

NISRA Annual Business Plan 2023 / 2024



Chief Executive's Foreword

I took up the joint position of Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and Registrar General for Northern Ireland at the end of February 2023. My appointment followed the retirement of my predecessor, Ms Siobhan Carey CBE, and the close of an extraordinary period for the Agency, including the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the activities associated with Census 2021.

This extraordinary period forms the backdrop for NISRA's Business Plan for 2023 / 2024 – and sets a high bar for our future performance. It is apparent to me that 2022 / 2023 was a year of delivery for NISRA. The publication of the first results from the 2021 Census – setting out how the population of Northern Ireland has changed over the last decade – and the significant progress we made in the delivery of our suite of economic and labour market statistics are both clear examples of this delivery.

Working across the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS), NISRA produced key insights on the impact of increases in the cost of living resulting from the war in Ukraine and the associated increase in the price of energy. Our excellent interviewer field force collected critically important data to support timely, insightful analysis across the full range of departments. The General Register Office (GRO) continued to operate under pandemic regulations, working throughout the year to meet the needs of the General Public. In these and many other ways, the staff of NISRA and the GRO continued to meet exceptional user needs in a flexible, dynamic and efficient manner.

Our ambitions for 2023 / 2024 build on this lofty performance but must also reflect the challenging financial environment for public services across Northern Ireland. This Business Plan sets out our Outcomes for the next 12 months based on an Outcomes Based Accountability approach – and reflects the priorities which are set out in our five-year Corporate Plan.

Among our key objectives are an ambitious programme of new outputs from Census 2021 – delivering real value from this investment and ensuring the insights it offers can impact on policy. Work to transform the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey will also

commence, and we will deliver a wide range of linked micro-data products for use in our universities and by researchers to deliver key policy insights. Alongside these technical outputs, we will make our releases more accessible and more focused, empowering the public with trusted insights on the population, economy and society of Northern Ireland.

The constrained financial environment will also shape our priorities for this year. The extended discussions about budgets across the NICS – as well as explaining the lateness of this Business Plan – account for the changes we plan to make to our outputs in consultation with our users. It also explains our intention to refocus our people on priority and strategically important income generating work streams. Our Tech Lab will continue to deliver innovations across the NICS, with a particular focus on efficiency enhancing projects, and we will look to use our resources and estate more efficiently.

As we monitor our financial position and press forward with our priority work streams, NISRA will also turn its attention to our strategic position in the wider NICS. Since my appointment I have started meeting with senior leaders across government, building a shared understanding of their vision and objectives, and identifying ways in which NISRA can support them in both the transformation and delivery of public services. This engagement has affirmed the importance of and appreciation for the power of data across the NICS and provides an excellent starting point for future discussions.

Sound data and insightful analytics are the bedrock of good policy design: there are few challenges which are not made easier or more tractable through focused research and analysis, especially at a time of constrained budgets. As we begin to develop a new Corporate Plan for 2024 – 2025 and beyond, we will look to how we can deliver on our position in the NICS to support key policy ambitions in Northern Ireland. I look forward to working with colleagues to deliver this and many other objectives.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philip Wales". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Philip Wales
Chief Executive & Registrar General

Our purpose

Support decision makers in the formulation of evidence-based policy and inform public debate, through the production and dissemination of high quality, trusted, meaningful analysis; facilitate research and deliver the decennial population census and cost effective civil registration services.

Our mission

Provide citizens and decision makers with trusted insight on life in Northern Ireland.

Our vision

We aspire to:

- be the go-to organisation for an accurate and insightful account of life in Northern Ireland, informing decision making and recognising our people are our strength;
- provide comprehensive registration and genealogy services that give our customers what they need; and
- be motivated and valued people doing excellent work together; innovating, growing, proud of our Agency and our impact.

Our values

Key to the Agency's future success will be the extent to which we live up to the standards we have set for ourselves, both individually and collectively. These are encapsulated within INSIGHT, the initiative we will use to give substance to our shared values, provide a focus for planned transformational activities and be a vehicle for the communication and exploration of organisational culture and the projection of leadership behaviours.

