

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
TWO HUNDRED AND FOURTEENTH COMMISSION MEETING
DUNADRY HOTEL, TEMPLEPATRICK
28 AUGUST 2024

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

APOLOGIES

Sheena McKinney

IN ATTENDANCE

Keith Brown	Interim Chief Executive
Louise Conlon	Director, Communications
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
Kathryn Barr	Senior Policy Officer, Policy & Strategic Engagement
Paul Noonan	Senior Policy Officer, Policy & Strategic Engagement

1. Minutes of the two hundred and thirteenth meeting held on Wednesday 26 June 2024 EC/24/07/01

The Minutes of the two hundred and thirteenth meeting held on Wednesday 26 June 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 11, paper 14.

The declaration was **noted**.

4. Policy Issues

- Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) EC/24/07/02

Paul Noonan, Senior Policy Officer, Policy and Strategic Engagement provided an update on recent engagement with the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination's (UN CERD) examination of the implementation of the Convention by the United Kingdom. He provided an overview of his engagement during the Committee's examination. The Senior Policy Manager explained that that since the paper was circulated, the Committee's report had been published and its recommendations reflected many of the Commission's recommendations. This would form part of the Commission's engagement going forward in respect of promoting race equality.

Commissioners welcomed the update noting that it was a timely report considering the recent racist attacks and riots which were shocking and unacceptable. Commissioners discussed the misinformation and political engagement on the issue generally. It was agreed that the Commission should continue to prioritise work around race equality matters and seek the

necessary resources to do so. Engagement in respect to the upcoming work in relation to a racial equality strategy would be important.

Commissioners **noted** the update and the proposed next steps.

- TEO Committee – Gaps in Equality Legislation Inquiry EC/23/07/03

Darren McKinstry and Kathryn Barr, Policy and Strategic Engagement, provided information on the NI Assembly Committee for the Executive Office Inquiry into Gaps in Equality Legislation, and proposals for engagement. They outlined next steps noting that the closing date of 6 September 2024 and that the Commission would be giving evidence to the Committee on 11 September 2024.

Commissioners welcomed the TEO Committees interest and provided detailed comment on the draft submission particularly on how it was presented. Commissioners recognised the quality of the work in preparing the paper and suggested that it may have more impact by structuring the submission around the questions posed by the Committee and providing the Committee with a succinct synopsis rather than such a detailed document. A tabular format should also be considered. There was a discussion about the priorities, which were based on existing positions of the Commission and some changes to these were suggested. Officers agreed to consider the Commissioners comments and suggestions and refocus the submission. The Chief Commissioner would also work on her messaging to the Committee.

Following discussion, the commissioners noted the submission deadline and agreed subject to the above that these could be submitted to the Inquiry.

5. Business Reporting

- Business Plan and Budget 2024-2025 EC/24/07/04

Keith Brown, Interim Chief Executive presented the revised costed Business Plan 2024-2025, highlighting that the Plan has been reviewed in the context of the confirmed opening budget position, which was communicated at the end of June. The opening budget letter confirmed that this year's allocation would be the same as the opening allocation from 2023-24. He advised that, in the context of the unfunded nature of the NICS pay settlement, this had the effect of a 7% cut in the Commission's Resource budget this year.

Following consideration, Commissioners **approved** the attached costed

Business Plan for 2024-25 for submission to TEO.

- Finance Report: 1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024 EC/24/07/05

Mr Craig Gartley, Director of Finance and Corporate Services presented the Q1 Finance Report and outlined the budgetary position as of 30 June 2024 across the main budget tranches. He advised that in the June monitoring round, the main Resource bids made by the Commission had been unsuccessful. A small amount had been secured for some essential Capital purchases. Engagement is continuing with TEO regarding the October Monitoring rounds in the hope of easing the substantial pressures in salaries and current expenditure. At present, the initial feedback was not encouraging. Members will be kept updated and notified of the outcome.

The financial position had formed a large part of the earlier discussion on the Corporate Plan and Commissioners had no further comment at this stage. It was agreed that a more detailed update on the position would be prepared for the September meeting, and the position would be reported on a monthly basis thereafter, to ensure that there is close scrutiny of what was a very difficult budget situation.

The Commission **noted** the Financial Report for the period 1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024.

- Report to those charged with governance 2023-24 EC/24/07/06

The Interim Chief Executive presented the Final Report to those Charged with Governance which had been presented to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on 14 October 2024.

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

- Business Plan 2023-24 Progress Report: EC/24/07/07
1 April 2024 – 30 June 2024

Keith Brown, Interim Chief Executive presented the progress as contained in the revised Business Plan against the 29 objectives within six priority areas.

Progress this year is being delivered against the backdrop of further

budgetary constraint and despite the return of an Executive and Assembly, uncertainty about a new Programme for Government. By the end of the first quarter, significant progress had been made in delivering 15 of the objectives. For a further six satisfactory progress was being made, so that by the year-end ground could be made up to bring the progress back on track. This is however dependent upon an improvement in both the financial and policy-making environment. Already, at this stage the year, in seven areas progress is substantially less than planned and in the key area of budgetary control the target is unlikely to be achieved.

The Interim Chief Executive detailed the areas under pressure and highlighted the areas where significant progress has been made. It was noted that the Commission will continue to press for the necessary additional resource to effectively deliver the business plan and assess how we can best harness whatever resources we have at our disposal to meet our business objectives.

Following discussion, Commissioners **noted** progress against Performance Measures for delivery of the Business Plan's Key actions.

6. Other Matters for Commission Decision

No matters for Commission decision.

7. Chief Commissioner's Business

EC/24/07/08

The Chief Commissioner outlined the meetings and engagements she had attended since the June meeting, including the Launch of Mela Festival on 25 August 2024

She met with MLA, Paula Bradshaw on 8 August 2024 and participated in a number of press engagements.

Commissioners **noted** the Chief Commissioners Report.

8. Chief Executive's Report

EC/24/07/09

Keith Brown, Interim Chief Executive provided further detail to his report, including update regarding budget and business planning and the pay remit.

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

9. Matters for Information

- Proposed Technical changes to Tribunal Rules EC/24/07/10
- TEO Race Consultation EC/24/07/11

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

10. Minutes of Committee Meetings

- Minutes of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on Wednesday 8 May 2024. EC/24/07/12
- Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on Tuesday 25 June 2024 EC/24/07/13

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

[Commissioner, Duane Farrell left the meeting]

11. Any Other Business

- CLC draft Advice EC/23/07/14

Eoin O'Neill provided updated in relation to CLC draft advice.

Commissioners **noted** the update.

12. Date of next meeting: Two Hundred and fifteenth Commission Meeting on Wednesday, 25 September 2024, at 1.30 pm in Equality House.

Signed:



Date: 25 September 2024