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Tonia Antoniazzi MP
Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
SW1A 0AA

By email: northircom@parliament.uk

11th May 2026

Our reference: MC/26/292

Dear Tonia,

On 15th April, I made a Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) about an independent review of the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR) which was commissioned following a number of concerns about corporate effectiveness and culture raised directly with the NIO. In that statement, I committed to placing the Review findings, along with our response and joint ICRIR/NIO action plan, in the Library of the House, once that information had been shared by ICRIR with their staff.

I am advised that ICRIR has now shared the Review with their staff, and updated them on the actions being taken to address the Review's findings. I now write to you to share the review in full alongside my plans to address its findings. I am placing a copy of this letter and its attachments in the Library of the House.

The Peter May Review

Peter May was jointly commissioned by NIO and ICRIR in December 2025 to deliver an independent review into the corporate effectiveness and cultural health of ICRIR. The Review had three key objectives:

- To provide an assessment of ICRIR's effectiveness in providing strategic and operational leadership and adhering to the duties set out in the Framework Document (which sets out the broad governance framework within which the NIO and ICRIR operate).
- To determine if ICRIR is effectively meeting the requirements of *Managing Public Money* including the Accounting Officer responsibilities.
- To provide an assessment of the operating culture and organisational effectiveness of ICRIR, its current Senior Leadership Team and its Board in overseeing the duties set out in the Framework Document.

Peter May undertook more than 50 meetings as part of his review, including with members of the ICRIR Board, ICRIR senior staff, NIO officials and those who have worked with the Commission, such as internal and external audit, and external members of ICRIR Committees. He visited the ICRIR offices in both Belfast and London and held three site meetings attended by around 100 staff, both online and in person. He also met a number of ICRIR staff individually or in small groups, at their request.

Summary of Review Findings

Peter May's findings were provided to ICRIR and NIO at the end of February 2026 in his Final Report. He recognised that there are real strengths in the work done to date in creating the Commission, securing more Requesting Individuals than expected and receiving good feedback about their engagement to date. He also noted that the Commission has many good people committed to the mission of the organisation and willing to work hard to achieve it. I have met many of those ICRIR staff and I wholeheartedly agree with that assessment.

However in Peter May's view, it is clear that ICRIR is facing significant problems resulting from a combination of the governing legislation which he feels creates structural weaknesses, problems with the financial management and governance of the organisation and conflict among its senior leaders which is damaging the operation of the organisation and overall morale.

The review sets out that senior leaders need to tackle the financial management and governance weaknesses in the organisation. It also indicates that work is needed to review and revise approaches to decision making to simplify and clarify who can take what decision and to ensure that the outcome does not unacceptably diminish delegation and autonomy at all levels. Peter May's view is that the senior leadership of ICRIR need to address key cultural challenges facing the organisation, including tackling unacceptable behaviour and improving internal communications.

NIO Response

I am grateful to Peter May for undertaking this review, as well as the time and engagement invested by all those who contributed to it. I am particularly conscious of those ICRIR staff who spoke to him in confidence and expressed fears that their honesty could result in negative consequences for them within the Commission. I thank them for their candour, and I am deeply concerned that such an impression may have been given to these staff.

ICRIR was established under the Legacy Act 2023. Its task is to undertake complex and sensitive investigations relating to deaths and serious injuries during the Troubles. In doing so, ICRIR's Commissioners and senior leaders have a duty to uphold the organisation's values and those of the wider public sector, to ensure victims, survivors and their families, and indeed their own staff, can have confidence in them.

I was deeply concerned to read the findings in Peter May's review, and I have made my dismay clear to each ICRIR Commissioner. While the review makes clear that it is for the ICRIR Board to address matters of conduct and performance, what has been identified is unacceptable and falls below the standards expected. It is for the ICRIR Board urgently to take whatever steps are necessary and appropriate to address this. I do not accept that the internal friction identified in the review is an inevitable consequence of the current structure or, indeed, of the new one. These are questions of management and leadership, and I expect all public office holders to clearly demonstrate their commitment to the Nolan principles.

As the sponsoring department, the NIO maintains regular contact with the ICRIR, both to provide necessary oversight and also to discuss how the Commission will be reformed by the measures in the Troubles Bill, ensuring that any changes are operationally practicable. Since receiving the findings of this review, I have met each of the Commissioners individually and a joint ICRIR-NIO oversight committee has been established to ensure that the review's recommendations are swiftly addressed. I have also provided additional dedicated sponsorship resource within the NIO to support the organisation. My officials are already working with ICRIR to deliver a joint action plan to address Peter May's recommendations, and are meeting regularly to ensure progress is made urgently. Progress is being made but there is more to do, in particular to start seeing the publication of final reports.

In his review, Peter May notes a number of internal finance and governance weaknesses. NIO officials are working closely with ICRIR to make sure these internal governance shortcomings are promptly addressed in order to ensure the organisation operates effectively, provides value for money and meets both its statutory duties and public sector governance requirements.

Finally, Peter May makes a number of suggestions regarding the governing legislation, the Troubles Bill and other wider policy considerations. The Troubles Bill will reform the way in which the Legacy Commission is structured and operates, and is intended to remedy the organisational weaknesses in the Legacy Act 2023 which are identified in the review. Last week, the Supreme Court confirmed that ICRIR is capable of delivering human rights-compliant investigations. The judgment also shows that the Government was right to remove the provision for conditional immunity, which was wrong in principle, lacked public confidence, and has been found to be incompatible with human rights standards. The Troubles Bill is now the only viable way to generate confidence across communities, enable information sharing by the Irish authorities and put in place the necessary safeguards for our former service personnel.

Through the Troubles Bill, this Government has been clear that it is committed to reforming the governance structures of the ICRIR - which will become the Legacy Commission - to build wider confidence in its vital work. The provisions in the Bill are designed to reform the ICRIR, address conflicts of interest and create new oversight arrangements to provide accountability

for the Commission. They place a duty on me to take advice on appointments to the Commission, and create statutory provision for an independent person or body to undertake regular scheduled reviews of the performance by the Commission of its functions. Indeed, provisions in the Troubles Bill establishing a statutory Oversight Board more at arm's length from day-to-day management, directly address the reviewer's concerns about a conflict between executive and non-executive responsibilities in the present (non-statutory) board.

These provisions will help support the Commission to make improvements in its corporate effectiveness to enable it to better do its work for victims, survivors and families, as they seek to find answers after so many years. ICRIR is a new public organisation with a complex statutory role, and the work that the Commission's dedicated staff are undertaking is really important to those families. Nothing must detract from the continuation of that work as more families approach the Commission for assistance. The Government will do everything it can, including through the important reforms set out in the Northern Ireland Troubles Bill, to help ICRIR deliver for those families.

I hope this letter has been helpful. I would be very happy to answer any questions which the Committee might have on the Peter May Review, our response or the action plan. Further to my WMS, I will also make a further statement in due course on the appointment of a Chair for the Section 36 review.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Benn', written in a cursive style.

**THE RT HON HILARY BENN MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

Attachments:

1. Peter May Final Report
2. Joint NIO-ICRIR Action Plan