I	Investment in people, technology and learning and development.
N	Network of specialist staff across the public sector, working within a shared culture of collaboration, supportive team-working and effective communication.
S	Standards of best practice, professionalism, personal integrity and respect, taking pride in all we do and delivering on our promises.
I	Improvement through innovation and a challenge mind-set, supporting positive change and adding value in all we do to increase our efficiency, effectiveness and impact.
G	Good governance of data and our corporate processes.
H	High quality insight and analysis, outputs, publications and comprehensive service, engendering trust in what we say and the information that supports it.
T	Trust extended as a sign of our shared responsibility, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

DoF Strategic objectives

Priority 4: Excellent Public Services	
Target: Provide high quality statistical information to support public policy.	
Measurement	Timescale
• Publish Census 2021 Flexible Table Builder allowing users to build statistical tables on-demand	Summer 2023
• Begin delivery of Census 2021 microdata outputs / products.	Summer 2023
• Produce official population estimates in line with preannounced dates.	March 2024
• Begin transforming the Labour Force Survey into an online first Labour Market Survey.	March 2024
• Maintain the percentage of the general public who state they trust statistics produced by NISRA.	Autumn 2023
• Publish official economic and labour market statistics in line with preannounced dates.	Monthly, Quarterly and Annual as required.
Target: Deliver key civil registration services - births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships and adoptions.	
Measurement	Timescale
• 98% of priority certificate applications and 98% of standard certificate applications, fulfilled within target timescales (1 working day – priority certificate applications / 5 working days for standard certificate applications).	March 2024

Key priorities

- 1 To produce and publish key statistics and analysis on the economy and society of Northern Ireland to provide decision makers with the best possible evidence base and understanding.
- 2 Continue to work closely with departments across the NICS on key policy priorities: bringing the benefits of data and analysis to bear on strategically important questions to enable improved public services in a time of constrained budgets.
- 3 To work within our financial constraints to identify new and more efficient means of delivery, focusing our teams on strategically important income generating activity and meeting both the resourcing needs of and development ambitions of our people.

Enablers

To help deliver our strategic outcomes the Agency Board has committed to implementing a Transformational Programme designed to produce the changes our

customers, stakeholders and staff have asked for and that are demanded by the environment in which we now work. The Programme encompasses a range of activities grouped under the headings Culture, People, Structure, Collaboration, Data and Legislation.

Our organisation

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), which incorporates the General Register Office (GRO), is an executive agency within the Department of Finance (NI) and was established on 1 April 1996. It currently employs some 459¹ permanent Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff split between its core operational headquarters and 21 outposted locations including all NICS Departments and has a net operating budget of circa £11.1m.

The administration of the marriage and civil partnership law in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of GRO, along with the registration of births, deaths, adoptions and gender recognition. GRO is also responsible for the maintenance of registration records and the production of certificates in relation to these events on request.

The Agency is the principal source of Official Statistics and social research on Northern Ireland. These statistics and research not only inform public policy but also academic and private sector research, and contribute to debate in the wider community. We provide our services to a wide range of Government Departments and Non-Departmental Public Bodies, as well as Local Councils to assist the policy development process and the delivery of their business objectives.

NISRA conducts the Census of Population every 10 years which every household in Northern Ireland must complete by law. It is used by central and local government, health authorities and other organisations to plan and provide future services. The last Census took place in March 2021.

Our statisticians also make an important contribution to the draft Programme for Government (PfG) providing the data underpinning the vast majority of the 49 Population Indicators and assisting policy colleagues and other stakeholders in developing a greater understanding of the data.

¹ Figure is taken at 1st April 2023 and include NISRA staff outposted to other government departments and seconded to other organisations.

Governance arrangements

The Chief Executive is the designated Agency Accounting Officer and is responsible to the Finance Minister and accountable to the NI Assembly for the Agency's use of resources. The Chief Executive is also responsible for the propriety and regularity of the Agency's expenditure and for ensuring that the requirement of Government accounting standards and practice are met.

