



THE **LAW SOCIETY**
OF NORTHERN IRELAND



APPOINTMENT OF SOLICITOR MEMBERS

**TO UPHOLD PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS WITHIN
THE SOLICITOR PROFESSION IN NORTHERN
IRELAND**

INFORMATION BOOKLET

This material will also be made available on request in other formats such as Braille, large print, audio etc. All reasonable adjustments will be made to accommodate the needs of applicants with a disability.

1. BACKGROUND

In November 2006 a Legal Services Review Group chaired by Professor Sir George Bain, issued a report to government entitled “Legal Services in Northern Ireland: Complaints, Regulation, Competition.” This report contained recommendations aimed at improving the existing system, primarily in the context of complaints handling by professional bodies.

Subsequently, the Legal Complaints and Regulation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the 2016 Act) was introduced following consultation and is intended to be commenced on 1 September 2025. Implementation will bring changes to better assist the consumer and improve the existing regulatory framework. One of the key changes to the current system is to increase the lay membership of the regulatory bodies that are designated to determine complaints against the solicitor’s profession and the establishment of a new Solicitors Complaints Committee. For this reason, and although there will be a lay majority on the SCC, solicitor appointments are required to be made to the new Committee.

In addition, there are current vacancies for solicitor members of the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal (SDT).

Pursuant to Articles 43 and 73A of the Solicitors (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 (“the 1976 Order”), lay appointments to the above are made by the Lady Chief Justice (“LCJ”) in consultation with the Society’s Council.

This information booklet has been drafted in consultation with the Office of the LCJ and sets out the detail of appointments through a single composite recruitment exercise.

Should you have any questions about any of the appointments noted in this booklet, please contact apply@lawsoc-ni.org

1.1 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Under the new complaints handling system, complaints raised against members of the Solicitor's profession in Northern Ireland will be delineated as follows:

Lady Chief Justice Appeals and Judicial Review Applications	
Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal (SDT) Receives referrals from the Society's regulatory Committees and other interested persons against Solicitors.	
Solicitor Complaints Committee	Professional Conduct Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Will replace the current Client Complaints Committee upon commencement of the 2016 Act, save for transitional matters.➤ Investigates and determines complaints raised by a client against their Solicitor, or a beneficiary entitled to the estate or trust being administered by the Solicitor, relating to the adequacy of the professional service provided.➤ Sanctioning and investigative powers granted under Part 3 of the 2016 Act.➤ May refer a Solicitor to the SDT if a complaint is upheld.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Established by the Society in exercise of the powers granted to it by Article 73A of the 1976 Order.➤ Discharges the statutory and regulatory function of the Council of the Law Society of Northern Ireland with respect to the professional practice, conduct and discipline of the Solicitor profession with the aim of protecting the public and in the public interest.➤ Sanctioning and investigative powers granted under Articles 13, 14, 15 and 41B, Part 2, Part 3 and Part 4 of Schedule 1 and Schedule 1A of the 1976 Order.➤ May refer a Solicitor to the SDT for regulatory breaches.

2. THE ROLES IN CONTEXT

Solicitor Complaints Committee (SCC)

The SCC will be constituted with a lay Chairperson, lay majority membership and minority solicitor membership who must not be members of the Council of the Society. The Chairperson, Mr Richard Hill MBE has been appointed, and this recruitment exercise seeks to appoint the remaining solicitor members.

The SCC will provide greater independence by operating at arm's length from the Society when handling complaints against solicitors arising from the provision of professional services.

Where a complaint is made and the problem is not resolved with the solicitor firm/solicitor complaints office in the first instance, clients can submit a formal complaint to the SCC, which is the gateway for all service complaints. Any matters pertaining to the service received by a solicitor, for example delay, query on charges, or lack of responsiveness will be managed through the SCC process.

All matters pertaining to a solicitor's conduct it will be dealt with via the Society.

The SCC will have the power to:

- Direct the uplift of a solicitor's file,
- Direct a solicitor to take steps to complete or rectify a matter,
- Take such further action in the interests of the client as the SCC may direct at the solicitor's expense,
- Limit the costs to which the solicitor is entitled by directing a reduction, refund or waiving of a bill.
- Direct the solicitor to make a formal apology.
- Direct compensation of up to £5,000 if it is found that the client endured loss, inconvenience or distress.
- Direct the completion or correction of work undertaken by the solicitor at their own expense.

