score reduced.
- 8.3 There was a deep dive into two risks at Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) on 5 March (Degradation of the Court Estate and Insufficient Financial Resource to Modernise).

Decision: The Board noted the Risk Register and update provided.

9. Quarterly ARAC Update (Vilma Patterson)

9.1 Vilma, who was not at the meeting, had provided a paper.

Decision: The Board noted the paper provided.

10. Items for discussion: Draft 2026-27 Business Plan (Catherine Rodgers)

10.1 Catherine, referring to the paper and draft plan provided, updated the Board on the proposed Business Plan for 2026-27.

10.2 The format broadly follows that of last year's plan and was discussed at the SMT Planning Day on 25 February 2026.

10.3 Performance Standards have been reviewed and some amended for the next reporting year.

10.4 Business Objective 3 action 6 is subject to change following a feasibility report.

10.5 Subject to the budget and certain amendments the Board agreed the plan for 2026-27.

11. Integrating Generative AI Assistants into a Public Sector Agency (Albert Hamilton)

11.1 Albert Hamilton presented his paper to the Board on the potential use of AI within the NICTS and about keeping focus on this as an ongoing area for interest of the Board.

11.2 The potential benefits and risks were discussed.

11.3 Elaine and Karen noted that from an NICTS perspective we are bound by NICS Policy, and any approach would need to be safe, measured and controlled.

11.4 There was a discussion on AI use from a judicial perspective, and it was noted that a working group has been established with different angles being considered.

11.5 Discussion of "evergreen" AI in the context of ongoing Themis project, specifically around continuously integrating AI in systems & technology to avoid obsolescence.

11.6 The Board noted Albert's paper.

12. Internal Audit Reports

12.1 Internal Audit Review of NICTS – Laganside Front Counter.

Decision: The Board noted the report.

13. AOB

13.1 No other business raised.

14. Key Messages

14.1 Key messages from the meeting to be shared with staff:

- Keeping a close eye on budget position and the impact on financial & work planning for 2026/27.
- Acknowledging the achievement on 2025-26 business objectives and performance and preparation for next year's plan.
- Growing awareness of the benefits and risks of the use of AI across all work areas.

Next meeting – 15 June 2026.

Actions:

Date of Meeting	Action	Owner	Status
8 December 2025	Catherine to review protocol for submission of evidence in digital forms to tribunals.	Catherine Rodgers	Ongoing