The Chief Executive ensures that the Agency observes any general guidance issued by DoF and puts into effect any recommendations by the Public Accounts Committee, other Assembly Select Committees or other relevant authority, which the Executive has accepted.

The Agency is subject to external audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland in concert with the Agency's own Audit and Risk Committee (ARC). ARC includes 3 non-executive directors (NEDs) one of whom also acts as Committee Chair. All three NEDs are also members of the DoF ARC, providing considerable continuity of approach and direct oversight of Agency level governance.

A Senior Management Team and a wider Agency Board assist the Chief Executive in the strategic management of the Agency and provide advice on major issues of policy.

Partners and ALBs

Nationally the Agency works in partnership with the UK Office for National Statistics, the Office for Statistics Regulation and the Government Statistical Service as well as collaboratively with the lead statisticians in the other regional administrations and the Republic of Ireland

Locally the Agency works in partnership with every district council in the delivery of registration services through the Local Council Offices.

In addition, NISRA considers the various NI business and industry sectors to be some of its most significant stakeholders, given the Agency's routine engagement with them in gathering economic data. Their views are represented specifically by the Agency's one ALB, the Statistical Advisory Committee (SAC) whose members are Ministerial appointees.

NISRA BUSINESS PLAN 2023 / 2024

Approach

In line with NICS recommended best practice, a NISRA Business Plan 2023 / 2024 has been developed based on an Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) approach, which sets out our Outcomes for the next 12 months, and the Indicators and Performance Measures that we will take towards achieving those Outcomes

The Plan incorporates NISRA's values, priorities, the INSIGHT Project outputs and the NISRA DoF measures.

NISRA is an Agency in its own right and therefore requires its own Outcomes and Indicators. This terminology is based on the OBA methodology (Outcomes / Indicator / Performance Measures); it does not include arbitrary performance measures (targets). The Plan also includes a section for accomplishments, which can be qualitative.

The proposed approach for NISRA includes an OBA scorecard, the lower quadrant of which, 'Is anyone better off', is a reflection of the impact NISRA's work has had at a corporate level. Further support for NISRA's impact is found in the narrative from NISRA Branches across departments.

Please Note: The Performance Measures are colour coded (OBA Ref) to indicate which quadrant of the OBA card they are applicable to. Where a Performance Measure fits into more than one quadrant it is marked with both colours.

<u>Outcomes Based Accountability Report Card</u>	
How much did we do? (N)	How well did we do it? (%)
Is anyone better off?	
N	%
Accomplishments	

OUTCOMES	INDICATOR	OBA Ref	PERFORMANCE MEASURE
Well structured organisation, delivering on agreed priorities	Planning and Resource Management		Identify our affordable approved ² vacancies and fill 90% of these within six months of approval under normal recruitment and promotion conditions.
			Review and monitor our resource allocation within NISRA in the context of the wider financial challenges in NICS.
			Initiate work to develop a longer term resourcing model for NISRA as a basis for future planning.
			Review the use of NISRA facilities with the aim of making more efficient use of our spaces, lowering NISRA's costs and enhancing staff well-being.
	The Agency will remain within allocated budget.		Underspend to be as close to budget as possible.
			Identify and secure significant new sources of income for NISRA to deliver strategically important activities.
	Provide high quality statistical information to support public policy.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish Census 2021 Flexible Table Builder allowing users to build statistical tables on-demand. Summer 2023. • Begin delivery of Census 2021 microdata outputs / products. Summer 2023. • Produce official population estimates in line with preannounced dates. March 2024. • Begin transforming the Labour Force Survey into an online first Labour Market Survey. March 2024.
			Publish official economic and labour market statistics in line with preannounced dates.
			As a partner within the Administrative Data research NI (ADR NI), NISRA will make new or enhanced cross government data linkages accessible to accredited researchers: the Cross Government Income Administrative dataset (Winter 2023), updates to the Educational Outcomes linkage (Winter 2023), the 2021 Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (March 2024), and the NI Mortality Study (March 2024).
	Deliver key civil registration services – births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships and adoptions.		98% of priority certificate applications and 98% of standard certificate applications, fulfilled within target timescales (1 working day – priority certificate applications / 5 working days for standard certificate applications). March 2024.
Inspired people.	Training and Development supports delivery of business objectives.		% staff sign posted to training/development requested via HOB training returns.
			% of all NISRA staff indicating they have deployed training in their day to day work.
	Staff are engaged.		Number of Wellbeing events organised.