It is anticipated that the SCC will commence operations in September 2025 upon commencement of the 2016 Act.

Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal (SDT)

Upon commencement of the 2016 Act, the SDT will require at least two lay members and one legal Chair to constitute the Panel and will require a majority of lay membership overall. This recruitment exercise seeks to appoint solicitor members to the Tribunal.

The SDT is an independent statutory Tribunal which determines complaints that arise within the legal profession. The functions of the Tribunal and its procedures are set out in Articles 43 to 54 of the 1976 Order.

The Tribunal deals with the following types of business:

- Complaints of professional misconduct or of other conduct tending to bring the solicitors profession into disrepute from the Society or any other person.
- Applications for replacement to the Roll of Solicitors and Applications for Removal of a Restriction on a practising certificate.
- Applications for an order terminating a solicitor's suspension from practice.
- Applications by a solicitor who is excluded from legal aid work by an order made under Article 51B the 1976 Order for an order terminating their exclusion.
- Complaints that a solicitor has been convicted in Northern Ireland of a criminal offence tending to bring the solicitors' profession into disrepute or has been convicted outside Northern Ireland of an offence of like character which if committed in Northern Ireland would be a criminal offence.

The most severe sanction available to the Tribunal is to strike an individual off the Roll of Solicitors, which effectively removes the individual's right to practise as a solicitor in Northern Ireland. Other orders can range from issuing an admonishment, imposing a fine, restricting or suspending a solicitor from practising etc.

3. DETAILS OF THE APPOINTMENTS

Roles:	Solicitor members to Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal (SDT) Solicitor members to Solicitor Complaints Committee (SCC)
Organisations:	Law Society of Northern Ireland and The Independent Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal.
Location:	Belfast (some meetings may be in hybrid format but some attendance in person will be required).
Reserve List:	12 months from the date of appointments.
Duration of Appointment:	3 years with possibility of re-appointment for a further term thereafter.
Workload Commitment:	Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal: 5-10 sittings per annum Solicitor Complaints Committee: 10-20 sittings per annum Additional time for reading papers in preparation of meetings will also be required.
Remuneration:	£250 per sitting. Meetings lasting two hours or less £125 *Composite fee for pre and post meeting preparation, as well as meeting attendance.
Expenses:	45 pence per mile or other reasonable travelling (car/bus/rail) and car parking expenses.

4. MAIN DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

To contribute to the efficient and effective operation of the regulatory system and process, ensuring the highest standards of integrity, fairness, and transparency.

The roles require a strong commitment to upholding the principles of justice, professional service standards and enhancing public confidence in the Solicitor profession.

The persons appointed are expected to display high standards of integrity and probity, both within and outside of sittings, to treat people fairly, take personal accountability and be prepared to commit sufficient energy and time to be effective in the role.

The successful candidates are also expected to be independent in character and judgement.

The successful candidates should ensure they have sufficient IT resources and skills to consider papers and attend remote meetings where required.

Key Responsibilities:

Adjudication & Decision-Making:

- Contribute to the adjudication process, ensuring that all cases are reviewed fairly, impartially, objectively, and in accordance with established procedures.
- Contribute to making high-level decisions on complex or high-profile cases, considering legal, ethical, and regulatory factors.
- Work collaboratively with Committee/Tribunal members and legal advisors to ensure sound decision-making.

Governance and Policy:

- Contributing to the operation of the Committee/Tribunal.
- Promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical decision-making.
- Ensure that all policies and practices meet regulatory and legal requirements.
- Work with Committee/Tribunal Members to ensure appropriate standards of governance are met.

Operational Contribution:

- Work closely with other Committee/Tribunal members and secretariat to contribute to the day-to-day operations, ensuring the efficient, effective and timely handling of complaints.
- Provide mutual support to colleagues and to challenge and respond to being challenged, constructively.

Performance & Reporting:

- Maintain attendance and contribution to the meetings and work of the Committee/Tribunal.
- Ensure compliance with statutory reporting requirements, providing transparency to stakeholders and the public.
- Work with the Chairing Member to ensure that the highest quality of regulation of the profession takes place through the work of the Committee/Tribunal.

