

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

Tuesday 27 May 2025 at 1.30 pm

Harbour House, Guildhall, Derry

PRESENT:

Geraldine McGahey	Chief Commissioner
Neil Anderson	Deputy Chief Commissioner
Maureen Brunt	
Siobhan Cullen	
Duane Farrell	
Monica Fitzpatrick (part of)	
Nazia Latif (part of)	
Jim McCooe	
Preeti Yellamaty	
John McCallister	

APOLOGIES:

Lisa Caldwell
Stephen Mathews
Ellen Finlay
Sheena McKinney
Colin Kennedy

IN ATTENDANCE:

Louise Conlon	Chief Executive
Keith Brown	Head of Corporate Services (R) (part of)
Frances Fleming	Temporary Director of Communications (part of)
Alden Henderson	Director, Advice and Compliance (R) (part of)
Lisa King, Director	Research and Investigations (R) (part of)
Kelly McGinley	Communications Manager
Kathryn Barr	Senior Policy Officer (part of)

1. Introduction

The Chief Commissioner welcomed everyone and thanked all for attending the Commission meeting at the Guildhall.

On behalf of the Commission, the Chief Commissioner thanked the Council for the opportunity to meet in the Guildhall. Commissioners welcomed the engagement with the Mayor, Cllr Lilian Seenoi Barr and key stakeholders prior to the Commission meeting.

The Chief Commissioner noted this was the end of Commissioner Sheena McKinney's tenure with the Commission.

Update on Supreme Court Judgment

Commissioners were provided with an update on plans to move forward the course of action agreed at the extraordinary meeting held on 12 May 2025 on the 'For Women Scotland Ltd' Supreme Court judgment.

2. Conflict of Interest

Commissioner, Monica Fitzpatrick previously declared a conflict of interest and joined the meeting following item four on the Chair's Agenda. Commissioner Nazia Latif declared a conflict of interest in relation to item eight on the Chair's Agenda. The Commissioner left the meeting during this item and rejoined for item nine.

3. Minutes of the two hundred and twenty first meeting held EC/25/05/01 on Wednesday 30 April 2025

Minutes of the two hundred and twenty first meeting held on Wednesday 30 April 2025 were signed as a true and accurate record.

4. Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on Monday 12 May 2025

EC/25/05/02

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on Monday 12 May 2025 were signed as a true and accurate record.

[Monica Fitzpatrick and Kathryn Barr joined the meeting in person, Keith Brown, Lisa King and Alden Henderson joined remotely]

5. Actions from previous meeting

EC/25/05/03

Commissioners **noted** the actions outlined from the previous meeting.

6. Policy Issues

- Law reform update and Age gfs draft response

EC/25/05/04

Kathryn Barr, Senior Policy Officer gave a short presentation on law reform generally. She further presented a paper on Claire Sugden MLA's consultation on her Private Members Bill on age discrimination in goods, facilities, and services and outlined the proposed next steps.

Commissioners discussed the Commission's proposals on law reform generally, including the need for a Single Equality Act. Commissioners agreed that while this is still the preferred option the Commission must continue to advance equality law reform where possible.

There was a discussion on the scope of the proposed age gfs and in particular its interaction with other laws and exceptions in relation to healthcare and financial services were raised. There was a discussion on the scope of the proposed age gfs and in particular its interaction with other laws and exceptions in relation to healthcare and financial services were raised.

Other issues including the need to consider socio-economic status were raised and it was agreed that all inequalities have a socio-economic aspect to them. In the absence of socio-economic status being a prescribed characteristic, the Commission will continue to apply a poverty lens in the development of its policy positions.

Commissioners approved the key issues and the draft response to the Private Members Bill subject to the addition of further detail on addressing concerns relating to the inclusion of children and young people in any proposed legislation.

Commissioners **approved** the proposed next steps.

7. Business Reporting

- Risk Management and Corporate Risk Register EC/25/05/05

Keith Brown, Head of Corporate Services, updated Commissioners on changes to the Corporate Risk and Business Continuity Register. The Register was recently presented at the ARAC Committee meeting on 7 May 2025.