²Refers to vacancies approved within NISRA and DoF FMB, includes temporary as well as permanent placements.

OUTCOMES	INDICATOR	OBA Ref	PERFORMANCE MEASURE
Add Value to Society, Engaging and Informing the public and customers.			% Employee Engagement.
			% level of staff wellbeing.
			% staff from the People Survey who feel involved in and understand how they contribute to the work of the Department.
			Conduct one (career development or professional development) managed moves exercise per analytical grade, per year.
	Produce People Survey Results.		Conduct the 2023 Civil Service People Survey and report the key findings by March 2024.
	The public is aware of and trusts NISRA.		Maintain the percentage of the general public who state they trust statistics produced by NISRA. Autumn 2023.
			% of awareness of NISRA amongst the general public.
Enhance Insight into NISRA Products and Services.	NISRA releases and publications are of high quality.		Number and percentage of official statistics publications with corrections (including major corrections and minor errors).
			Number of official statistics publications.
			Number of National Statistics publications.
			Conduct a review of NISRA DOF outputs to ensure that they are focused on key messages and affordable, engaging with our users on proposed changes.
	NISRA outputs are quality assured.		% of official statistical outputs with process documentation.
			% of official statistical outputs with a documented quality assurance process.
			Number of breaches of the Code of Practice for Statistics (broken down by IT vs non-IT).
We will lead as an Innovative Organisation.	NISRA activities are legislatively compliant.		Confirmed number of reported Breaches of DPA / GDPR.
			Subject Access Requests (SAR) processed on time (number / %).
			NISRA DoF FOI requests processed on time (number / %).
			Confirmed number of Breaches of DEA.
	Standardisation of Data Analysis and analytical toolset.		A review of the range of software tools, both licensed and 'open source', currently utilised across NISRA and their application with a view to determining their appropriateness and efficacy and make recommendations for a standard set.
	Data management and visualisation, automation and programming processes are utilised.		Develop a NISRA Culture Charter.
			Develop a RAP Strategy for NISRA and encourage NISRA branches to produce publications using the RAP process.

Measuring Success

Our approach to performance measurement and improvement arrangements will ensure that we have an appropriately detailed picture of our progress on delivering the desired outcomes described above. The framework we will use throughout the Plan period is set out in Figure 1 below.

