

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
TWO HUNDRED AND FOURTH COMMISSION MEETING
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 23 AUGUST 2023 AT 1.30 PM
IN EQUALITY HOUSE

PRESENT

Geraldine McGahey	Chief Commissioner
Neil Anderson	Deputy Chief Commissioner
Maureen Brunt	
Lisa Caldwell	(part)
Siobhan Cullen	
Duane Farrell	(part)
Monica Fitzpatrick	
Jarlath Kearney	
Colin Kennedy	
Stephen Mathews	
Carmel McKinney	
Sheena McKinney	(remotely)
John McCallister	
Preeti Yellamaty	

APOLOGIES

Ellen Finlay

IN ATTENDANCE

Amanda Logan	Chief Executive
Keith Brown	Head of Corporate Services
Louise Conlon	Director, Communications
Patricia Cosgrove	Senior Legal Officer, DMU
Craig Gartley	Director Finance and Corporate Services
Lisa King	Director, Investigations and Research (part)
Roisin Mallon	Director, Dedicated Mechanism Unit
Jacqui McKee	Director, Advice and Compliance
Darren McKinstry	Director, Policy and Strategic Engagement
Eoin O'Neill	Director, Legal Services

Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the Commission meeting and welcomed Amanda Logan, Chief Executive to her first meeting.

This was also Harry Robinson's last meeting as Boardroom Apprentice. Commissioners wished Harry well in his future endeavours and thanked him for the valuable contribution he had made during his year with the Commission. Harry thanked Commissioners and staff for the support they had given him noting that he learnt so much and really enjoyed the experience.

1. Minutes of the two hundred and fourth meeting held on Wednesday 23 August 2023

EC/23/07/01

An amendment to the draft minutes previously circulated was suggested and tabled. These amended minutes of the two hundred and fourth meeting held on Wednesday 23 August 2023 were **signed** as a true and accurate record.

2. Matters Arising

Page 2: Public Opinion Survey 2023: This had been published on the Commission website following the meeting.

3. Conflict of Interests

Commissioners Duane Farrell and Lisa Cardwell declared an interest in respect to the item on NI Budget 2023/2024. The Director of Research and Investigations also declared an interest in respect to this item.

This was being taken as the first item on the agenda and they all left the meeting.

4. Policy Issues

- NI Budget 2023/2024

Legal & Confidential

Commissioners received an update regarding ongoing work on the NI Budget 2023-24. Following discussion, a series of next steps were agreed.

[Duane Farrell; Lisa Cardwell and Lisa King rejoined the meeting.]

- Dedicated Mechanism Public Awareness Survey

EC/23/07/02

Glenda Doherty, Policy and Research Manager, DMU, presented the findings of the Public Awareness Survey on Article 2 of the Windsor Framework and the role and remit of the dedicated mechanism. She outlined proposed next steps including that further internal qualitative analysis of the comments was being undertaken. It was noted that a similar survey was being carried out by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and this would provide a useful comparison.

Commissioners discussed the findings noting that the survey results provided useful information for internal planning of this work and some of the findings could be distilled out for external audiences.

Commissioners **noted** the DMU Public Awareness Survey and proposed next steps.

- Review of DMU Communications Strategy

EC/23/07/03

Louise Conlon, Director, Communications, presented a revised draft DMU Communications Strategy. This built on the previous Strategy approved in August 2021 and aligned it more to the overall Commission Communication Strategy, while also recognising differences in focus and key stakeholders. This should help build on the steady progress made and facilitate the eventual integration into the overall corporate Communication's Strategy.

Commissioners welcomed sight of the draft strategy making a number of comments and suggestions in respect to strengthening the messaging, specific target audiences and on evaluation.

The current draft was **noted**, and it was confirmed that a final Strategy would be presented to the next meeting for approval.

5. Business Reporting

- Finance Report: 1 April 2023 – 30 June 2023

EC/22/07/04

Craig Gartley, Director of Finance and Corporate Services presented the Q1 Finance Report and outlined the budgetary position as at 30 June 2023 - 23.1% of the budget had been spent and there was a positive variance of 6.8%. This reflected an underspend in the overall core and Dedicated Mechanism's Projects and Services budgets, and it was confirmed that some budget profiles were being reviewed and remedial action taken as appropriate.

Commissioners **noted** the financial position at 30 June and ongoing actions to address current budget variances.

