

THE TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY SEVENTH MEETING OF
THE EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Wednesday 26 November 2025 at 1.30pm

Equality House

PRESENT:

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

APOLOGIES:

Duane Farrell
Harry Robinson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Louise Conlon	Chief Executive
Keith Brown	Head of Corporate Services
Frances Fleming	Director of Communications (part of)
Craig Gartley	Director of Finance & Corporate Services (part of)
Alden Henderson	Director of Advice and Compliance (part of)
Natasha McClelland	Policy Officer (part of)
Kelly McGinley	Communications Manager
Edel Quinn	Senior Policy Officer

1. Commissioners update

Closed session with Commissioners and Chief Executive

2. Introduction

The Chief Commissioner commenced the board meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

3. Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interests were declared.

4. Minutes of the two hundred and twenty sixth meeting held on Wednesday 22 October 2025

Minutes of the two hundred and twenty sixth meeting held on Wednesday 22 October 2025.

EC/25/10/01

Minutes of the Special meeting held on Wednesday 29 October 2025.

EC/25/10/02

Minutes of the Special meeting held on Wednesday 19 November 2025.

EC/25/10/03

The above minutes were **agreed** and signed as a true and accurate record.

5. Actions from previous meeting

EC/25/10/04

The actions from the previous meeting were noted.

6. Policy Issues

- EU Loss of funding: Draft Policy Briefing

EC/25/10/05

Edel Quinn, Senior Policy Officer, presented the briefing paper and policy recommendations from the research report on “Funding for Equality Groups in NI: The impact of the transition from EU Funding to UK Shared Prosperity Fund”.

Commissioners were advised that the Shared Prosperity Fund had been managed and delivered by Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government which is not designated for the purposes for of Section 75.

Commissioners were reminded that the Chief Commissioner had previously written to the Secretary of State in relation to this.

Commissioners discussed the reliance on the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland to deliver services. They discussed the impact of cuts on service users from across the various equality groups and on the sector more widely.

Commissioners requested that the impact of the loss of funding on Section 75 groups needs to be brought to front and centre of all work relating to this area. It was suggested that some recommendations maybe streamlined.

It was agreed that the Commission will again press the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to designate the relevant government department for the purpose of Section 75 in relation to the administration of this fund and the need for an equality impact assessment to be carried out.

Following discussion, Commissioners **approved** the briefing paper and the policy recommendations subject to agreed amendments.

Disability and Work Strategy: Draft Response

EC/25/10/06

Paper not presented – format being reconsidered, response will be submitted to Department for Communities to meet 12 January 2026 deadline.

Commissioners **noted** this update.

7. Business Reporting

- Risk Assurance Framework and Risk Register

EC/25/10/07

Keith Brown, Head of Corporate Services presented the updated Corporate Risk Register and Business Continuity Register and outlined key points. The Register was recently reviewed at the ARAC Committee on 15 October 2025 and is presented to the full Commission in May and November.

Several changes were highlighted, resulting from realignment with an updated TEO Risk Management Policy. Although some of the changes were extensive, they were not substantive. He highlighted the key updates, including a description of the ‘three lines of defence’

model, additional clarification of some key risk terms, and minor changes to risk rating definitions.

The Head of Corporate Services presented a revised Corporate Risk Register covering:

CR1 (Strategy and impact) Commissioners considered that further progress needed to be made on the delivery of the mitigating actions, particularly to demonstrate more clearly the impact of underfunding on the delivery of the Commission's statutory responsibilities. Commissioners discussed the impact and pressure on ECNI staff as more gaps in staffing structure appear but no budget to recruit new staff.

CR2 (Budgetary control) highlighted the increased risk due to the forecast year-end overspend and the potential negative October monitoring outturn.

CR3 (Statutory compliance and internal control) Commissioners noted that this risk rating has increased due to the increased risks of litigation and of failure of regulatory compliance emanating from aspects of our Legal Services work.

CR4 (Business continuity) risk is gradually decreasing thanks to continued efforts this year. These needed to be continued to address this risk more fully. Commissioners discussed the current situation regarding the lease on Equality House and the ongoing work relating to this.

An update was provided on emerging risks, incidents and near misses. There were no new risks, incidents or near misses to report. The assurance map had also been updated.

Commissioner **noted** the update.

8. Other Matters for Commission Decision

- **Equality Scheme: North South Language Body** EC/25/10/08

Alden Henderson, Director, Advice and Compliance presented the NSLB authority revised equality scheme to the Commission for approval, noting that the Scheme has been audited for compliance to ensure it meets the obligations under Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Commissioners briefly discussed some of the terminology used and agreed this was due to the legislation.

Commissioners **approved** the North South Language Body Revised Equality Scheme.

9. Reports from Committees

- SDIC Committee

The Chair, Siobhan Cullen, updated on recent business considered by the SDIC Committee at it's annual in person meeting on 12 November 2025.

- SDIC Minutes of 10 September 2025

EC/25/10/09

Commissioners **noted** the oral update on the SDIC Committee and the Minutes outlined above.

10.

Chief

Commissioner's Business

The Chief Commissioner provided an update on a number of recent engagements since the last Commission, she participated in a panel session, at the 'Rule of Law' conference held by the Bar of Northern Ireland, a PwC breakfast briefing on the 'Economic impact of violence against women and girls' and attended the Regulation and Oversight Forum.

The Chief Commissioner provided an update on the publication of report into Ulster Boxing, including meetings and briefings with Minister Lyons, department officials, and Phillip Brett MLA (DUP).

The Chief Commissioner attended a number of other meetings, including a meeting with Jim Fitzgerald re Standards for Equality Bodies, expert paper, the annual three Commission board meeting and had also met with Gillian Morton, NIO and Conal Heatley, Chief Executive, Commonwealth Games Northern Ireland.

Commissioners **agreed** to hold the next board meeting at 10am on 28 January to facilitate the Chief Executive and Chief Commissioner to attend a briefing session at the TEO Committee.

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

11. Chief Executive Report

EC/25/10/10

The Chief Executive presented her previously circulated report. She provided an update on CLC Judicial Review and the Commission's next steps in its roadmap relating to the 'For Women Scotland Ltd v the Scottish Ministers' judgment.

An update was also provided regarding accommodation, noting that three new tenant organisations have moved onto the 4th floor, Equality House on Monday 17 November.

The Chief Executive also provided information in relation to other business areas.

Commissioners **noted** the update.

12. Date of next meeting: Two hundred and Twenty eighth Commission Meeting on **Wednesday 28 January 2026, at 10am** in Equality House.

Meeting concluded at 4.10pm

Signed:**Signed:** 28 January 2026