

**EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**  
**TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTEENTH COMMISSION MEETING**  
**HELD ON WEDNESDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2024 AT 1.30 PM**

**EQUALITY HOUSE**

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

**APOLOGIES**

Neil Anderson	Deputy Chief Commissioner
Lisa Caldwell	

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Louise Conlon	Chief Executive
Keith Brown	Head of Corporate Services
Craig Gartley	Director of Finance
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
Chris Jenkins	Senior Public Policy & Engagement Officer

**1. Minutes of the two hundred and Fourteenth meeting held on Wednesday 28 August 2024** **EC/24/08/01**

The Minutes of the two hundred and fourteenth meeting held on Wednesday 28 August 2024 were **signed** as a true and accurate record.

**2. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

**3. Conflict of Interests**

Commissioner, Duane Farrell, previously declared an interest in CLC and would leave the meeting before presentation at item 12, AOB, paper 14.

The declaration was **noted**.

**4. Policy Issues**

**- Programme for Government**

**EC/24/08/02**

Darren McKinstry, Chris Jenkins, Policy and Strategic Engagement provided an overview of their initial considerations of the Programme for Government. Commissioners are asked to comment on and agree the direction of travel prior to development of a formal response. It was important to remember that there were under two years of this mandate remaining.

Commissioners welcomed the progress made to agree a Programme for Government. However, it was necessary to balance this with recognition of its shortcomings in respect to promoting equality of opportunity.

The consultation document lacked tangible targets at this stage. There was mention of two strategies, namely the Disability and Anti-Poverty strategies, but no indication of the other strategies. There was also no acknowledgment of Article 2 safeguards with respect to the Windsor Framework.

There was no indication of a programme of work in respect to equality law reform including of the ongoing review of race equality legislation. There was also no specific mention of improved hate crime legislation.

A final draft response would be on the agenda for the next Commission meeting for approval. This would be followed with stakeholder engagement prior to the response deadline.

Commissioners welcomed the opportunity to consider this matter at this early stage of development and approved the approach outlined.

**- Measuring Equality in NI: Health and Social Care** **EC/23/08/03**

Lisa King, Director, Research and Investigation presented this paper and identified a number of areas for discussion.

The issue around transgender and access to healthcare was highlighted and it was noted that the next strategic discussion related to equality issues and transgender.

References to discussion at Ministerial level around health inequalities was noted as something the Commission could engage with.

Commissioners agreed that it was important to tie all issues together to provide a holistic picture to reflect the intersectionality of the issues. This would be further considered and included in corporate planning discussions.

Commissioners noted the information provided.

**Measuring Equality in NI: Employment** **EC/24/08/04**

Lisa King, Director, Research and Investigations presented this paper

There was a query on whether this employment data could be layered with areas of deprivation. This would be checked.

Again, it was agreed that it would be interesting to look at all this data in the round. What does this show for people of different walks of life and is there is the potential to look at the intersectionality.

Commissioners thanked Lisa King and colleagues for this useful piece of work and noted the information provided and plans for publication.

- **Legacy Bill: update**

EC/24/08/05

Roisin Mallon, Director, DMU provided an update regarding the Legacy Bill following the Judgement at the Court of Appeal on Friday 20 September 2024.

Commissioners welcomed this an important judgement which has ramifications for future cases and for new emerging complex law.

Commissioners thanked the DMU team for all their work on this and noted the update provided.

## 5. **Business Reporting**

- **Finance update**

EC/24/08/06

The Finance Director, Craig Gartley updated Commissioners on information regarding the overall financial position at 31 August 2024, as requested at the last meeting. He outlined several steps that had been taken or were planned to be taken to deal with the budget pressures identified. He advised that the Commission's bid in October monitoring was still being considered, but action needed to be taken now to allow the Commission to live within the significantly reduced budget allocation. He also advised that scenario planning for the next two years was painting a bleak picture.

Commissioners asked a series of questions relating to the proposed cuts, including the postponement of recruitment, reduction in agency cover, and the impact of these and other reductions on planned project work and legal assistance. Concern was also raised about staff morale.

Although, recognising the efforts that had been made to identify the action needed, concerns were raised about the increasing inability of the Commission to deliver its remit and the need to identify a strategy to raise awareness of this dire situation and support the objective of a better funded and more sustainable Commission

Following discussion, Commissioners **noted** the financial position at 31 August and **considered** the proposed actions and their impact to make any necessary budget savings in the second half of the year.

## **Board Effectiveness Review**

**EC/24/08/07**

The Head of Corporate Services, Keith Brown presented this paper, following the 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.

Commissioners **approved** the findings of the Commissioner assessment and actions to address the delivery of the recommendations.

## **6. Other Matters for Commission Decision**

### **- SDIC Committee Terms of Reference**

**EC/24/08/08**

Siobhan Cullen Chair SDIC presented updated Terms of Reference, which had been presented to the SDIC Committee at its meeting on 18 June 2024. The draft included a number of changes to facilitate improved effectiveness.

Commissioners considered and **approved** the amended Terms of Reference.

## **7. Chief Commissioner's Business**

**EC/24/08/09**

The Chief Commissioner outlined the meetings and engagements she had attended since the August meeting, including the TEO Committee re gaps in Equality Legislation. She also attended the Launch of the Article 2 Annual Report at the University of Ulster and, along with the Chief Executive, attended the BBC 100 year anniversary at St Anne's Cathedral.

### **- Dates of Committee/Commission meetings 2025**

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

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

## **8. Chief Executive's Report**

**EC/24/08/10**

Louise Conlon, Chief Executive provided further detail to her report, including the update regarding budget and business planning and the pay remit. She had attended the British Irish Association conference along with the Chief Commissioner, which was a good opportunity to meet a number

of others across the public sector. She also updated on the recent recruitment exercise for the appointment of a Director Advice and Compliance.

Commissioners welcomed her confirmation that the IIP survey was to take place in November and that a staff engagement day was being planned.

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

## 9. Matters for Information

- Sinéad McLaughlin MLA – Private Members Bill: Regional Jobs, Skills, and Investment **EC/24/08/11**
- Consultations **EC/24/08/12**
  - Calls for views civil Legal aid
  - NI Housing Executive: Draft Community Involvement and Cohesion Strategy 2024-29
  - Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)
  - Department of Work and Pensions: Modernising support for independent living
  - Racism and Hate in Northern Ireland
  - Submission to the Committee for the Executive Office Inquiry into Gaps in Equality Legislation

Commissioners **noted** the matters outlined above for information.

## 10. Minutes of Committee Meetings

- Minutes of the Statutory Duty Investigations Committee Held on 18 June 2024. **EC/24/08/13**
- Minutes of the Ad Hoc meeting of the Statutory Duty Investigations Committee held on 26 June 2024. **EC/24/08/14**

Commissioners noted the Minutes outlined above for information.

**[Commissioner, Duane Farrell left the meeting]**

**11. Any Other Business**

- **CLC draft Advice**

**EC/24/08/15**

Eoin O'Neill updated Commissioners in relation to the progress made.

Commissioners **noted** the update.

**12. Date of next meeting: Two Hundred and Sixteenth Commission Meeting on Wednesday, 23 October 2024, at 1.30 pm in Equality House**

**Signed:** 

**Date:** 23 October 2024