

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
TWO HUNDRED AND SIXTEENTH COMMISSION MEETING
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 23 OCTOBER 2024 AT 1.30 PM

EQUALITY HOUSE

Geraldine McGahey	Chief Commissioner
Neil Anderson	Deputy Chief Commissioner
Maureen Brunt	(R)
Lisa Caldwell	
Siobhan Cullen	
Duane Farrell	
Ellen Finlay	
Monica Fitzpatrick	
Colin Kennedy	
Nazia Latif	
Stephen Mathews	
Jim McCooe	
Sheena McKinney	(R)
John McCallister	(R)

APOLOGIES

Stephen Mathews
Preeti Yellamaty

IN ATTENDANCE

Louise Conlon	Chief Executive
Keith Brown	Head of Corporate Services
Donal Collins	Equality Advice and Compliance Manager
Craig Gartley	Director of Finance
Chris Jenkins	Senior Public Policy & Engagement Officer
Lisa King	Director, Research and Investigations
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

**1. Minutes of the two hundred and Sixteenth meeting held on Wednesday
23 October 2024** **EC/24/10/01**

The Minutes of the two hundred and sixteenth meeting held on Wednesday 23 October 2024 were **signed** as a true and accurate record.

2. Matters Arising

Page 5 Board Effectiveness Review: following consideration of Board and Committee effectiveness in August 2024. It was agreed that a draft action plan will be drafted to prioritise the issues raised and implement steps to address them. This will be in the agenda for the November meeting.

3. Conflict of Interests

Commissioner, Duane Farrell has previously declared a conflict in relation to CLC JR – there will be an update under AOB and Duane will leave the meeting before the discussion.

The declaration was **noted**.

4. Policy Issues

- EU Standards

EC/24/10/02

Roisin Mallon, Director to present the Joint ECNI/NIHRC Briefing Paper: WF Article 2: The EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies.

Commissioners are asked to **approve** the policy positions set out in the attached draft joint ECNI/NIHRC briefing paper and to **note** the proposed next steps.

5. Business Reporting

- Finance Update

EC/24/09/05

Craig Gartley, Director, Finance and Corporate Services to provide Commissioners with an update following the October Monitoring Round.

Commissioners to **note** the financial position at 31 October and the ongoing review of the budget in light of the additional funding provided to Commission through TEO's October Monitoring.

Commissioners provided feedback around the title, accessibility and agreed to reference artificial intelligence and digitisation. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Corporate Plan would be accessibility checked prior to consultation.

Commissioners **approved** the draft Plan and strategic priorities prior to public consultation.

- Finance Report: 1 April 2024 – 30 Sept 2024

EC/24/09/06

Craig Gartley, Director of Finance and Corporate Services, updated Commissioners on information regarding the overall financial position at 30 September 2024. Recent engagement with TEO last week indicated a positive outcome was possible for the October monitoring round, with a decision expected by the end of the month.

It was confirmed that at this stage, there would be a projected £83k overspend, if additional funds were not received from the October monitoring round. Commissioners discussed the need for a review of the overall staffing structure noting that the continuing reliance on not backfilling posts was unsustainable.

Commissioners **noted** the financial position at 30 September and the ongoing review of the budget in light of the pressures faced by the Commission throughout 2024/2025

- Progress Report: 1 April 2024 – 30 Sept 2024

EC/24/09/07

Louise Conlon, Chief Executive, presented the Progress Report for the period 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024, noting that the report has been reformatted to report 'by exception' basis. She explained that by the end of the first quarter, significant progress had been made in delivering only 13 of the objectives. Work on 10 objectives which are partly achieved or, broadly on track will progress dependent upon an improvement to the financial position. The Chief Executive provided details of the areas behind target.

There was a discussion regarding the ratings scale used and it was suggested that this should be reviewed for the next report.

Commissioners **noted** the report.

- **Communications Report: 1 April 2024 – 30 Sept 2024** **EC/24/09/08**

Louise Conlon presented the communications work undertaken for the period 1 April 2023 – 30 Sept 2024 outlined details of press engagement.

Commissioners **noted** the contents of the report.

- **Legal Services Report: 1 April 2024 – 30 Sept 2024** **EC/24/09/09**

Eoin O'Neill, Director, Legal Services presented the report on the provision of services for the period, 1 April 2024 – 30 Sept 2024.

Following a previous discussion at Legal Funding Committee, Donal Collins, Equality and Compliance Manager joined the meeting to provide an update on follow up engagement with Queen's University following a number of settlements.

Commissioners welcomed the update and clarification was provided on a number of points raised. It was agreed that an update would be provided on the work with QUB when the pilot programme had been completed.

Commissioners **noted** the work undertaken and the outcomes from legal advice and assistance activity for the period.

6. Other Matters for Commission Decision

No other matters for commission decision.

7. Chief Commissioner's Business

The Chief Commissioner outlined her engagements since the last meeting. This included a meeting with the Carson Women's Group along with the Ballymena Inter Ethnic Forum and a representative from the Home Office. She also attended the American Consulate Women beyond borders reception and the Day of Germany Unity reception hosted by the German Ambassador.

She updated on some upcoming engagements including visiting a "Bright Sparks" initiative specifically designed to target the educational needs of primary school children residing in disadvantaged areas of North Belfast.

The Chief Commissioner expressed thanks to Commissioner Colin Kennedy for a great evening at his event, Jordan's Gift and Colin Kennedy thanked all for their support.

- Dates of Committee/Commission meetings 2025

Commissioners were asked to consider and note in their diaries, the proposed dates for meetings in 2025.

Commissioners **noted** the Chief Commissioner's Report and the confirmed the dates of Commission/Committee meetings for 2025.

The Chief Commissioner will be approaching Commissioners over the next while in respect to participating in the staff away day and a working group to consider review of board papers.

8. Chief Executive's Report

EC/24/09/10

Louise Conlon, Chief Executive provided further detail to her report, including the update regarding engagement with TEO, on the IIP assessment and on the planned staff planning day.

She updated on the recent recruitment of Alden Henderson, who was appointed as the new Director of Advice and Compliance. Alden has been with the Commission since 2002. He was previously Manager of the Compliance Team in Advice and Compliance Directorate and brings a wealth of experience to this role.

Commissioners **noted** the update report.

9. Matters for Information

- Autism Guidance

EC/24/09/11

Commissioners **noted** Autism Guidance above for information.

10. Minutes of Committee Meetings

There were no Minutes to note.

[Commissioner Duane Farrell left the meeting]

11. Any Other Business

Eoin O'Neill updated Commissioners in relation to the CLC JR.

Commissioners **noted** the update.

- 12. Date of next meeting:** Two Hundred and Seventeenth Commission Meeting on **Wednesday, 27 November 2024, at 1.30 pm in Equality House.**

A Strategic Discussion session will take place at 11.30 prior to the main Commission meeting.

Signed: 

Date: 27 November 2024