

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY SIXTH MEETING HELD ON
WEDNESDAY 27 OCTOBER 2021 AT 2.30 PM****PRESENT**

Geraldine McGahey	Chief Commissioner
Neil Anderson	Deputy Chief Commissioner
June Best	
Duane Farrell	
Helen Ferguson	
Jarlath Kearney	
Deepa Mann-Kler	
Stephen Mathews	
Joe McVey	
Dawn Purvis	
Katy Radford	

APOLOGIES

Theresa Donaldson
Hazel Francey
Carmel McKinney

Tamlyn Stinson	Boardroom Apprentice
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IN ATTENDANCE

Evelyn Collins	Chief Executive
Keith Brown	Head of Corporate Services
Louise Conlon	Manager, Communications
Roisin Mallon	Director, Dedicated Mechanism
Jacqui McKee	Director, Advice and Compliance
Anne McKernan	Director of Legal Services
Darren McKinstry	Director, Policy and Strategic Engagement
Lisa King	Director, Investigations & Research
Simon Hookham	Senior Research Officer
Alexandra De La Torre	Research Officer
Natasha McClelland	Research Officer

1. Introduction

The Chair welcomed all to the Commission meeting

2. Minutes of the one hundred and eighty fifth meeting held on 22 September 2021.

EC/21/09/01

The minutes of the one hundred and eighty fifth meeting held on Wednesday 22 September 2021 were **signed** as a true and accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

Pg: 3 The Investigation Report was published on 29 September 2021 and received some coverage media (see Communications report for detail)

4. Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

5. Policy Issues

- Measuring Equality in Northern Ireland: For approval EC/21/09/02

Lisa King, Director, Research and Investigations, presented the paper on Measuring Equality in Northern Ireland. Commissioners had previously approved the proposed approach for the regular measurement of equality in Northern Ireland at the Commission meeting in October 2020. Ms King presented a draft framework for the measurement of equality, based on nine draft outcome areas, along with proposed indicators and measures drawn from available data sources to highlight potential inequalities in these areas. The work will culminate in the publication of a Statement on equality in NI in these areas.

Commissioners welcomed the update and commended the work to date. They also commented on a number of the indicators and on potential data sources and a number of queries were raised about how to use the information to influence policy and practice, for example in relation to education, data gaps and also poverty. Queries were also raised about links with official data and with data used for PfG outcome areas. Commissioners also noted a number of points in relation to wording and that the proposed consultation on this work would be important.

Following discussion, Commissioners **approved** the proposed outcome

areas and draft Framework of measures in order to proceed to consultation with stakeholders.

- Effective Parliamentary and NI Assembly scrutiny of Article 2(1) of the Protocol: Proposed recommendations EC/21/09/03

Rosin Mallon, Director, DMU, highlighted the key findings and recommendations of an expert paper on “Effective Parliamentary and NI Assembly scrutiny of Article 2 (1) of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol”. The paper, commissioned in June 2021, analyses current structures and identifies recommendations for reform of UK Parliament and NI Assembly mechanisms and processes to enable effective scrutiny.

The recommendations would also be considered by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, and this may result in agreed joint recommendations going forward.

Commissioners welcomed the paper and the recommendations. A query was raised about political support for the recommendations and how best to ensure acceptance and change by relevant bodies; this would be followed up as part of next steps.

Commissioners noted the expert paper and proposed next steps and **approved** the proposed policy recommendations.

- Promoting equality issues for the Assembly election: EC/21/09/04
Discussion paper

Louise Conlon, Manager, Communications outlined the proposed political engagement “campaign” to promote key equality issues which require political commitment and action. It was proposed that it will run for a period to the start of Purdah prior to the NI Assembly election scheduled for 5 May 2022.

Commissioners welcomed the proposed engagement and provided comments and suggestions, including on the importance of clarity on the objectives, on using images and stories that are relatable and on garnering support from key stakeholders to strengthen the key asks. These would be considered as the campaign was being planned.

- Draft Corporate Plan 2022 - 2025: update EC/21/09/05

The Chief Executive provided an update on progress being made to develop a new Corporate Plan for the period 2022-2025 against the outline work plan presented at the September Commission meeting. This paper

sought to capture Commissioner discussions to date, including initial thinking in relation to the Commission's vision and mission. The paper also outlined internal thinking to date on strategic Objectives/strategic priorities. She also explained that there had been good engagement to date with staff, including on vision and mission and on values. This was ongoing and will be fed into Commissioner discussions going forward.

Commissioners raised some queries in relation to the work being done on values in particular noting that similar work had been carried out by other organisations.

