

THE TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY THIRD MEETING OF**THE EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND****Wednesday 25 June 2025 at 1.30 pm****EQUALITY HOUSE****PRESENT:**

Geraldine McGahey	Chief Commissioner
Neil Anderson	Deputy Chief Commissioner
Maureen Brunt	(R)
Lisa Caldwell	
Siobhan Cullen	(R)
Duane Farrell	
Ellen Finlay	
Monica Fitzpatrick	(part of)
Colin Kennedy	(R)
Nazia Latif	
Stephen Mathews	(R)
Harry Robinson	
Preeti Yellamaty	(R)

APOLOGIES:

Jim McCooe
John McAllister

IN ATTENDANCE:

Louise Conlon	Chief Executive
Keith Brown	Head of Corporate Services
Craig Gartley	Director, Finance & Corporate Services (part of)
Eoin O'Neill	Director, Legal Services (part of)
Lisa King, Director	Research and Investigations (part of)
Kelly McGinley	Communications Manager

1. Introduction

The Chief Commissioner thanked everyone for joining the meeting and welcomed Commissioner Harry Robinson to his first Commission meeting.

2. Conflict of Interest

Commissioner, Monica Fitzpatrick previously declared a conflict of interest at Item 5 on the agenda and joined the meeting after this item was considered.

3. Minutes of the two hundred and twenty second meeting held on Wednesday 27 May 2025

EC/25/06/01

The minutes of the two hundred and twenty second meeting held on Wednesday 27 May 2025 were signed as a true and accurate record, subject to the agreed amendment under AOB.

4. Actions from previous meeting

EC/25/06/02

Commissioners **noted** the actions outlined from the previous meeting and agreed that a briefing on barriers faced by neuro diverse people in relation to accessing education and financial services will be added to the action list.

5. Policy Issues

- Supreme Court Judgment

EC/25/05/03

The Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive provided an update and outlined the Commission's approach in relation to the Supreme Court Judgment in the 'For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers' case.

Commissioners were provided with a draft press release and the Foreword from the Commission's legal paper to consider before discussing the planned approach to:

- publish a legal paper identifying the legal uncertainties.
- consult widely over 12 weeks to ensure the right legal questions are being asked.
- issue pre action protocol letters to people and organisations who have a direct interest in resolving these legal uncertainties and may wish to join these legal proceedings.
- consider applying to the High Court for a declaration.

- publish draft guidance which will be subject to consultation.
- publish final guidance for employers, service providers and public bodies.

Commissioners were advised that this approach aims to minimise long-term legal uncertainty and provide guidance that is credible, workable and accurate. In the interim the Commission will continue to provide information for employers, service providers and public authorities.

Commissioners raised queries about the relative costs of different approaches, the expected timeframe, legal uncertainties, the practical arrangements for the Pre Action Protocol letters and the status of the interim information. Commissioners confirmed the approach and welcomed the leadership being shown.

Commissioners also discussed the draft press release and requested some changes to keep language closer to the Foreword and ensure that it reflected that real people are at the heart of this issue.

Following discussion Commissioners **approved** the approach outlined above and noted the launch date as Friday 27 June 2025 with a press briefing.

[Commissioner Monica Fitzpatrick, Craig Gartley, Director of Finance and Corporate Services, Eoin O'Neill, Director of Legal Services, and Lisa King, Director of Research and Investigations joined the meeting at 2.25pm.]

- Powers and Duties

EC/25/05/04

Lisa King, Director of Research and Investigations, presented the work to map the Commission's powers and duties and their use. She outlined the planned approach for the next steps to develop a draft Strategic Enforcement Strategy by year end, as committed to in the business plan.

Commissioners provided comment and considered the details outlined in the "map" and on the next steps for reviewing the enforcement powers specifically. They discussed deployment of the Commission's enforcement powers and how these might be used to tackle employers who continue to be named in individual's applications for assistance to the Legal Funding Committee.

Clarification was provided in relation to a number of areas discussed including the Judicial Review in relation to Northern Ireland's budget, proposed amendments to race relations legislation and Codes of Practice.

Commissioners **approved** the next steps outlined in the paper.

6. Business Reporting

- Draft Annual Report and Accounts EC/25/06/05

Louise Conlon, Chief Executive presented the Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25 which had been considered by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) the previous day (24 June 2025).

