



26 May 2020

224th COMMISSION MEETING

Held via Conference call

Present: Les Allamby, Chief Commissioner
Helen Ferguson
Helena Macormac
Paul Mageean (Agenda items 1-8)
John McCallister
Eddie Rooney
Graham Shields

In attendance: David Russell, Chief Executive
Lorraine Hamill, Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs)
Rebecca Magee, Personal Assistant
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

1. Apologies and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 There were no apologies.
- 1.2 There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of the 223rd Commission meeting and matters arising

- 2.1 The minutes of the 223rd Commission meeting held on 27

April 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

Action: 223rd Commission meeting minutes to be uploaded to the website.

- 2.2 The Auditors have been made aware that the Business Plan 2020-21 has been published without waiting for budgetary approval (item 2.5 of the 223rd minutes refers).
- 2.3 Commissioners were updated that letters have been sent to the Minister for Justice, Chief Constable and Policing Board in relation to the DNA retention policy that is awaited from the PSNI following the Commission's 2019 legal action (item 2.6 of the 223rd minutes refers).
- 2.4 The meeting with Robin Walker MP, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (NIO) re: Dealing with the Past and new arrangements has been rescheduled and will take place on the 28 May 2020 (item 3.1 of the 223rd minutes refers).

3. Chief Commissioner's Report

- 3.1 The Chief Commissioner reported on meetings and events he had attended since the last Commission meeting. These included:
 - Conference call Commissioner for Older People and Age(NI)
 - Interview Nick Garbutt for Scope
 - Conference call with Legacy Investigation Branch
 - Conference call Louise Haigh Shadow Secretary of State and colleagues re: abortion
 - Conference call Geraldine McCaughey and Evelyn Collins, Equality Commission
 - Conference call Equality Coalition
 - Conference call NI Human Rights Consortium
 - Business and Human Rights meeting
 - Meeting CAJ
 - Interviewed for Evangelical Alliance webinar event
 - Meeting with Contact Tracing App Steering group
 - Conference call Naomi Long
- 3.2 It was noted that the following submissions had been made

since the previous meeting:

- Provisions under NDNA for Irish Language; Ulster Scots and Ulster British; Culture and Identity
- Response to House of Commons Women and Equalities Select Committee on Coronavirus pandemic
- Response to Hate Crimes review consultation

4. Commissioners' Reports

4.1 Nothing to report.

5. Chief Executive's Report

5.1 The Chief Executive provided an update on the fit-out branding and arrangements for the new premises at Alfred Street.

5.2 Commissioners were provided with an update on the business cases on core funding and the role for the Commission as a dedicated mechanism under the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement.

5.3 Commissioners were provided with an update on the recruitment of the Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs Officer.

5.4 The Chief Executive reported that Commission staff are continuing to work from home. Staff meetings are held weekly via conference call and working across teams has continued. Consideration was being given to staff well-being when office based work returns.

6. Finance Report

6.1 The Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) presented the financial report for April 2020 and provided details on variances against budget.

6.2 It was noted that until the Commission received formal notification of its budget for 2020-21, assumptions had been made on the prior year and included the additional costs for rent and rates due to the Commission moving to new premises.

7. Plans for annual statement 2020, monitoring reproductive rights project, and the drugs project

7.1 Commissioners were briefed on the plan for the Annual Statement 2020. It was agreed that the Statement would follow the reduced format of the 2019 Statement given that the Executive Assembly had just been reinstated before the Covid-19 pandemic occurred.

7.2 Commissioners discussed the plan for monitoring reproductive rights and agreed that strand one of the plan – engaging with and monitoring the Department of Health regarding provision of services should commence, with further discussion to take place on strands two and three in due course.

7.3 Commissioners held an initial discussion on a proposal for an inquiry into drug addiction and human rights issues. It was agreed that engagement was needed with relevant service providers in order to draw out the main issues in more detail to assist the Commissioner’s deliberations.

Action: Commissioner Rooney to liaise with the Director (Legal, Research and Investigations, and Advice to Government) regarding a list of invitees for a roundtable discussion.

8. Children Missing from Care Report

8.1 Commissioners were provided with the background to the Children Missing from Care human rights analysis and discussed the document. It was agreed that this topic was of high importance and that further work would be needed in order to assist with making final recommendations.

9. Legal Functions Report

- 9.1 Commissioners were provided with an update on the legal functions report including current legal challenges before the courts.

10. Communications Report

- 10.1 The Director (Communications, Information and Education, Public and Political Affairs) updated Commissioners on press coverage since the last meeting, which included the joint piece with the Commissioner for Older Persons regarding the Covid-19 threat to care homes.
- 10.2 The Director (Communications, Information and Education, Public and Political Affairs) updated Commissioners on the Business and Human Rights Forum which took place virtually.
- 10.3 Commissioners noted the analytics for social media and the increase in hits on Facebook.

11. Any Other Business

- 11.1 Commissioners were briefed on the legal advice which was sought in relation to Freedom of Information requests and the approach taken when responding to continuous similar requests from one individual. Commissioners agreed that a vexatious notice should be issued to the individual, with agreement that any request that is new, and relevant to the work of the Commission will continue to be responded to.
- 11.2 It was noted that Julia Stella's term as a Boardroom Apprentice was due to finish in June 2020. It was agreed that she would do a short debrief at the next Commission meeting.

Action: Julia Stella to provide a short debrief at next Commission meeting.

The meeting closed at 3.45pm.