THE TWO HUNDRED AND THIRTY FIRST MEETING OF

THE EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Wednesday 22 April 2026 at 1.30PM

Equality House

PRESENT:

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

APOLOGIES:

Siobhan Cullen

IN ATTENDANCE:

Louise Conlon	Chief Executive
Frances Fleming	Temporary Director of Communications (part of)
Craig Gartley	Director of Finance and Corporate Services (part of)
Alden Henderson	Director of Advice and Compliance (part of)
Lisa King	Director, Policy and Research
Kelly McGinley	Communications Manager
Jacqui McKee	Director, Projects

Ciaran Trainor — Equality Development Manager (Information and Guidance) (part of)

1. **Introduction**

   The Chief Commissioner welcomed everyone and commenced the meeting.

2. **Conflict of Interest**

   No conflicts of interest were declared.

3. **Minutes of the two hundred and thirtieth meeting held on Wednesday 25 March 2026** EC/26/04/01

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

4. **Actions from previous meeting** EC/26/04/02

   The actions from the previous meeting were **noted.**

5. **Policy Issues**

   - Updated Race Policy Positions: Tackling Racism, Advancing Race Equality EC/26/04/03

   Lisa King, Director of Policy and Research, presented an updated draft policy paper noting that this reflected feedback from the previous Commission meeting and subsequent stakeholder engagement.

   Commissioners welcomed the revised paper noting that it had clear, practical actions and welcomed the strengthened recommendations across public space, education, media/social media and governance.

   Commissioners requested some further amendments to ensure consistent coverage of different forms of hatred, stronger Section 75 and good relations references, and a clearer recommendation on responsibilities of social media platforms and their users separate from that of the traditional media.

Commissioners also discussed media reporting and the responsibilities on government and councils to support all communities.

Frances Fleming, Director of Communications provided an update on plans for a conference on racial equality to be held on Thursday 21 May and communications to support this work going forward.

Commissioners **approved** the updated Race Policy Positions subject to amendments.

[Commissioner John McCallister joined the meeting. Commissioner Stephen Mathews and Senior Policy Officer, Paul Noonan left the meeting.]

6. Other Matters for Commission Decision

- Review of ECNI Functions under Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 — EC/26/04/04

Jacqui McKee, Director of Projects, presented the review of the Equality Commission's Functions under Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and outlined the implications from recent case law and detailed the proposed next steps, including the establishment of a working group.

Commissioners discussed the need for strategic direction and clarity on concepts such as "policy", "decisions", and "functions" and the importance of ensuring duties lead to meaningful equality outcomes.

Commissioners **approved** the review paper and **agreed** to establish a working group to progress the review with TOR to be developed by the Group.

Commissioners **agreed** they would indicate to the CE if they were interested in being on this working group.

7. Business Reporting

- Finance Report 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026 — EC/26/04/05

Craig Gartley, Director of Finance and Corporate Services, noted that the 2025/26 outturn was provisional pending audit. At this stage, the Commission were recording a core resource underspend of 40k (0.8%) and a DMU underspend of 5k (0.4%), both within the 1.5% target.

Total capital spend was £56k against a budget of £115k. This underspend of £59k was due to late approval of a furniture business case for the Equality House accommodation project and subsequent withdrawal of the Department of Finance framework supplier (Senator) on 30 March, leaving insufficient time to procure; the issue had been raised with TEO.

The 2026/27 opening core resource budget was £4.639m which was a £48k reduction on opening budget last year, DMU funding increased by £112k, and opening capital was £2.86m (including £2.7m relating to the building lease).

Commissioners discussed the report and it was confirmed that the new Equality House lease would run for five years (to July 2031). The Business Case was currently with TEO.

Following discussion, Commissioners **noted** the financial position at the year end.

- Progress Report: 1 April 2025 - 31 March 2026 EC/25/04/06

Louise Conlon, Chief Executive presented the year end Business Plan Progress Report, outlining progress against 21 objectives. By the year-end, 15 objectives have been met/partially met by the end of the year. There were 5 areas where progress in meeting target was substantially less than planned and one objective was not met.

Commissioners discussed the value of including workforce wellbeing/people metrics in future plans (e.g. attrition, absence, engagement indicators) and the impact of unsuccessful monitoring rounds on the Commission.

Commissioners also discussed the vacant director posts and the risks and mitigations relating to and regarding this, including the lack of resources to fill these posts and the need to again raise this with the TEO sponsorship team.

Commissioners **noted** the year end Progress Report.

- Communications Report: 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026 EC/26/04/07

Frances Fleming, Temporary Director of Communications, provided an overview of the communications work undertaken for the period 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026. She highlighted the successful launch of the new website, engagement with social media and blogs, publicity of legal cases and the increase in neutral coverage over the year, attributed to the judgment in the ‘For Women Scotland v the Scottish Ministers’ Supreme Court case.

The Commissioners **noted** the update for the period.

8. Reports from other Committees

ARAC Terms of Reference EC/26/04/07

The Chair of ARAC Committee, Neil Anderson presented the updated ARAC Terms of Reference which were considered at the February meeting of the ARAC Committee.

Commissioners **approved** the ARAC Terms of Reference.

9. Chief Commissioner’s Business EC/26/04/08

The Chief Commissioner provided an update on a number of recent engagements since the last Commission. She noted that she attended the Equinet Leadership Hub in Vienna along with the Chief Executive and highlighted some of the valuable discussions they had including those relating the EU Standards for Equality Bodies Directives. The Chief Commissioner reminded Commissioners that the Supreme Court judgment in Dillon and others is expected shortly.

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

10. Chief Executive Report EC/26/04/09

The Chief Executive presented an oral update in relation to budget, accommodation and ongoing work in other business areas. The Chief Executive also provided an update on an Equality Coalition event on Section 75 following the CLC judgment.

Commissioners **noted** the update.

[Commission staff left the meeting.]

11. AOB

Closed session with Commissioners and Chief Executive

12. Date of next meeting: Two hundred and thirty second Commission Meeting on **Wednesday 27 May 2026 at 1.30 pm.**

Meeting concluded at 3.55pm

Signed: **Dated:** 27 May 2026