

**EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

**ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY SEVENTH MEETING HELD**  
**ON WEDNESDAY 24 NOVEMBER 2021 AT 1.30 PM**  
**on Microsoft Teams**

**PRESENT**

Geraldine McGahey	Chief Commissioner
Neil Anderson	Deputy Chief Commissioner
June Best	
Theresa Donaldson	
Duane Farrell	
Hazel Francey	
Helen Ferguson	
Stephen Mathews	
Carmel McKinney	
Joe McVey	
Dawn Purvis	
Katy Radford	

**APOLOGIES**

Jarlath Kearney  
Deepa Mann-Kler

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Evelyn Collins	Chief Executive
Keith Brown	Head of Corporate Services
Louise Conlon	Manager, Communications
Roisin Mallon	Director, Dedicated Mechanism Unit
Jacqui McKee	Director, Advice and Compliance
Darren McKinstry	Director, Policy and Strategic Engagement
Lisa King	Director, Investigations & Research
Tamlyn Stinson	Boardroom Apprentice

## 1. Introduction

The Chair welcomed all to the Commission meeting. She congratulated Theresa Donaldson on her appointment as Chair of the Board of Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

## 2. Minutes of the one hundred and eighty sixth meeting held on 27 October 2021.

EC/21/09/01

The minutes of the one hundred and eighty sixth meeting held on Wednesday 27 October 2021 were **signed** as a true and accurate record.

## 3. Matters Arising

Pg 2 The Investigation Report with respect to the paragraph 10 complaint was laid before Parliament and the NI Assembly on 4 November 2021.

Pg 2 The Measuring Equality framework was being finalised for consultation and would issue shortly.

Pg 3 The report on scrutinising draft legislation in respect to Article 2 obligations being designed and will be published on the Commission's website shortly; the NIHRC are considering the recommendations at its November Board meeting.

Pg 3 Preparations are progressing for a social media campaign based on the need to update equality legal protections. It is now envisaged that this will start in January and run into the first year of the new corporate plan.

Pg 5 The report of the Commissioner discussion session of 12 November had been circulated by email on 18 November 2021.

## 4. Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

## 5. Policy Issues

- Draft Corporate Plan 2022-2025:

EC/21/10/02

The Chief Executive outlined proposals for a revised vision and mission, values and five strategic priorities to guide the Commission's work in the

coming Corporate Plan period. These proposals built upon input from Commissioners through their away days and also from engagement with staff over the last period.

Once approved, these would be incorporated into a draft consultative Corporate Plan document, with a consultation launched prior to the end of November 2021. The Chief Executive drew attention to the engagement plan for public consultation which was appended to the paper. It was anticipated that, following consultation, a final updated draft would be presented to Commissioners in March 2022.

Commissioners welcomed the staff engagement on the Vision and Mission and on the Values. Commissioners discussed the options as presented. It was agreed that the vision should be 'An equal society', as discussed at the Commissioner away day in September; for the mission statement, one of the staff suggestions was agreed - 'Improving people's lives by promoting equality and combatting discrimination'. Commissioners welcomed the work done with staff on the core values, made a few suggestions for consideration in this regard, and noted the ongoing work on behaviours.

On the strategic priorities, they agreed that these captured Commissioners suggestions and views to date. Some wording changes in relation to the strategic area relating to the Article 2 work were suggested. Commissioners were informed that the consultation document would refer to work focused on specific equality grounds as well as the work which covers the full range of equality grounds.

Commissioners noted the planned engagement and agreed on the importance of community engagement during the consultation.

Commissioners approved the proposals as amended and **noted** the proposed next steps and plans public consultation.

## 6. Business Reporting

- Corporate Risk & Business Continuity Register EC/21/10/03

Keith Brown, Head of Corporate Services, presented an updated Corporate Risk and Business Continuity Register. He advised Commissioners of the restructuring of risks and risk descriptions that had taken place since the May meeting. He also advised of changes to residual risk targets and sought approval for these. He confirmed that these had been considered at Audit and Risk Committee meetings. He also drew attention to the increased risk rating for CR4,

With reference to the change to CR4, Neil Anderson, Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, reminded Commissioners that the internal audit review of the Commission's data protection had been requested by ARC members and senior management, as a consequence of the number of minor data breaches and near misses over the recent period. The outcome of this audit had resulted in the change to the rating for CR4 and this would be a matter of ongoing scrutiny by the Committee.

