

**EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

**TWO HUNDRED AND SEVENTEENTH COMMISSION MEETING**

**HELD ON WEDNESDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2024 AT 1.30 PM**

**EQUALITY HOUSE**

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

**APOLOGIES**

**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

The Chief Commissioner commenced the meeting by extending condolences to Commissioner, Ellen Finlay, on the recent passing of her Mum and to let her know that Commissioner's thoughts and prayers are with Ellen and her family at this time. Ellen Finlay thanked everyone for their support and to all who had contacted her over recent weeks.

The Chair also welcomed Alden Henderson, to his first Commission meeting as Director of Advice and Compliance.

**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**

**Board Effectiveness Review:** following consideration of Board and Committee effectiveness in August 2024. The process for seeking tenders to complete the effectiveness review has commenced, with appointment expected before Christmas. It is anticipated the review will be completed by March 2025 and all Commissioners are asked for their co-operation and support in the review process.

**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 would leave the meeting before the discussion.

The Chief Commissioner reminded Commissioners to ensure their Registers of Interests were up to date.

**4. Policy Issues**

**- EU Equality Standards**

**EC/24/10/02**

Roisin Mallon, Director, presented the Joint ECNI/NIHRC Briefing Paper: WF Article 2: The EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies noting a number of proposed new policy positions at appendix A.

Commissioners considered the paper noting that it could be further developed particularly in relation to how the Commissions powers and duties compare to the EU Standards. Given the variation between equality bodies across the EU it

may be that that substantial changes are not needed to the Commission powers and duties. It was also agreed that further engagement is required to secure a commitment from the UK/ NI Executive that transposition will be undertaken by June 2026.

Following discussion, it was agreed to reconsider the detail contained in the briefing document.

## 5. Business Reporting

### - Finance Update

**EC/24/10/03**

Craig Gartley, Director, Finance and Corporate Services updated Commissioners following the October Monitoring Round. He confirmed that the Commission received an additional £298k for the 2024-2025 financial year. Work is now ongoing to re-profile these funds to maximise their use. Although, staff were mindful to minimise potential liabilities for subsequent financial years. He also noted that no additional resources were being requested through January monitoring round.

Following a query on the impact of the increase in employers' National Insurance contributions, it was initially estimated that this would be an additional £80,000 for the 2025-26 year. Although, there was now an indication of a commitment from Treasury to fund this increase across the public sector, further clarification was needed.

Commissioners **noted** 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.

### - Corporate Risk & Business Continuity Register: for approval

**EC/24/10/04**

Keith Brown, Head of Corporate Services presented the updated Corporate Risk Register and Business Continuity Register, which had been presented to the ARAC Committee at its last meeting. He highlighted the importance the role of Commissioners in risk monitoring and their right to request additional information.

Commissioners discussed some areas from the paper, including how risks are monitored, emerging risks and the need to address reputational risks, including in relation to LFC decisions. It was noted that reputational risks should be flagged and managed proactively.

Discussion took place regarding the importance of a strategic discussion on financial sustainability and the Chief Executive advised that a strategic discussion to allow a deep dive into CR1 would be organised.

Following discussion, Commissioners **approved** the Corporate Risk & Business Continuity Register.

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

**EC/24/10/05**

Commissioners congratulated the Chief Commissioner on her reappointment for a further five years until 28 February 2030. She thanked them for their good wishes and support.

The Chief Commissioner outlined a number of engagements and meetings since the October Commission. Along with the Chief Executive, she attended an introductory meeting with the TEO Permanent Secretary. The Chief Commissioner also met Gordon Milligan, Chair LRA and Geraldine Hanna, Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime.

She noted an appearance before the Communities Committee on disability law reform on 14 November.

The Chief Commissioner expressed her thanks to Deputy Chief Commissioner Neil Anderson and Commissioner Lisa Caldwell for their attendance at the recent successful Corporate Planning staff day and thanked them for their valuable contributions.

Commissioners **noted** the update report.

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

**EC/24/10/06**

Louise Conlon, Chief Executive provided further detail to her report, noting that the Commission had received the recent IIP assessment report and had retained Silver Status. The feedback includes recommendations which will be taken forward by the SLT for consideration of next steps. The report had been appended for Commissioners information.

Commissioners noted that the draft Corporate Plan is currently out for consultation until 6 February 2025.

It was noted that the pay remit 2023 had been recently approved and staff would receive their back pay this month.

The Chief Executive updated on the Illegal Migration Act Court of Appeal Proceedings and provided detail on a number of other meetings and engagements. It was confirmed by the Board that there was no change to the ECNI's position in terms of the exercise of its legal powers in the context of IMA proceedings.

The Chief Executive reported on attendance at the TEO ALB Forum meeting discussing the Programme for Government, Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls and budget constraints.

Commissioners **noted** the update report.

## 8. Matters for Information

**EC/24/10/07**

- ECNI Response to the Executive's Consultation on a Programme for Government Outcomes Framework

Commissioners **noted** the ECNI response outlined above.

## 9. Minutes of Committee Meetings

- Minutes of the ARAC Committee meeting held on Wednesday 14 August 2024.

**EC/24/10/08**

Commissioners **noted** the minutes outlined above.

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

## 10. Any Other Business

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

Commissioners **noted** the update.

The Chief Commissioner thanked all for their input and wished everyone a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

11. **Date of next meeting:** Two Hundred and Eighteenth Commission Meeting on **Wednesday, 22 January 2025, at 1.30 pm in Equality House.**

Signed:



**Date:** 22 January 2025