

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY SECOND MEETING HELD **ON WEDNESDAY 27 MAY 2020 AT 1.30 PM** **BY TELECONFERENCE**

PRESENT

Geraldine McGahey	Chief Commissioner
Neil Anderson	Deputy Chief Commissioner
June Best	
Theresa Donaldson	
Duane Farrell	
Helen Ferguson	
Hazel Francey	
Jarlath Kearney	(part)
Deepa Mann-Kler	
Stephen Mathews	
Carmel McKinney	
Joe McVey	
Dawn Purvis	
Katy Radford	

APOLOGIES

IN ATTENDANCE

Evelyn Collins	Chief Executive
Keith Brown	Head of Corporate Services
Jacqui McKee	Director, Advice and Compliance
Anne McKernan	Director, Legal Services
Darren McKinstry	Director, Policy and Strategic Engagement
Louise Conlon	Manager, Communications
Adriana Morvaiova	Boardroom Apprentice

1. Introduction

The Chief Commissioner welcomed everyone to the Commission meeting, which was taking place for the third month by teleconference call due to Government guidance on the Coronavirus pandemic.

2. Minutes of the one hundred and seventy first meeting held on 29 April 2020.

EC/20/05/01

The minutes of the one hundred and seventy first meeting held on Wednesday 29 April 2020 were **signed** as a true and accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

Pg 2 Commissioner Induction: these sessions would take place during June.

Pg 4 Draft Business Plan: this will be presented again for approval when budget information has been received.

4. Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

5. Policy Issues

- Establishment of the Dedicated Mechanism: Briefing Paper

EC/20/05/02

Roisin Mallon, Senior Policy Officer, updated on a number of recent key developments in respect to the Dedicated Mechanism, including measures to implement the Withdrawal Agreement together with the passing of the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020, and the coming into operation of a number of relevant EU/UK oversight bodies. She noted that discussions were ongoing regarding resources and a public facing document, outlining the commitments in Article 2 of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol and the role of the Dedicated Mechanism, was being finalised by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO).

Commissioners welcomed this latest update which provided clear information on a complex area and keeps the Commission up to date with developments in respect to the Dedicated Mechanism.

Commissioners queried whether if the Northern Ireland Office planned any further engagement with stakeholders over the next period, noting the limited engagement that had taken place during the initial planning period. It was confirmed that the Commission continued to emphasise to NIO officials the importance of engaging stakeholders. The publication of the public facing document, once finalised, would form part of this engagement.

Following a query, the Chief Executive outlined the Commission's bid for additional resources over a three-year period. She also updated Commissioners on discussions with The Executive Office officials regarding the receipt of these resources once they had been approved by UK Treasury; and with NIO officials on arrangements to ensure oversight of matters which fall within the scope of the Article 2 commitment and have an all island basis

Commissioners **noted** the update and planned next steps, including the potential need for Commissioners' approval to constitute the Dedicated Mechanism once there is clarity about the level of resources being made available prior to next Board meeting.

- Draft Communications Strategy 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021
EC/20/05/03

Ms Louise Conlon, Manager, Communications presented the draft Communications Strategy 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2022. She advised that the last Strategy has been in place since May 2017 and a review of it had been presented to and discussed by Commissioners in September 2019. The current draft Strategy took into account feedback from September 2019 and was being presented for comment; a final draft would be on the agenda for the next Commission meeting for approval.

Commissioners commended the draft Strategy noting that it provided a clear framework to develop the Commission's communications work. They welcomed the focus on accessibility of the Commission communications and on the need to provide information in clear, understandable language. This was important if the Commission is to connect with all its audiences.

In respect of stakeholder engagement, Commissioners were content that the Strategy built upon the work already done to ensure that stakeholder engagement is two way and focused on listening to stakeholders. It was important that the Commission was clear on its audience requirements. It was suggested that the "Goal" in the document required further refinement. It was also agreed that more work was required to refine the performance indicators in order to provide baseline data. Commissioners noted the resources available in terms of both staff resource and budget. There was a query around website functionality and audience segmentation.

Commissioners noted that the Strategy will be further developed and refined and the final Strategy will be presented to Commissioners for approval at the June Commission meeting.

6. Business Reporting

- Risk Management and Corporate Risk Register: update

EC/20/05/04

Keith Brown, Head of Corporate Services, presented the updated Risk Management Policy and Corporate Risk Register.

This will be revised later in the year, taking into consideration the recent publication by HM Treasury of an updated 'Orange Book' on risk management and a forthcoming internal audit review of the Commission's risk management processes.

The Head of Corporate Services also presented the updated Corporate Risk Register and outlined the key changes from the Register presented to the Commission in November 2019, and drew attention to the emerging risks identified. He noted in particular the impacts of Covid-19 and the delay to the provision of a budget for the Commission by The Executive Office.

[Jarlath Kearney joined the meeting]

There was a query regarding an emerging risk noted in respect to investigations; the Chief Executive provided further information on this matter.

There were also queries around the impact of the current Covid 19 in particular on data protection and governance arrangements. The Chief Executive confirmed that all staff had recently been provided with Data Protection training in the context of homeworking. She was also content that the Commission's governance arrangements were robust even in the current environment, there were clear audit trails in relation to notification of arrangements being put in place for example.

In response to a query on risk appetite, it was noted that the Commission discussion of Board Effectiveness, being planned for later in the year, could provide the opportunity for further consideration of strategic risk and a review of the Commission's risk appetite.

Commissioners **approved** the updated Risk Management Policy and Corporate Risk Register.

7. Other Matters for Commission Decision

No other matters for Commission decision.

8. Chief Commissioner's Business

EC/20/05/05

The Chief Commissioner reported on recent meetings including on a briefing that she and the Chief Executive had given to the TEO Assembly Committee. They had also met the Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive of NI Human Rights Commission.

- Committee Membership

EC/20/05/05i

The Commissioners **agreed** the proposed Committee membership and noted that dates for induction of new Committee members would follow.

9. Chief Executive's Report

EC/20/05/06

The Chief Executive presented her May report, and provided an update on homeworking, noting that work has commenced in drawing up a list of issues to be addressed in preparation for a return to Equality House at some stage.

In respect to Covid 19, since the last meeting the Commission had published further articles and advice and she had written to the Chief Executives of the Health Trusts to remind them of the importance of adhering with their Statutory Duties.

Commissioners **noted** the Chief Executive's Report.

10. Matters for Information

There were no matters for information.

11. Minutes of Committee Meetings

- Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 4 February 2020.

EC/20/05/07

- Notes of the CRPD Meeting held on 5 November 2019. EC/20/05/08
- Notes of Special CRPD Meeting held on 15 January 2020 EC/20/05/09

Commissioners **noted** the Minutes of meetings outlined above.

12. Any Other Business

No further business to discuss.

13. Date of next meeting: One hundred and seventy third Commission Meeting on Wednesday, 24 June 2020, at 1.30 pm.

The meeting closed at 3.05pm