Following discussion, and response to queries, Commissioners thanked Audit and Risk Committee members for their continued diligence and work.

The updated Corporate Risk Register and Business Continuity Register, including the changes to risk targets, was **approved**.

[Hazel Francey left the meeting]

- Legal Services Report: 1 April 2021- 30 Sept 2021      EC/21/10/04

The Chief Executive presented the report on the provision of legal advice services from 1 April and 30 September 2021, outlining the work undertaken and the patterns and trends for the period. She explained that calls to the Discrimination Advice Officers appeared to have had returned to previous levels. A meeting will be arranged in Q4 for all Legal Funding Commissioners to consider the outcome of the consultation on the revised Policy for the Provision of Legal Advice and Assistance, prior to approval by the full Commission.

Queries were raised and responded to about the sort of assisted cases that resulted in positive media coverage and whether this was a factor considered at the outset of assistance; on the number of responses received to the consultation on the revised Policy for the Provision of Legal Advice and Assistance; and the level of complaints raised about sexual orientation discrimination, including in comparison to other equality bodies

Commissioners **noted** the report.

- Equality Schemes for Approval:      EC/21/10/05

- Independent Monitoring Authority (IMA)
- Historic Institutional Abuse Redress Board (HIARB)

Jacqui McKee, Director, Advice and Compliance, presented the above

Equality Schemes for approval, noting that each Scheme has been audited for compliance to ensure it meets the obligations under Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. She provided background regarding the development of the schemes presented for approval.

Following consideration, Commissioners **approved** the Equality Schemes outlined above.

## **7. Other Matters for Commission Decision**

None

## **8. Chief Commissioner's Business**

EC/21/10/06

The Chief Commissioner thanked Commissioners for attending the inaugural three Commissions meeting, the previous day, involving Commissioners from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. Commissioners agreed that it had been an important opportunity to meet the other Commissioners to discuss progress made to date in respect to the Article 2 role, including on issues falling within its scope that have an all-island dimension.

The Chief Commissioner also thanked those who were able to join the strategic discussion session at Malone House on 12 November. A report of the session had been circulated.

One of the actions arising was the resumption of the Strategic discussion sessions. Following reflection on suggestions for topics made over the recent period, the Chief Commissioner proposed that the first session would be on equality issues affecting transgender people and that this would take place on the morning of the January Commission meeting. The next discussions session would be on fair employment issues. It was agreed that the January discussion session would commence at 12 noon.

The Chief Commissioner reported on a letter she had written to the Secretary of State in respect to comments made by the Taoiseach about appointments to the Commission, following comments he had made in the Oireachtas on the subject

Commissioners were asked to consider joining the Statutory Duty Investigations Committee. Joe McVey noted his willingness to become a member of this Committee. This was agreed

The Chief Commissioner expressed thanks to Carmel McKinney for leading

the Take the Next Step on 18 November on woman and public appointments.

It was noted that the Northern Ireland Office would be advertising Commissioner appointments in the New Year; the terms of office of seven Commissioners would come to an end in May 2022.

The Chief Commissioner updated on several engagements she had undertaken since the last meeting. This included meeting along with the Chief Executive, the Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, John McDowell. She also reported on her recent meeting with David Campbell LCC. Both engagements had been useful and constructive meeting.

Commissioners **noted** update from the Chief Commissioner.

## 9. Chief Executive's Report

EC/21/10/07

The Chief Executive referred to her previously circulated report. She highlighted an event organised in partnership with Business in the Community on 8 November which she had chaired. The theme was race equality in the workplace which presented an exchange of views on good practice and on challenges in ensuring an inclusive and diverse workforce.

The Chief Executive also advised that reported that Laurence Bond, Chief Executive of the Irish Equality and Human Rights Commission, had been elected as Chair of Equinet, the European Network of Equality Bodies.

The Chief Executive drew Commissioners' attention to the new conflict of interest guidance issued by the Department of Finance which was appended to her Report for information.

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

## 10. Matters for Information

## 11. Minutes of Committee Meetings

Minutes of the Statutory Duty Investigations Committee held on Wednesday 15 September 2021 EC/21/10/08

- Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee EC/21/10/09

held on Wednesday 8 September 2021

Commissioners **noted** the minutes outlined above.

**12. Any Other Business**

**13. Date of next meeting:** One hundred and eighty eighth Commission Meeting on **Wednesday, 26 January 2022.**

**Meeting ended at 3.20pm**