

**EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND****ONE HUNDRED AND NINETIETH MEETING HELD ON  
WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH 2022 AT 2.30 PM****PRESENT**

|                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| Geraldine McGahey | Chief Commissioner |
| June Best         |                    |
| Duane Farrell     | (part)             |
| Hazel Francey     |                    |
| Helen Ferguson    |                    |
| Jarlath Kearney   |                    |
| Deepa Mann-Kler   | (part)             |
| Stephen Mathews   |                    |
| Joe McVey         |                    |
| Katy Radford      | (part)             |

**APOLOGIES**

|                   |                           |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Neil Anderson     | Deputy Chief Commissioner |
| Theresa Donaldson |                           |
| Carmel McKinney   |                           |
| Dawn Purvis       |                           |

**IN ATTENDANCE**

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Evelyn Collins   | Chief Executive                           |
| Louise Conlon    | Director, Communications                  |
| Lisa King        | Director, Investigations & Research       |
| Roisin Mallon    | Director, Dedicated Mechanism             |
| Jacqui McKee     | Director, Advice and Compliance           |
| Anne McKernan    | Director of Legal Services                |
| Darren McKinstry | Director, Policy and Strategic Engagement |
| Glenda Doherty   | Senior Policy Manager – DMU               |
| Simon Hookham    | Senior Research Manager                   |
| Tamlyn Stinson   | Boardroom Apprentice                      |

## 1. Introduction

The Chair welcomed everyone to the Commission meeting noting that she anticipated a meeting in person, potentially in May, prior to the end of the outgoing Commissioners' term of office.

## 2. Minutes of the one hundred and eighty ninth meeting held on 23 February 2022.

EC/22/03/01

The minutes of the one hundred and eighty ninth meeting held on Wednesday 23 February 2022 were **signed** as a true and accurate record.

## 3. Matters Arising

**Pg 2 Commissioner appointments:** the closing date for Commissioner appointments was 27 February 2022 and interviews would take place in week commencing 4 April or shortly thereafter.

**Pg 4 IPSOS Mori Report:** This had been published on the website on 8 March 2022.

## 4. Conflict of Interest

In respect to item on EU Funding Research Report [EC/22/03/23], Hazel Francey noted an interest as she represented the Commission on a Committee of the Special EU Programmes Body. This was not considered a conflict of interest. The Chief Commissioner noted a similar interest.

## 5. Policy Issues

- Draft Corporate Plan 2022-2025: post consultation

EC/22/03/02

The Chief Executive provided an overview of feedback received during the public consultation. The responses were detailed in the annex. She noted general support from respondees for the priorities identified and a number of suggested changes and additions to the draft Plan provided by consultees. The revised draft Corporate Plan sought to address the comments and suggestions with proposed changes which she highlighted. Commissioners considered the feedback received and were content with the proposed changes set out in the working draft.

The Chief Executive advised that a further draft would be presented at the April Commission meeting along with the addition of a section on achievements over the past three years and targets and measures for 2022-2025.

Commissioners welcomed sight of the wide-ranging responses received through the public survey and noted that there was still work to be done by the Commission in respect to engagement with certain sections of the community.

Commissioners noted the draft Plan and looked forward to considering a further draft in April.

- Fair Employment Monitoring Report (2020) No. 31 EC/22/03/03

Simon Hookham, Senior Research Officer, presented the Fair Employment Monitoring Report (2020) No. 31 and outlined the key findings and trends. He noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on level of returned monitoring forms, and the report was likely to be under-reporting the monitored workforce. However, he stated that the impact of this was marginal, in that if the missing employers which were unable to submit monitoring returns in 2020, were taken from the 2019 record and included into the 2020 record, the community background composition would be similar or the same to that recorded without them. The Senior Research Officer outlined details of the high-level trends.

Commissioners noted the report agreeing that it showed significant progress towards fair participation in the workforce since 2001. It was suggested that it would be helpful to highlight the longitudinal story of this, including the increasing participation by the Catholic community. This work would also provide a useful context for the legislative changes that the Commission wishes to see going forward particularly in respect to race monitoring.

It was noted that the trends shown reflected the data from the Labour Force Survey following the slight divergence in the previous four years reports. It was also important for the Commission to reflect on workplace monitoring generally, in the context of societal changes and increased diversity in Northern Ireland. Publication of the Census data later in the year would also provide relevant data.

It was noted that a strategic discussion session in respect to fair employment including monitoring was planned prior to the May Commission meeting and Commissioners welcomed this.

Commissioners **noted** the key findings and planned dissemination of the report.

- Research report: Impact of Brexit on Section 75 Equality groups in Northern Ireland: EU Funding EC/22/03/04

Glenda Doherty, Senior Policy Officer, DMU, presented the key findings and recommendations of a research report on the “Impact of Brexit on Section 75 Equality Groups: EU funding”. She outlined the proposed next steps in relation to the publication and dissemination of the report and the development of Commission policy recommendations.