Commissioners noted progress to date and the planned next steps, with discussion on Strategic objectives/strategic priorities scheduled for the November Commission meeting.

6. Business Reporting

- Finance Report: 1 April 2021 – 30 Sept 2021 EC/21/09/06

Keith Brown, Head of Corporate Services, presented the Q2 Finance Report and outlined the budgetary position as at 30 September 2021. He noted that an overspend was currently being forecast although remedial action was being taken and this was expected to be reduced.

Commissioners **noted** the financial position at 30 September and ongoing actions to address current and potential future variances.

- Progress Report: 1 April 2021 – 30 Sept 2021 EC/21/09/07

The Chief Executive outlined the progress being made to deliver Business Plan 2021-2022. She explained that the majority of these were on track for completion and detailed the three areas where progress was currently falling behind.

There was a query regarding the Covid library and a suggestion that this could be removed. This action would be due to be reviewed and this would now be done.

Commissioners **noted** the progress against Performance Measures for delivery of the Business Plan's Key actions.

- Communications Report: 1 April 2021– 30 Sept 2021 EC/21/09/08

Louise Conlon, Manager, Communications, presented the Communications Report for the period 1 April 2021 – 30 September 2021. She highlighted the work undertaken during this period including media and social media activity.

Commissioners welcomed the update. The Annual Review was commended and a query was raised about the data regarding Facebook followers.

Commissioners **noted** the Report.

7. Other Matters for Commission Decision

There were no other matters for Commission decision.

8. Chief Commissioner's Business

EC/21/09/09

The Chief Commissioner updated on her engagements during the period.

She had met with the Minister of Finance and senior Department Officials along with the Chief Executive and Director of Advice and Compliance, to discuss implementation of the revised Ministerial Code of Conduct.

The Chief Commissioner had given evidence to the House of Lords Sub Committee in relation to Article 2 commitments, with the Chief Commissioner of NIHRC and the Director DMU. She informed Commissioners about resulting correspondence from the Chair, Lord Jay, to the Secretary of State. She had also, along with Paul Noonan, Senior Policy Officer, given evidence to the NI Affairs Committee on the experiences of minority ethnic and migrant people in Northern Ireland.

She had also participated in a joint engagement, organised at the School of Human Rights at QUB, with the Chief Commissioners from NIHRC and IHERC on Human Rights and Equality on a Shared Island.

The Chief Commissioner provided an update on plans for a Commissioner facilitated discussion as agreed at the last Away Day. Further information would follow and some dates in the second and third weeks of November would be circulated to seek availability.

A reminder was also given about the meeting of all Commissioners from the three Commissions engaged in oversight of and reporting on rights and equalities issues falling within the scope of the Article 2 commitment that have an island of Ireland dimension. This was

scheduled for 23 November and NIO had now confirmed a Minister would participate. There had been some discussion about an overnight stay for interested Commissioners; this would be followed up.

The Chief Commissioner had taken part in a number of media interviews during the period, including in relation to the recent settlement in the case of Jacobs v Yellow Door. She spoke on other matters including the Investigation into Complainants v NIO (Legacy), Menopause, FETO Teachers' Exception and Race Equality.

Commissioners **noted** the update from the Chief Commissioner and commended the media work

9. Chief Executive's Report

EC/21/09/10

The Chief Executive presented her October Report. She noted that she had a useful meeting with the new Permanent Secretary of TEO, Denis McMahon, at the end of September 2021, covering a range of issues

The Chief Executive reported on her recent presentation to staff of the Northern Ireland Audit Office on the role and work of the Commission, which provided opportunity to highlight issues of mutual interest.

The Judicial Review proceedings brought by SPUC Pro Life Ltd in relation to the Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2021 had been heard in early October. There was no indication of when the judgment would be given.

The Labour Relations Agency had asked to postpone the joint Board meeting with the Commission due to competing diary commitments. This would be rescheduled for a date in February 2022.

The Chief Commissioner thanked Stephen Mathews and Katy Radford who had attended the Belfast Chamber of Commerce Awards along with the Chief Executive. She was keen to provide opportunities for Commissioners to represent the Commission. The NOW Project had won the award sponsored by the Commission on the Best Disability Initiative by an Employer.

Commissioners **noted** the Chief Executive's October 2021 Report.

10. Matters for Information

Annual Review 2020 - 2021

EC/21/09/11

Commissioners **noted** the Annual Review 2020 – 2021.

11. Minutes of Committee Meetings

12. Any Other Business

13. Date of next meeting: One hundred and eighty seventh Commission Meeting on **Wednesday, 24 November 2021, at 1.30 pm** via Microsoft Teams.

Meeting ended at 3.30pm