- Business Plan Progress Report: 1 April 2023–30 June 2023 EC/22/07/05

Keith Brown, Head of Corporate Services outlined progress against performance measures for the key actions set out in the revised Business Plan 2023-2024. He highlighted progress in a number of areas including on race law reform work, engagement on race research and in respect to a new website. He also outlined a number of areas where progress was currently less than anticipated and the remedial action that was being taken.

Commissioners **noted** the Progress Report 1 April 2023 – 30 June 2023.

- Legal Services Report: 1 April 2023- 30 June 2023 EC/22/07/06

Eoin O'Neill, Director, Legal Services presented the report on the provision of legal advice services from 1 April to 30 June 2023, outlining the work undertaken and the patterns and trends for the period. This included reference to enquiries received, cases supported, assistance rate for applications and outcomes.

There was a query in respect to legal expenditure and it was noted that although this was substantially lower than the same period the previous year, this situation could change quickly, and this was being monitored carefully.

Commissioners **noted** the Legal Services Report 1 April 2023 – 30 June 2023.

- Communications Report: 1 April 2023 – 30 June 2023 EC/22/07/07

Louise Conlon, Director of Communications, presented the Communications Report for the period 1 April 2023 – 30 June 2023, outlining the KPIs for the communications work across media, social media and website. She highlighted key areas of work undertaken during this period including media and social media.

Commissioners welcomed the interesting report and discussed the use of social media particularly around targeting certain audiences. The ongoing good work on engagement was noted and it was suggested that KPIs in this area would be useful as it was important that the Commission continues to build on its engagement work.

Commissioners **noted** the Communications Report.

6. Other Matters for Commission Decision

- Dedicated Mechanism – LFC’s Terms of Reference. EC/23/07/08

Roisin Mallon, Director, Dedicated Mechanism, presented the amendments to the DMU Legal Funding Committee’s Terms of Reference, which make clear its remit includes considering applications for assistance from individuals in relation to complaints regarding an alleged breach/potential breach of Article 2(1) of the Windsor Framework.

There was a discussion on the strategic importance of this work, and it was suggested that there was scope for greater integration with the Commission’s other legal work. This could allow cross pollination of legal expertise and experience. It was also suggested that further training of LFC Commissioners in Article 2 work was important prior to consideration of any potential cases. The meeting was reminded that a Strategic Litigation Strategy was outstanding and needed progressed.

It was confirmed that there was currently some cross Directorate work between the core legal team and the DMU legal team, but further work was planned over the coming period. Consideration would also be given to further training information for Commissioners in respect to this work.

Commissioners considered and **approved** the DMU Committee’s amended Terms of Reference.

SDIC Committee Terms of Reference EC/23/07/09

Lisa King, Director, Investigations and Research, presented the updated SDIC Terms of Reference which had been reviewed by the SDIC Committee at its meeting on 23 June 2023.

Commissioners considered and **approved** the SDIC’s recommendations for a revised Terms of Reference.

7. Chief Commissioner’s Business

Chief Commissioner provided update on a number of recent meetings and engagements thanking Monica Fitzpatrick for accompanying her to the Mela and Siobhan Cullen and Neil Anderson for accompanying her to a meeting with the new Migrants Forum and to meetings with Gregory Campbell and Mark H Durkin on the same day. She thanked Colin Kennedy for representing the Commission at the Northern Ireland Confederation cup football final.

In respect to Article 2 responsibilities, the Chief Commissioner, along with the Chief Commissioner of NIHRC, met with Ambassador, Jan-Hendrik Dopheide; launched the Joint Annual Report and presented to a meeting on the Oireachtas GFA committee.

She outlined stakeholder engagement in respect to the NI Budget, including with NICVA.

The Chief Commissioner outlined plans for a commissioner away day later in the year noting that more information would follow in due course.

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

8. Chief Executive's Report

EC/23/07/10

Amanda Logan, Chief Executive provided a verbal update noting her delight at being appointed to the post. She detailed some of her previous experience and covered some of the activity she had been undertaking since starting the Commission including a series of stakeholder meetings.

Commissioners **noted** the update.

9. Matters for Information

There were no matters to note.

10. Minutes of Committee Meetings

There were no minutes to note.

11. Any Other Business

12. Date of next meeting: Two Hundred and Sixth Commission Meeting on Wednesday 27 September 2023, at 1.30 pm – in person

The meeting ended at 4.15 pm