

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**ONE HUNDRED AND NINETY FIFTH MEETING HELD ON
WEDNESDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 1.30 PM****PRESENT**

Geraldine McGahey	Chief Commissioner
Neil Anderson	Deputy Chief Commissioner
Maureen Brunt	Remotely
Siobhan Cullen	Remotely
Duane Farrell	
Ellen Finlay	
Helen Ferguson	
Jarlath Kearney	
Colin Kennedy	
Carmel McKinney	Remotely
Sheena McKinney	Remotely
John McCallister	
Monica Fitzpatrick	
Preeti Yellamaty	
Harry Robinson	Boardroom Apprentice

APOLOGIES

Deepa Mann-Kler

IN ATTENDANCE

Evelyn Collins	Chief Executive
Keith Brown	Head of Corporate Services
Louise Conlon	Director, Communications
Craig Gartley	Director, Finance and Corporate Services
Simon Hookham	Senior Research Officer
Lisa King	Director, Investigations and Research
Roisin Mallon	Director, Dedicated Mechanism
Jacqui McKee	Director, Advice and Compliance
Darren McKinstry	Director, Policy and Strategic Engagement
Eoin O'Neill	Director, Legal Services
Kathryn Barr	Senior Policy Officer
Alexandra De La Torre	Research Officer

1. Introduction

The Chair welcomed all to the Commission meeting and introduced Harry Robinson, Boardroom Apprentice, to his first Commission meeting. She thanked Neil Anderson for agreeing to be his Boardroom Buddy.

2. Minutes of the one hundred and ninety fourth meeting held on 24 August 2022

EC/22/08/01

The minutes of the one hundred and ninety fourth meeting held on Wednesday 24 August 2022 were **signed** as a true and accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

Page 2 Race law reform: the policy positions were published on the website on 20/09/22.

Pg 2 UK Bill of Rights Bill: the submission on JCHR Inquiry on the Bill of Rights Bill was submitted on 26/08/22 and is now available on the Committee's webpage.

4. Conflict of Interest

Ellen Finlay and Monica Fitzpatrick had declared a conflict of interest in relation to item 7 on the agenda. They would leave the meeting for this item.

5. Policy Issues

- Human Rights: Policy positions: for approval EC/22/08/02

Darren McKinstry, Director, Policy and Strategic Engagement, updated Commissioners on developments with the Bill of Rights Bill since the August Commission meeting, and Kathryn Barr, Senior Policy Officer, presented the contents of the policy position paper on human rights and equality.

Commissioners welcomed the paper, noting that it had captured and articulated many of the issues discussed previously by Commissioners and it was clear and helpful. It was agreed that it was important that the Commission has had a comprehensive discussion on these issues as human rights and equality are interlinked. It was acknowledged that political uncertainty around potential legislative reform means it will be necessary to continually refine positions as developments occur and it is important that the views from Northern Ireland are not lost in all the discussions.

It was confirmed that we will continue to engage with key stakeholders,

including international bodies, on equality and human rights and the positions detailed in this paper will form basis of this engagement. A few suggestions for editing were forwarded.

Commissioners **approved** the policy positions which will be finalised and published following a final edit.

- Public Awareness Survey of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland: for information EC/22/08/03

Simon Hookham, Senior Research Officer, outlined the findings of the recent Public Awareness Survey, including noting some comparisons with results of previous surveys.

Commissioners welcomed the survey noting that some of the results were encouraging. This was evidence of the good work being done on communications and engagement and this information will help further shape the Commission's communications and engagement activities. The meeting discussed the need for more direct engagement with some groups including the BME community and young people. There was a discussion on the sampling size and whether the sample size would need boosted in terms of, for example, transgender or LGB people.

It was noted that the draft Communications Survey would be on the agenda for the next Commission meeting, and it would be informed by this survey.

Commissioners **noted** the findings from the Public Awareness Survey.