The Chief Executive was pleased to report that Annual Accounts will be certified with an unqualified audit opinion, without modification.

The Annual Report and Accounts will be formally certified, by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), on 1 July and will be laid in both Westminster and in the NI Assembly on 10 July 2025.

Commissioners expressed appreciation to staff, on behalf of the Commission, for another good performance this year and another very positive outcome to the annual audit.

Commissioners **approved** the Annual Report and Accounts for formal submission to C&AG.

- Draft Report to Those Charged with Governance EC/25/06/06

Keith Brown, Head of Corporate Services outlined the details in the Draft Report to Those Charged with Governance, noting that this had also been presented to the ARAC Committee on 24 June 2025.

It was noted that the previous accounting issue relating to dilapidations costs has been resolved. In the Accounts dilapidations have been disclosed as a contingent liability, in line with IAS 37. It was noted that Land and Property Services (LPS) have acknowledged receipt of instructions to enter into negotiations with the landlord about the lease, on behalf of ECNI.

In relation to the one Priority 3 recommendations, work has commenced in formalising the sublease agreement between ECNI and the Truth Recovery Independent Panel.

The Committee **noted** the Report to Those Charged with Governance and thanked staff for their work.

7. Other Matters for Commission Decision

SDIC Committee – Verbal Update

EC/25/06/07

Siobhan Cullen, Chair, SDIC Committee, provided an update on the recent work of the Committee including progress on finalising two draft investigation reports. It was noted that further discussion in relation to the Committee's work would take place at the Commissioner away day.

Commissioners **noted** the Minutes of the SDIC Committee held on 9 April 2025.

Commissioners thanked the Chair for her update.

ARAC Committee – Verbal Update

Neil Anderson, Chair of the ARAC Committee provided an update on the recent meetings of the Committee, noting that the Committee had just approved the Annual Report and Accounts as presented earlier. Mr Anderson also noted his thanks to staff for all their work on this.

Commissioners thanked the Chair for his update.

8. Chief Commissioners Business

The Chief Commissioner provided an update on recent engagements she had had over the past month, along with the Chief Executive, including a meeting with Clare Moore NI-ICTU and their NI Committee, which was a very positive engagement.

The Chief Commissioner also updated on her attendance at the Presbyterian Church Meeting of General Assembly for the Incoming Moderator, a meeting with Women's Rights Network and an evidence session at the Assembly's Committee for Communities regarding the Sign Language Bill.

There was a discussion on the Commission's response to the race riots that began in Ballymena and spread to other parts of Northern Ireland. The Chief Commissioner advised that statements and a blog had been issued which were well received. Commissioners were also advised of the ongoing work across the Commission to tackle racism in Northern Ireland and plans going forward. Commissioner's highlighted the importance of continuing engagement with as wide a range of groups as possible to work together to

address racism and racial discrimination and seeing progress on the amended race relations order.

Commissioners **noted** the update.

9. Chief Executive Report

EC/25/06/08

With sadness, the Chief Executive reported that Brian Kennedy, a member of the Communications Team, had passed away after a short illness. Brian's loss has been greatly felt within the team and across the Commission. Commissioners requested that their condolences be noted.

The Chief Executive presented her previously circulated report and updated on a number of business issues including the IT Business Case and accommodation in Equality House.

Commissioners **noted** the update

10. Matters for Information

- Advancing Equality in Education Briefing Paper EC/25/06/09
- Age GFS Response EC/25/06/10
- ECNI Response: Dept of Health Consultation: EC/25/06/11
Proposal to amend minimum standards for
Childminding and Day Care

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

Commissioners welcomed the updated education briefing. The Chief Executive welcomed any specific comments in relation to this, which was a slightly new approach. There was a short discussion on the impact of socio-economic status on both the issue of education and childcare and reflected on the previous discussion on the potential future consideration of socio economic to be a protected characteristic.

Commissioners welcomed the response to the Dept of Health consultation and briefly discussed that departments should not make assumptions about the capabilities of disabled people.

11. Any Other Business

Peace Plus Northern Ireland -Ireland: Monica Fitzpatrick, the Commission's representative on the Peace Plus Monitoring and Steering Group updated members on progress in relation of funding bids.

12. Date of next meeting: Commissioner away day would take place on the date of the next Commission meeting on **Wednesday 27 August 2025**, venue and time to be confirmed.

Meeting concluded at 4.10pm

Signed:



Signed: 27 August 2025