5. PERSON SPECIFICATION

ESSENTIAL

- Must be a solicitor on the Roll of Solicitors in Northern Ireland, holding a valid Practising Certificate without condition, with at least 10 years post-qualification experience.
- Must not be a current member of LSNI Council, a member or co-optee of any Committee of the Society or a member of LSNI staff.
- Must demonstrate private practice experience in two out of four of the following areas of practice:
 - (i) Conveyancing
 - (ii) Administration of Estates
 - (iii) Litigation
 - (iv) Family Law
- Must have a strong working knowledge of legal aid work.
- Must have at least 2 years' experience, including the drafting and explaining of decisions, as a member of a statutory committee, Board, or other decision-making body dealing with matters involving members of the public.
- Must not have received any sanctions from the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal within the last 5 years.
- Must demonstrate an understanding of the statutory and other frameworks within which Solicitors in Northern Ireland operate.
- Must have a working knowledge of legislation affecting the work and practice of solicitors including: -

The Solicitors Practice Regulations 1987 as amended.

The Solicitors (Client Complaints) Practice Regulations 2008.

The Accounts Regulations.

The legislative provisions relating to the delivery of criminal and civil legal aid services.

The Home Charter Scheme and associated Regulations and Practice Directions.

The Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Transfer of Funds (Information on the Payer) Regulations 2017 and associated Regulations and Practice Directions.

- Must demonstrate a full understanding of the billing requirements of a Solicitor, including the statutory provisions in the Solicitors (N.I.) Order 1976 as amended and the Solicitors Remuneration Order (N.I.) 1977, the application of RCJ Order 62, and Article 55 in the County Court Order.

- Must demonstrate the ability to work collaboratively with other members of the Committee to reach reasoned conclusions.
- Must demonstrate the ability to assimilate and analyse complex papers and reach evidence-based conclusions.
- Must be sufficiently available to attend meetings of the Committee and Tribunal as required.

DESIRABLE

- Must have direct experience of handling, reviewing, and determining complaints in a Committee, Board, or formal decision-making setting.

6. SELECTION PROCESS

To apply, candidates must complete an application form which can be found here:

[Solicitor Member Application Form](#)

Please ensure that you indicate on the application form to which of the three bodies you wish to apply for appointment (you can apply for any or all of the three bodies, however successful candidates will receive one appointment only).

Closing date for receipt of completed applications is Friday 23rd May 2025.

The selection process will include:

- A paper-based short-listing assessment of applications against the criteria outlined in the person specification.
- An interview focused on experience and competence will be undertaken by the Appointment Panel.

All candidates will be notified of the format in advance of each stage to aid their preparation.

Full details will be provided to all candidates in letters of invitation to each stage of the process.

The outcome of each stage of the process will be communicated to each candidate individually and, where requested, feedback will be provided.

A formal offer of appointment will be made to the successful candidates on the satisfactory completion of any pre-appointment checks that are considered by the panel to be required.

As a minimum requirement successful candidates who are offered appointment must provide a Basic Disclosure Certificate issued by AccessNI confirming a clear criminal record check. Further details of this procedure will be provided if your application is successful.

Indicative Timetable of Recruitment

Closing date: Friday 23rd May 2025

Shortlisting Notification: Friday 6th June 2025

Interviews: 13th, 16th, 17th, 23rd and 25th June 2025

Appointment Notification: Week commencing 25th August 2025

Appointments commence: With effect from **1 September 2025**

7. FURTHER INFORMATION

Any queries about this appointment or the selection process should be addressed to apply@lawsoc-ni.org

Disability requirements

If you require any reasonable adjustments, due to disability, to enable you to attend any part of the process please contact us. Details of any disability do not form any part of the selection process.

Conflict of interest and due diligence.

What is a conflict of interest?

If there are any issues in your personal or professional history that could, if you were appointed be misconstrued, cause embarrassment or cause public confidence in the appointment to be jeopardised, it is important that you bring them to the attention of the Appointment panel and provide details of the issues(s) in your application.

In considering whether you wish to declare any issues, you should also reflect on any public statements you have made, including through social media. The Panel may wish to explore issues with you before they make a recommendation to appoint.

