

**THE TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTIETH MEETING OF
THE EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

Wednesday 26 March 2025 at 1.30pm

EQUALITY HOUSE

PRESENT:

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

APOLOGIES:

Monica Fitzpatrick

IN ATTENDANCE:

Louise Conlon, Chief Executive
Keith Brown, Head of Corporate Services
Darren McKinstry Director, Policy and Strategic Engagement
Frances Fleming Interim Director of Communications
Eoin O'Neill, Director of Legal Services
Kelly McGinley, Communications Manager

1. Introduction

The Chief Commissioner welcomed everyone to the meeting including two representatives from Deloitte, who had been undertaking the Board Effectiveness Audit.

2. Minutes of the two hundred and nineteenth meeting held on Wednesday 26 February 2025

Minutes of the two hundred and nineteenth meeting held on Wednesday 26 February 2025 were signed as a true and accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

A rolling 'action sheet' was distributed to Commissioners outlining key actions. This will be updated and provided at each meeting going forward.

4. Conflict of Interest

There were no conflicts declared.

5. Policy Issues

None.

6. Business Reporting

Draft Costed Business Plan 2025/26

EC/25/03/03

The Chief Executive advised that a working draft of the Business Plan had been submitted to TEO following the last meeting. Commissioners were asked to consider the costed business plan. This draft Plan was focussed on a number of cross Directorate projects and these were being required to put forward project plans and to bid for the scarce resources.

It was anticipated that further bids will be made in the year monitoring rounds. Commissioners agreed this was a good approach.

Commissioners were advised that a funding bid will be required for the Dedicated Mechanism Unit at the end of this financial year.

In response to a query, Commissioners were advised that a final position, in relation to additional funding to cover the increase in employer national insurance contributions, had not yet received from TEO/DOF.

There was a brief discussion around the provision of translation services for individuals seeking advice from the Commission. The Chief Executive confirmed that there was a translation service available on the website and if required translators are used when necessary.

Commissioners **approved** the Draft Costed Business Plan 2025/26 paper for submission to TEO.

Board Effectiveness Survey Report

EC/25/03/02

Chief Commissioner Geraldine McGahey welcomed Deloitte's David Kinsella and Katrina Duckworth to the meeting.

Katrina Duckworth provided an overview of the report advising it was a positive review. She advised that the review found the Commission has the key skills and critical elements needed for a board. There is a good culture amongst the board with open discussion, challenge and positive conflict with strong facilitation and good governance structure. Results across the survey were all above average. The report includes 18 recommendations with only one high priority which will be easily resolved.

The lowest scoring area was around board papers, and it was noted that a number of actions were required in respect of these. There was a discussion around how to move away from text heavy documents for the board to more visual communications including use of graphs to convey important information.

Commissioners discussed the diversity of the current board. The use of an unusual phrase within the report was raised and it was agreed this would be changed. Commissioners queried why skills analysis only included public and private sectors. They were advised that the third sector is not typically included in this type of review.

The Chief Commissioner advised there were a number of things to discuss including training and mentoring and further views could be sought via the appraisal system. Commissioners discussed value of mentoring and training. All agreed a training plan was a useful idea to identify any gaps or needs across the board.

There was a brief discussion around the need for specific training for Commissioners in relation to some of the more complex areas of work, including SDIC. It was agreed that a training needs analysis, tailored to the requirements of the board, would be undertaken. The Chief Commissioner will also consider the TEO recommended training list as part of this for Board members.

The need to ensure Commissioners were across key issues relating to the Commission's work was raised. The Chief Commissioner advised that a plan was in place and that various issues would be covered in the proposed strategic discussion sessions for this. It was agreed this would make better use of Commissioner's time outside of the board meetings.

There was a brief discussion around how culture and talent within the organisation could be evaluated. Katrina Duckworth, Senior Manager, Deloitte outlined several ways this could be done. It was agreed there would be more discussion around this and other issues as the action plan is developed around the report.

The report was **noted**, and an action plan would be developed for Commissioners consideration.

7. Chief Commissioners Business

The Chief Commissioner referred to the note of the working group in relation to board papers. Commissioners welcomed the progress to date and offered to provide further feedback on papers if necessary.

The Chief Commissioner explained that following various discussions with Commissioners, it had been agreed to set up a number of short-term advisory groups to allow commissioners to work with officers on areas where they have particular knowledge.

Some examples included upcoming work on guidance in relation to trans-gender in employment for employers, Section 75 and race equality issues.

The Chief Commissioner reminded Commissioners of quarterly strategic discussion sessions, that are separate from the formal board meeting. These will provide an opportunity for discussion and better understanding of particular issues.

Another change, on a quarterly basis, would be that Commissioners would get some time on the agenda to meet without officers and would also meet with the Chief Executive without staff being present.

The Chief Commissioner noted that Commissioners were keen to represent the Commission at various events and availability of Commissioners is often the deciding factor in who attends. The Chief Commissioner will develop a table of events and ensure everyone has an opportunity to represent the Commission.

The Chief Commissioner advised Commissioners that the board meeting in May would be held in the Guildhall, Derry. It was agreed that taking the Commission meeting out of Belfast once or twice a year would be beneficial.

The Chief Commissioner provided an update on events and meetings she had had over the past month. Chief Commissioner had met with Richard Cushley from NI Bureau, participated in a panel discussion at the Alliance Party Conference, spoke at the PSNI's IWD event on working in male dominated environments, attended the British Irish Council's St Patrick's Day event, spoke at Arc NI's conference on UNCRPD, met with NICICTU on the Good Jobs Bill and travelled to meet Mayor Lilian Seenoi-Barr at the Guildhall.

8. Chief Executive Report

EC/25/03/05

The Chief Executive provided some additional updates to her previously circulated report in relation to the provision of IT services and staffing issues for the year ahead.

The Chief Executive invited Eoin O'Neill, Director of Legal to provide an update on ongoing Judicial Review on budgets taken by Children's Law Centre. In addition to the update Mr O'Neill advised that a two-day hearing has been listed for June 2025.

9. Matters for Information

Commissioners were advised that the Draft Corporate Plan 2025-2028 has been submitted to TEO and this was with the papers.

They were also advised the response to Proposed Private Member's Bill: UNCRPD (Obligation on Public Authorities) Bill EC/25/03/07 has been issued as agreed by the board.

10. Minutes of Committee Meetings

Commissioners noted the minutes of the fourth annual meeting of Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission which was held on 19 November 2024 at Riddel Hall Belfast.

11. Any Other Business

A Commissioner requested more information from the discrimination advice line about the types of calls they receive and the process which follows these calls. This would be followed up.

12. Date of next meeting

The two hundred and twenty first Commission Meeting will be held on Wednesday, 30 April 2025, at 1.30 pm in Equality House.

Commissioners were advised that a strategic planning session has been scheduled for the morning of 30 April at 11.30am, in Equality House. The topic will be advised in due course.

The meeting ended at 3.30pm.

Signed:



Date: 30 April 2025