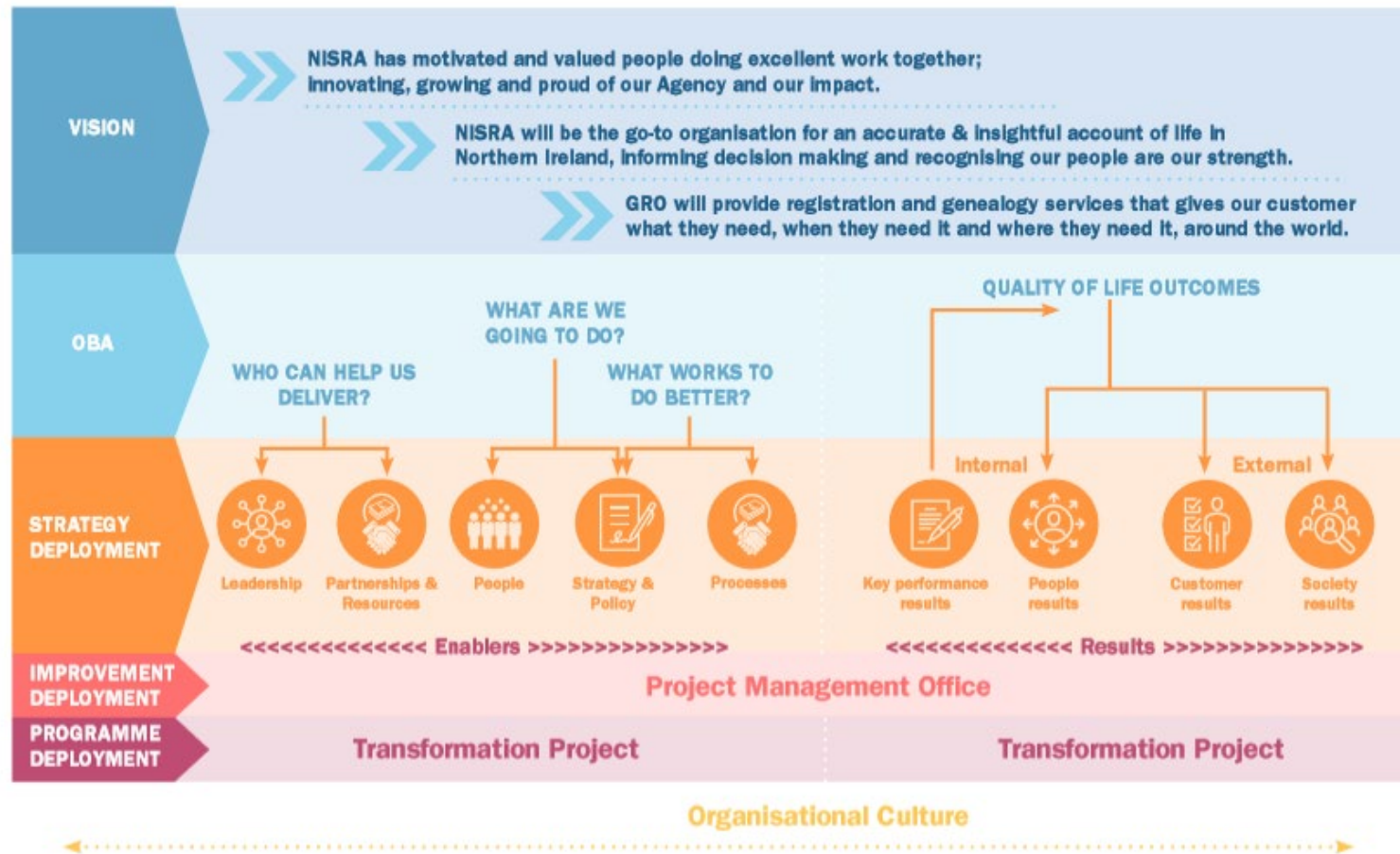


Fig 1: Performance measurement, management & improvement framework

Financial Resources

NISRA's opening Resource Budget for the financial year (FY) 2023 / 2024 is:

Opening budget	FY 2023 / 2024	FY 2022 / 2023
	£'m	£'m
Salaries	23.08	23.08
General Administrative Expenses	7.92	6.31
Total Operating Expenses	31.00	29.39
Income	(19.86)	(16.38)
Net Operating Cash Budget	11.14	13.01
Non-cash	2.1	1.0

The net cash allocation has substantially reduced from 2022/23 reflecting budget cuts within the Department of Finance for 2023/24 and the continued reduction in analysis of Census 2021 data.

The opening indicative capital budget allocation is:

£'m	FY2023 / 2024	FY2022 / 2023
Capital	3.5	1.8

The budget includes:

- £1.6m for the New Integrated Business Survey System (IBSS); and
- £1.0m for updating/development of Social Survey Operations and Infrastructure and delivery of PfG Indicator Data.

The Agency's funding position is monitored throughout the year and any emerging pressure or easement is considered at the monitoring rounds. The net Resource allocation includes estimated income totalling £19.8m which will be used to offset the Agency's expenditure.