6. Business Reporting

- Northern Ireland Audit Office: Final Report to those Charged with Governance EC/22/08/04

The Chief Executive presented the Final Report to those Charged with Governance from NIAO, noting that this had been presented to the Audit and Risk Committee on 7 September 2022.

She advised that there was one priority 3 recommendation in relation to making provision for dilapidation costs which may arise at the end of the current lease period. The position about the treatment of dilapidations is being investigated and management will consider making provision for same in the financial statements for the years ending 31 March 2023 and thereafter.

Commissioners expressed thanks to staff and auditors for the work involved and **noted** the Final Report to those Charged with Governance.

7. Other Matters for Commission Decision

- Recommendation from the Statutory Duty Investigations Committee for an investigation of the Northern Ireland Office, under paragraph 11 of Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 EC/22/08/05

Helen Ferguson, Chair SDIC, presented the recommendation from the Committee that, following consideration, it believes that NIO may have failed to comply with its Equality Scheme in relation to its equality assessment of its proposed Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill. She outlined the Committee considerations in relation to this and its recommendation that the Commission authorise an investigation into the matter.

The meeting discussed the matter including the next steps in terms of remedy if it is found that there was a breach of NIO's equality scheme.

The Commission **approved** the recommendation to investigate the matter under Paragraph 11 of Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

- Review of Procedures for Complaints and Investigations under Paragraphs 10 and 11 of Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998: changes for approval EC/22/08/06

Helen Ferguson, Chair SDIC, presented the review of Procedures for Complaints and Investigations considered by Statutory Duty Investigations Committee at its meeting on 21 September 2022. She outlined the proposed revisions to the procedures following a recent internal audit recommendation and paid tribute to the investigations team for its work to review the procedures. Reviews will now routinely take place every three years.

Commissioners **approved** the revised procedures noting that the updated will be published on the Commission's website following the meeting.

8. Chief Commissioner's Business EC/22/08/07

- Final Dates of Commission/Committee Meetings 2023

Commissioners were asked to **note** the final dates for meetings in 2023.

The Chief Commissioner confirmed that Commission meetings would take place in person and that it was anticipated that Committee meetings would generally take place online, although it might be considered necessary for Committees to meet in person from time to time.

The Chief Commissioner outlined the meetings/engagements she had attended since the last meeting. This included giving evidence at the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. She had spoken at a well-attended North South race conference for migrants. The Chief Commissioner had attended the Law Society Centenary Dinner and the PSNI launch of its Violence against women and girls action plan. She also hosted the Regulation and Oversight Forum in Equality House this month.

The Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive represented the Commission at the Service of Reflection for the life of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II at Belfast Cathedral on 13 September 2022.

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

9. Chief Executive's Report

EC/22/08/08

The Chief Executive referred to her previously circulated report. She reported on a meeting with the TEO Accounting Officer, where she raised concerns about the impact and implications of the very reduced funding situation, both for the current year and for the coming years. She would be following this up in writing shortly.

The Chief Executive provided further update to her report and noted a number of engagements including a speaking engagement at the British-Irish Association conference in Oxford on 3 September.

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

10. Matters for Information

11. Minutes of Committee Meetings

- Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee held on Wednesday 11 May 2022. EC/22/08/09
- Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee held on Tuesday 21 June 2022. EC/22/08/10
- Minutes of the Statutory Duty Investigations Committee held on Wednesday 8 June 2021. EC/22/08/11
- Minutes of the Statutory Duty Investigations Ad-Hoc Committee Meeting held on Monday 27 June 2022. EC/22/08/12

Commissioners **noted** the ARC and SDIC Minutes outlined above.

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business discussed.

13. Date of next meeting: One hundred and ninety sixth Commission Meeting on **Wednesday, 26 October 2022.**

Staff left the Commission meeting and discussion took place on progress with the recruitment plan for a new Chief Executive.

Meeting ended at 15.30pm