- CR1 Strategy: the rating remains very high, due to the continuing concern about the impact of chronic underfunding and understaffing.
- CR2 Reputation and Credibility: despite the mitigating actions taken the rating remains unchanged, due to the recent impact of political and media focus on the recent Supreme Court judgment and expectations for Commission guidance.
- CR3 Budgetary control: has reduced since the October monitoring round last year with some additional funding provided in the opening allocation for this year.
- CR4 Statutory compliance and Internal control: has increased following a limited assurance audit for HR. Work is ongoing to address the audit recommendations.
- CR5 Business continuity: As a result of the remedial action being taken to reduce this risk, progress should be evident over the coming months.

Mr Brown outlined the incidents and near misses that had occurred since the November 2024 meeting and responded to queries from Commissioners.

Commissioners **noted** the updated Risk Management and Corporate Risk Register.

- ARAC Chair's Report to the Commission EC/25/05/06

Neil Anderson, Chair ARAC Committee, presented the Annual Report of the Committee's work on behalf of the Commission during 2024/2025. He expressed thanks to the Chief Executive and the staff team for all the work and support they had given to the Committee over

the previous twelve months. He thanked his fellow Committee members for their work during the year.

The Commission **noted** the annual report from the Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

8. Other Matters for Commission Decision

Equality Schemes for Commission Approval

EC/25/05/07

- Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR)
- Department for Culture, Media & Sports (DCMS)

[Commissioner Nazia Latif left the meeting].

Alden Henderson, Director, Advice and Compliance presented the Equality Schemes for the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery and for the Department for Culture, Media & Sports.

There was a brief discussion around how the proposed schemes were based on the model scheme provided to public authorities by the Commission and that Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act only applies to Northern Ireland.

Commissioners **approved** the equality schemes outlined above.

[Commissioner Nazia Latif rejoined the meeting].

9. Chief Commissioners Business

The Chief Commissioner thanked all for their attendance at the meeting in Harbour House in the Guildhall, Derry.

The Chief Commissioner provided an update on recent engagements she had had over the past month, including a meeting regarding the Independent Review of the Windsor Framework, led by Lord Murphy of Torfaen. The Chief Commissioner also provided an overview of her engagements regarding Age GFS legislation and meetings in relation to the recent Supreme Court Judgment.

Commissioners **noted** the update.

10. Reports from Committees

ARAC Committee

- Minutes of Minutes of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 15 January 2025. EC/25/05/08

Legal Funding Committee

- May Report EC/25/05/09

Commissioners **noted** the Committee matters outlined above.

11. Chief Executive Report EC/25/05/10

The Chief Executive presented her previously circulated report and updated on a number of business issues including CLC Judicial Review.

The Chief Executive also updated on her recent partnership meeting with TEO and it was noted that the Commission's Corporate Plan 2025-28 is with Ministers for approval. Commissioners were also advised that the Business Plan 2025-26 is with the departmental board.

The Chief Executive provided additional updates on accommodation, IT and other business areas.

Commissioners **noted** the update.

12. Matters for Information

- TEO Assurance Statement Q4 EC/25/05/11
- Performance Report Q4 EC/25/05/12

Commissioners noted the outlined above for information.

13. Any Other Business

Committee Update Reports

There was brief discussion about how Committee updates should be presented by the relevant Committee Chairs and when these should occur.

Commission papers

There was a brief discussion on when papers should be issued ahead of meetings.

Commission Meeting at Harbour House, Guildhall

Commissioners agreed it was a worthwhile visit to the Guildhall.

Neurodiverse people

Barriers and issues faced by neurodiverse people in relation to education, particularly exams and financial services were raised, a report on these issues will be brought forward in due course.

- 14. Date of next meeting:** Two hundred and Twenty Third Commission Meeting on **Wednesday 25 June 2025**, in Equality House Belfast. 12.30 start TBC.

Meeting concluded at 4.00pm

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Geraldine McEneaney', written in a cursive style.

Signed: 25 June 2025