

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

Wednesday 28 January 2026 at 10am

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	
Colin Kennedy	
Nazia Latif	
Stephen Mathews	
Jim McCooe	
John McAllister	
Harry Robinson (R)	

APOLOGIES:

Preeti Yellamaty

IN ATTENDANCE:

Louise Conlon	Chief Executive
Frances Fleming	Temporary Director of Communications (part of)
Craig Gartley	Director of Finance & Corporate Services (part of)
Alden Henderson	Director of Advice and Compliance (part of)
Kathryn Barr	Senior Policy Research Officer (part of)
Kelly McGinley	Communications Manager
Jacqui McKee	Director of Projects (part of)
Edel Quinn	Senior Policy Officer (part of)
Ciaran Trainor	Equality Development Manager (Information & Guidance) (part of)

1. Commissioner update

Closed session with Commissioners and Chief Executive.

2. Introduction

The Chief Commissioner commenced the board meeting and thanked everyone for attending. She welcomed Jim Fitzgerald who would be presenting his expert paper on EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies.

She asked Commissioners to note that a presentation by the Rabble Collective would be delivered at 1.40pm as part of the Commission meeting on Wednesday 25 February.

3. Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interests were declared.

4. Minutes of the two hundred and twenty seventh meeting held on Wednesday 26 November 2025 EC/26/01/01

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

5. Actions from previous meeting EC/26/01/02

EU Loss of Funding Report: It was noted that a press release has been drafted, and other communications support were being explored. This was expected to issue imminently.

The actions from the previous meeting were noted.

6. Policy Issues

- Equality Standards Presentation EC/26/01/03

Mr Jim Fitzgerald presented his expert paper in respect of the EU Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies. He highlighted areas of the framework of law, policy and practice which governs the operation of the

Commission and is not aligned with the Standards Directives. He outlined several recommended reforms to remedy these areas and suggested next steps.

Commissioners discussed the deadline of June 2026 to transpose the directives, the possible consequences of failing to do so and the progress of transposing the directive in other countries. They also discussed the recommendations in detail including need for data collection and resourcing. Mr Fitzgerald reminded Commissioners that the commitment to implement this was ultimately on the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.

As part of the discussion Commissioners were advised that work is also ongoing in relation to how the Commission is meeting and utilising its current powers and duties. This work will be shared in due course.

Commissioners thanked Mr Fitzgerald for the presentation and the comprehensive paper which provided valuable information and proposed next steps.

It was **agreed** that staff will refine draft policy recommendations and these will be presented at February Commission, for consideration.

- CLC Judicial Review: Judgment Update EC/26/01/04

Jacqui McKee, Director, Projects, presented an update on the CLC judgment and on officers' initial consideration of the potential implications and the proposed next steps. A draft workplan will be developed as part of the commitment to keep under review the effectiveness of the section 75 statutory duties. There will be a focus on this area of work through the next Business Plan period.

Commissioners discussed key terms raised in the judgment such as governance, the potential consequences for those working in this area, what the law says and the other judgments that need to be considered as part of this work.

Commissioners thanked Ms McKee for the update and **agreed** the proposed next steps.

7. Business Reporting

- Finance Report 1 April 2025 – 31 Dec 2025 EC/26/01/05

Craig Gartley, Director of Finance and Corporate Services, outlined the overall financial position at 31 December 2025, noting that the opening budget allocation has been increased through revised allocations to accounts for the 2024 pay award as well as the employers national insurance increases post June Monitoring.

Commissioners were advised that historically the Commission has been able avail of October and January monitoring rounds, however this year these were combined into a single December monitoring round where the Commission was granted a further £50k of capital funding.

Commissioners were advised that 73% of the total resource budget has been spent. The Commission is forecasting full utilisation of the budget across areas including laptop replacement, IT upgrades and accommodation renovations. The Commission is reporting a £31k deficit in its receipts for the year which aligns to covenants.

Commissioners were further advised that resource pressures previously reported have been managed through internal reprofiling and savings in salaries and projects and services. Weekly Finance Team meetings are now being held to ensure the Commission delivers within it permitted budgetary limits.

Commissioners **noted** the update.

- Business Plan Progress Report EC/26/01/06

Louise Conlon, Chief Executive advised that the progress report has been reviewed and changed to a more traditional style of reporting. This will allow sufficient detail to be provided to give a fuller assessment of the progress being made on delivering business plan targets. This was considered pertinent given the proximity to the year end and the need for Commissioners to be assured of business plan commitments being met. Included in the paper a proposed balanced scorecard has been used to look at corporate performance and views were welcome on this.

Commissioners discussed resourcing issues and the pressures on delivery of the business plan this year.

Commissioners **noted** the update.

- Communications Report EC/26/01/07

Frances Fleming, Temporary Director of Communications, presented the report of the communications work undertaken for the period 1 October – 30 December 2026. This included publicity of legal cases, general press releases, blogs, social media, website, partnerships and events.

Commissioners discussed the relevant definitions of positive and negative coverage as based on industry standards. They also discussed use of various social media platforms and engagement generated.

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

8. Reports from Committees

- SDIC Committee

The Committee Chair, Siobhan Cullen, updated on recent business considered by the SDIC Committee at the meeting held on 3 December 2025 including 3 complaints considered during that meeting.

- SDIC Minutes of 12 November 2025 EC/26/01/08

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

9. Chief Commissioner's Business

The Chief Commissioner provided an update on a number of recent engagements since the last Commission. These included providing evidence to the Communities Committee on the Ulster Boxing report, speaking at the Reasonable Adjustments/Better Futures event, and attending the NIHRC Annual Statement Launch, and a PSCF briefing.

She also attended a number of meetings, including a meeting with representatives from the BMA . The Chief Commissioner also met with Claire Moore and other representatives from NIC ICTU. In addition, she met with Sir Declan Morgan and staff from ICRIR.

The Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive provided an update on the previous day's case management hearing at the High Court regarding the Commission's application for leave to apply for judicial review following the Supreme Court's judgment in the case of 'For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers'.

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

10. Chief Executive Report

EC/26/01/09

The Chief Executive presented her previously circulated report. This included an update in relation to accommodation in Equality House, noting that the accommodation business case has recently been amended to reflect the rental offer secured via Land and Property Services' negotiation with the Landlord.

The Chief Executive outlined information in relation to other business areas and provided details of meetings and engagements attended since the previous meeting.

Commissioners **noted** the update.

11. Date of next meeting: Two hundred and Twenty ninth Commission Meeting on **Wednesday 25 February 2026 at 1.30 pm.**

Meeting concluded at 12.15pm

Signed:



Dated: 25 February 2026