

DECISION NOTICE

Breach of Section 6.2 of the Governance Code - failing to consult the Commissioner on the Senior Independent Panel Member before campaign launch

Appointing authority: Northern Ireland Office

Public body: Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Role(s): Four Commissioners

1. On Wednesday 8 April 2026, the Northern Ireland Office launched a campaign to appoint four new Commissioners to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC).
2. NIHRC appointments are significant appointments, requiring the appointment of a Senior Independent Panel Member (SIPM).
3. Section 6.2 of the Governance Code, relating to SIPMs, states as follows:

Ministers must agree who the SIPM should be for each competition and should consult the Commissioner for Public Appointments ahead of the process commencing. Sufficient time should be built in for the Commissioner to discuss with either or both of the Minister or SIPM before the competition goes live.

4. The Code is clear that the Commissioner must be consulted on the proposed SIPM or SIPMs 'ahead of the process commencing' and 'before the competition goes live'. In this case, the department launched the campaign without first consulting the Commissioner. On that basis, the Commissioner finds a breach of Section 6.2.
5. The Northern Ireland Office identified the breach following a change to the Senior Independent Panel Member prior to the panel sift meeting and took corrective action by consulting the Commissioner on the new panel member. It will be noted in the Commissioner's annual report for 2026-27.