



24 February 2020

**221st COMMISSION MEETING
IN THE OFFICE OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, TEMPLE
COURT, 39 NORTH STREET, BELFAST, BT1
1NA**

Present: Les Allamby, Chief Commissioner
Helen Ferguson
Helena Macormac
Paul Mageean (agenda items 9-11)
John McCallister
Eddie Rooney
Graham Shields

In attendance: David Russell, Chief Executive
Lorraine Hamill, Director (Finance, Personnel and
Corporate Affairs) (agenda items 1-8)
Rebecca Magee, Personal Assistant (agenda items 9-11)
Claire Martin, Director (Communications, Information
and Education, Public and Political Affairs)
Hannah Russell, Director (Legal, Research and
Investigations, and Advice to Government)
Julia Stella, Boardroom Apprentice
Jason McKeown, Communications and Public Affairs
Officer (agenda item 1)

1. Presentation by Queen's University Belfast Architecture Students

- 1.1 The architecture students from Queen's University Belfast gave a presentation on Climate Change. The Commission had been a partner on the project, which focused on climate justice using the Holylands area of Belfast as a case example.

2. Apologies and Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the 220th Commission meeting

- 3.1 The minutes of the 220th Commission meeting held on 27 January 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

Action: 220th Commission meeting minutes to be uploaded to the website.

- 3.2 It was noted that over 200 attendees had registered for the Chris Patten event with the Equality Commission NI to mark the 20th anniversaries of the two Commissions (item 2.3 of the previous meeting refers).
- 3.3 It was noted that a formal letter confirming the Commission's budget for 2019-20 had still not been received. In the absence of one, it was agreed that the email received from the NIO would be used as confirmation of the budget (item 2.4 of the previous meeting refers).
- 3.4 The risk register had been updated to reflect the rating change and narrative for the risk 'Failure in Good Governance' and the risk 'Failure to Ensure Quality of Advices' due to continuing funding uncertainties. (items 5.3 and 5.4 of the previous meeting refers).
- 3.5 The Chief Commissioner updated Commissioners on his

proposed sabbatical, which had now been cancelled. The transition arrangements that had been put in place were no longer required (item 10.1 of the previous meeting refers).

4. Chief Commissioner's Report

4.1 The Chief Commissioner reported on meetings and events he had attended since the last Commission meeting. These included:

- Meeting with Conor Murphy, Finance Minister
- Meeting with Gender Budgeting Advisory Group
- Meeting with Julian Smith, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
- Talk to newly arrived Syrian families under UK Syrian Voluntary Programme of Resettlement
- Litigant in Person reference group workshop on dealing with distressed clients and meetings with Department of Justice, Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service and judiciary
- Roundtable on Universal Credit run by Law Centre NI
- Meeting with Jacqui Durkin, Chief Criminal Justice Inspector for Northern Ireland

4.2 The Chief Commissioner also reported on upcoming meetings and events he would be attending. These included:

- Meeting of the four National Human Rights Institutions and the Equality Commission NI
- Launch of the two research publications commissioned by the Joint Committee

5. Commissioners' Reports

5.1 Commissioner Shields reported that he attended the

recruitment launch for the Police Service Northern Ireland on 4 February 2020.

- 5.2 Commissioner McCallister reported on the Community Relations Council and Together Building a United Community launch he attended in Armagh.
- 5.3 It was noted that Commissioner Macormac was running an event at the Imagine Festival on Saturday 28 March 2020.

6. Finance Report

- 6.1 The Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) presented the financial report for January 2020 and provided details on variances against budget.
- 6.2 It was noted that the nine month interim accounts had been provided to the external auditor with the interim audit taking place week commencing 9 March 2020.

7. Chief Executive's Report

- 7.1 It was noted that the Chief Executive and Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) continued to meet with the relevant parties regarding the lease and the fit-out for the new premises at Alfred Street.
- 7.2 The Chief Executive updated Commissioners on the bid with the Rwandan Human Rights Commission to be the joint secretariat for the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions. The voting would take place at Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions meeting in Geneva week commencing 9 March 2020.
- 7.3 The Director (Communications, Information and Education, Public and Political Affairs) provided an update on the Freedom of Information requests and the approach being taken when responding to continuous requests from one

individual. Advice had been sought from the Information Commissioner's Office and the approach had been approved by the Commission's Audit and Risk Management Committee at their December 2019 meeting.

- 7.4 Commissioners were provided with an update on the business cases currently with the Northern Ireland Office for approval.

8. Business Plan 2020-21

- 8.1 Commissioners discussed the Business Plan for 2020-21. It was noted that this was an updated version of the draft discussed at the December 2019 Commission meeting.

- 8.2 It was agreed that the final version would come to the March 2020 Commission meeting for sign-off.

Action: Final version of Business Plan 2020-21 to be brought to the March 2020 Commission meeting for final approval and sign-off.

- 8.3 It was agreed that the approved Business Plan 2020-21 would be published early in the new financial year without waiting for budgetary approval from the sponsoring Department given this financial years experience.

Action: Business Plan 2020-21 to be published in April 2020.

9. Legal Functions Report

- 9.1 Commissioners were provided with an update on the legal functions report. This included updates on the following litigation:

- Unspent Convictions and Rehabilitation of Offenders Order - application for leave for JR - the Commission has written to the Departmental Solicitors Office for clarity on the possibility of law reform as per the judge's wishes.
- NM (MoD refusal to provide partner of army veteran with his pension after he passed away) - the case was

- adjourned with a new date arranged for 23 March 2020.
- MC (Requirement of candidates to publish home address to stand for local council/EU elections) - the Chief Executive attended the JR leave hearing on 3 February 2020, where stay was granted pending a change to the law due to be confirmed by the end of Feb 2020..
- 9.2 Commissioners were also updated on the watching brief files, which included an update on the DNA retention document that is awaited from the PSNI. A meeting with the PSNI is planned for the end of March 2020.
- 9.3 Commissioners acknowledged the suspension of the Advice Clinic, due to staff shortages within the legal team. The Chief Executive is monitoring the situation.

10. Communications Report

10.1 The Director (Communications, Information and Education, Public and Political Affairs) updated Commissioners on press coverage since the last meeting. These included highlights on the MC and DNA retention cases.

10.2 Commissioners noted the upcoming events. These included:

- Lord Patton on the Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement on 26 February 2020
- Annual Lecture with Stella Creasy MP
- Imagine Festival with Ulster University
- Visit to Westminster on 2-3 March 2020
- GANHRI from 9-12 March 2020

10.3 Commissioners were updated on the Education and training function, which includes Schools visits, and training with DERA.

11. Any Other Business

11.1 The Chief Commissioner highlighted that he was discussing the recommendations of the CEDAW report into Termination of Pregnancy with the NIO and Department of Justice.

11.2 There was no other business.

The meeting closed at 14:20pm.