

**157th COMMISSION MEETING ON MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2014 at 10:00 IN THE OFFICE OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, TEMPLE COURT, 39 NORTH STREET, BELFAST, BT11NA**

**In attendance:** John Corey (Interim Chair)

Alan McBride

Milton Kerr

Marion Reynolds (left the meeting at 3:40)

Paul Yam

Grainia Long

Christine Collins (joined the meeting at 10:30)

**Present:** Virginia McVea, Director

David Russell, Deputy Director

Rebecca Magee, Executive Assistant

Angela Stevens, Caseworker (items 6+7) Professor Brice Dickson (AOB)

Professor Colin Harvey (AOB)

**Apologies:** None

**1. Minutes of the 156th Commission meeting**

1.1 The following point was added at item 5 - It was agreed that references in the Director’s report or Statutory Functions report should use the title ‘Dealing with Northern Ireland's Past: Towards a transitional justice approach’ and use the language of that report.

1.2 Following the above addition the minutes of the 156th Commission meeting were agreed.

**2. Matters arising**

2.1 The recruitment for the post of Chief Commissioner has been advertised with the closing date of 28 February. (Item 3.2 of previous minutes refers).

**3. Interim Chair Report**

3.1 Interim Chair John Corey reported on his meetings since the last meeting. These included:

* Joint Commission meeting with the Irish Human Rights Commission
* Society of St Vincent de Paul
* Charities Commission of NI
* Trussel Trust

3.2 It was reported that the Commission was approached to consider standing for the role of Chair of the Commonwealth Forum of NHRIs. Commissioners welcomed the development and fully endorsed the NIHRC accepting the role subject to funding and addressing resource implications.

**Action: Director to engage further with the Commonwealth Forum in Geneva.**

**4. Commissioners report**

4.1 Commissioner Marion Reynolds along with Caseworker Ms Stevens visited Maghaberry HMP. (This was further discussed under the legal portion of the Statutory Functions report)

**5. Update on Budget and Restructure**

*Rebecca Magee, Executive Assistant left the meeting for the discussion on restructure.*

5.1 Commissioners received an update on the current restructure within the administration team.

5.2 Commissioners noted the budget.

5.3 Commissioners discussed the reduction in Grant in Aid for 2014-15 and where money had been allocated in the budget.

5.4 Commissioners were deeply concerned about the NIO proposals to further reduce the Commission’s funding for 2014/15 and agreed that further representations should be made to the Secretary of State on the issue.

**Action: Further representations to be made to the NIO and Secretary of State.**

**6. Statutory Functions Report**

6.1 Commissioners noted the Statutory Functions report.

6.2 Commissioners discussed the update on training relating to the investigation into Racist Hate Crime: Human Rights and the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland 2013.

6.3 Commissioners discussed the on-going Policy responses.

6.4 Commissioners discussed the Northern Ireland Miscellaneous Bill and agreed to discuss this further at the next meeting.

**Action: Commissioners to address outworking of the proposed NI Miscellaneous Bill at the March meeting.**

*Angela Stevens, Caseworker joined the meeting.*

6.5 Commissioners noted the update on Legal Services including an update on the weekly Legal Clinics.

6.6 Commissioners discussed the recent visit to Maghaberry HMP, which Commissioner Reynolds made with Ms Stevens.

6.6 Commissioners agreed to discuss De Silva/Finucane at the next meeting.

**Action: De Silva/Finucane is to be added to the March Agenda.**

6.7 Commissioners discussed the Adoption case and following the update to the DHSSPS guidance agreed to close the file.

6.8 Commissioners discussed the Community Engagement visit to Larne on 26 February.

**7. Terms of Reference for an analysis on: The rights of former members of paramilitary groups, including ex-prisoners**

7.1 Commissioners noted the introduction to the Terms of Reference paper from the Deputy Director.

7.2 Commissioners discussed in depth the terminology to be used when discussing former members of paramilitary groups, including ex-prisoners. There was also discussion on addressing the position of state actors.

7.3 This work should proceed in accordance with Paragraph 12 and will consider the format of any paper and whether a suite of papers are required. Staff are required to draft an analysis of IDDHR standards and guidance for further consideration by Commissioners.

**Action: Staff to draft an analysis of IDDHR standards and guidance.**

*Angela Stevens, Caseworker, left the meeting.*

**8. Draft ‘Poverty in Northern Ireland’ paper**

8.1 Commissioners noted the introduction on the background to the paper from the Deputy Director.

8.2 Commissioners discussed the draft paper ‘Poverty in Northern Ireland’.

**9. Draft Business Plan 2014-15**

9.1 Commissioners noted the update on the draft Business Plan for 2014-15 from the Director.

9.2 Commissioners discussed their categorisation of projects under the methodology headings of:

* Brilliant Basics
* Compelling Difference
* Changing the Game

**Action: Business Plan 2014-15 to be added to the March Commission meeting.**

**10. National Inquiry update**

10.1 Commissioners noted the update from the Director on the National Inquiry.

10.2 Commissioner were asked to express interest in being a member of the panel for hearings during the National Inquiry, Commissioners Yam, Collins and Reynolds conveyed an interest.

**11. Any other Business**

**11.1 Bill of Rights**

*Professor Brice Dickson and Professor Colin Harvey from the School of Law at Queens University joined the meeting at 2:00.*

11.1.1 Interim chair, Commissioner Corey welcomed Professors Dickson and Harvey to the meeting and explained the purpose of the discussion was to continue dialogue on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

11.1.2 Professors Dickson and Harvey outlined their discussion paper, trying to map out beyond the Bill of Rights process. There was a wide ranging discussion of the options for progress including the Commissions internal document on moving forward with a Bill of Rights. It was agreed to maintain dialogue on the issues.