Commissioners welcomed this report. It was agreed that the value of the role played by EU funding promoting equality of opportunity and good relations in Northern Ireland could not be underestimated. It had been one of the mainstays underpinning the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement and an important factor in supporting the peace process.

It was noted that the Government Departments and the voluntary sector had a unified voice on this issue, and it was important for the Commission to put its voice to this also. It was agreed that the Commission should work, in partnership, with a number of key organisations to highlight the importance of this funding and to highlight the serious concerns about the measures outlined by the UK Government to replace EU funding, including a lack of clarity around replacement funds, the ‘levelling up’ agenda and the serious risk of financial ‘cliff edge’ for organisations delivering key services to a range of equality groups.

Following discussion, Commissioners **noted** the report and looked forward to considering the policy positions at the next meeting. They **noted** initial plans for engagement also.

[Deepa Mann-Kler left the meeting]

## 6. Business Reporting

There were no items discussed.

## 7. Other Matters for Commission Decision

- Policy on Legal Advice and Assistance: post consultation EC/22/03/05

Anne McKernan, Director, Legal Services, updated Commissioners following the consultation on the Policy for the Provision of Legal Advice and

Assistance for Individuals. It was noted that Legal Funding Commissioners had considered the feedback and a revised policy at a meeting on 9 March 2022 and were recommending the adoption of the proposed revised policy by Commission.

Commissioners **noted** the feedback received in the course of the consultation and **approved** the revised Policy for the Provision of Legal Advice and Assistance for Individuals.

- Legal Funding Committee: Terms of Reference

EC/22/03/06

Anne McKernan, Director, Legal Services, presented the updated Terms of Reference for the Legal Funding Committee, which had been amended in light of proposed revised draft of the Policy for the Provision of Legal Advice and Assistance for Individuals.

A Commissioner asked that consideration be given to adding to the draft Terms of Reference an annual meeting of all Legal Funding Commissioners, to consider trends in casework and enquiries. This was agreed.

Commissioners **approved** the Legal Funding Committee Terms of Reference, subject to the addition of an annual meeting of all Legal Funding Commissioners

The Chief Commissioner took the opportunity to wish the Director of Legal Services a happy and healthy retirement. On behalf of Commissioners, she thanked the Director for her commitment and outstanding contribution to the Commission's work over nearly 29 years. She wished her well in her future endeavours.

[Katy Radford left the meeting]

## 8. Chief Commissioner's Business

EC/22/03/07

The Chief Commissioner updated on several meetings and events she had attended. This included, together with the Chief Executive, a meeting with Archbishop Eamon Martin, Archbishop of Armagh. There had also been a joint meeting with the NIHRC with representatives of faith groups early in March

She reported on a ministerial roundtable with Lord Wolfson in respect to the proposed changes to the Human Rights Act, which she had attended with Commissioner Kearney. She updated on meetings on the Elections Bill

Briefing with Lord Wallace, Baroness Ritchie and Lord Jay.

The Chief Commissioner also attended an International Women's Day Event at the Shankill Women's Centre and across border event on rights after Brexit organised jointly with NIHRC. She had also attended a meeting of ALB Forum organised by The Executive Office.

Along with the Chief Executive, she had attended the British Irish Intergovernmental, St Patricks Day event which was a very useful opportunity to meet people in person including NIO Minister Conor Burns. She had extended an invite to Minister Burns to meet the Commission and hoped that this could be arranged for May or June.

She noted that the Commissioner appointment process was ongoing with interviews being conducted shortly.

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

[Duane Farrell left the meeting]

## 9. Chief Executive's Report

EC/22/03/08

The Chief Executive referred to her previously circulated report. Very recently, the Commission had been advised that SPUC (NI) had advised of its intention to appeal the recent Judicial Review decision. Clarification was being sought and there would be further communication with Commissioners on this matter in due course.

The Chief Executive noted that the recent Private Members Bill on the removal of the Teachers Exception had been passed in the final days of the NI Assembly sitting. The Commission had been calling for its removal since 2004. There would be engagement with officials on its implementation. Commissioners welcomed this progress.

Commissioners congratulated Louise Conlon on her appointment as Director, Communications following external recruitment and wished her well in her post.

The Chief Executive also highlighted a number of meetings and speaking engagements, she had attended over the month, detailed in the report.

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

## **10. Matters for Information**

- Response on Human Rights Act Reform

EC/22/03/09

Commissioners **noted** the Response to Human Rights Act Reform, expressing appreciation for the way in which it reflected the Commissioners discussion at the March meeting.

## **11. Minutes of Committee Meetings**

## **12. Any Other Business**

There was no other business discussed.

- 13. Date of next meeting:** One hundred and ninety first Commission Meeting on **Wednesday, 27 April 2022.**

**Meeting ended at 15.50pm**