As part of due diligence checks we will consider anything in the public domain related to your conduct or professional capacity. This will include consideration of any publicly available information which may be made available to the Appointment Panel and they may wish to explore with you, should you be invited for interview.

Public Appointments require the highest standards of propriety, involving impartiality, integrity and objectivity, in relation to the stewardship of public funds and the oversight and management of all related activities. This means that any private, voluntary, charitable or political interest which might be material and relevant to the work of the body concerned should be declared.

There is always the possibility for real or perceived conflicts of interest to arise. Both are a problem, as the perceived inference of a conflict may, on occasions, be as damaging as the existence of a real conflict.

No-one should use, or give the appearance of using, their public position to further their private interests. This is an area of particular importance, as it is of considerable concern to the public and receives a lot of media attention. It is important, therefore, that you consider your circumstances when applying for a public appointment and identify any potential conflicts of interest, whether real or perceived.

Surely a perceived conflict is not a problem, as long as I act impartially at all times?

The integrity of the individual is not in question here. However, it is necessary for the standing of the individual and the board that members of the public have confidence in their independence and impartiality. Even a perceived conflict of interest on the part of a board member can be extremely damaging to the body's reputation and it is therefore essential that these are declared and explored, in the same way as an actual conflict would

be. The fact that a member acted impartially may be no defence against accusations of potential bias.

What should I do if I think I have a conflict of interest?

You will find a section on conflicts of interest in the application form for you to complete. This asks you to consider and declare whether or not you have a real, or perceived, conflict. If you are unsure if your circumstances constitute a possible conflict, you should still complete this section, in order to give the Selection Panel as much information as possible.

If I declare a conflict, does this mean I will not be considered for appointment?

No - each case is considered individually. If you are short-listed for interview, the Panel will explore with you how far the conflict might affect your ability to contribute effectively and impartially on the Board and how this might be handled, if you were to be appointed. For example, it may be possible to arrange for you to step out of meetings where an issue is discussed, in which you have an interest. However, if, following the discussion with you, the Panel believes that the conflict is too great and would call into question the probity of the Board or the appointment; they can recommend the withdrawal of your application from the competition.

What happens if I do not declare a known conflict, which is then discovered by the Department after my appointment?

Again, each case would be considered on its merits, but the relevant appointing body may take the view that by concealing a conflict of interest, you would be deemed to have breached the Seven Principles of Conduct Underpinning Public Life and may terminate your appointment.

What happens if I do not realise a potential conflict exists?

This situation may arise where the applicant is not familiar with the broad range of work which a body covers and therefore does not realise that a conflict might exist. In some cases, the Panel, with their wider knowledge of the body, might deduce that there is a potential conflict issue, based on the information on employment and experience provided by the candidate in the application form. They will then explore this at interview with the candidate.

What happens if a conflict of interest arises after an appointment is made?

This could arise for two main reasons. The first is that the member's circumstances may change, for example, they may change jobs and in doing so, a conflict with their work on the board becomes apparent. The second is where a member is unfamiliar with the range of the work of the body, but after appointment, it becomes clear that a conflict exists where none had been envisaged during the appointment process.

In both cases, the issue should be discussed with the Chair of the regulatory entity and the Chief Executive of the appointing body concerned, in consultation with the Sponsoring Department, to decide whether or not the member can continue to carry out their role in an appropriate manner, each case is considered individually.

It may be that the conflict is such that it would be impractical for the member to continue on the board, if they would have to withdraw from a considerable amount of the body's routine business. In such, cases, the member may be asked to stand down from the body.

Note for applicants: Whilst these are not public appointments, the relevant appointing bodies have adopted the following guidance for the purpose of appointing lay members of the Committees/Tribunal.

PROBITY & CONFLICTS OF INTEREST GUIDANCE FOR CANDIDATES

This information should be read in conjunction with the Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland "Guidance on Conflicts of Interest and Integrity and How to Raise a Complaint".

Standards of behaviour

Ministers expect that the conduct of those they appoint to serve on the Boards of public bodies will be above reproach.

The Seven Principles Underpinning Public Life

In 1995, the Committee on Standards in Public Life defined seven principles, which should underpin the actions of all who serve the public in any way. These are:

Selflessness: Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or other friends.

Integrity: Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity: In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability: Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness: Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty: Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership: Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.