



**25 January 2021**

## **231<sup>st</sup> COMMISSION MEETING**

### **Held at via Microsoft Teams**

**Present:** Les Allamby, Chief Commissioner  
Helen Henderson  
Jonathan Kearney  
David A Lavery CB  
Eddie Rooney  
Stephen White  
Maura Muldoon

**In attendance:** David Russell, Chief Executive  
Lorraine Hamill, Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs)  
Claire Martin, Director (Communications, Information and Education, Public and Political Affairs)  
Rhyannon Blythe, Director (Legal, Research and Investigations, and Advice to Government) (agenda item 8)  
Rebecca Magee, Personal Assistant  
Nikita Brijpaul, Boardroom Apprentice  
Sarah Simms (Policy and Research Officer) (agenda item 10)

## **1. Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

1.1 There were no apologies and no conflict of interest.

## **2. Minutes of the 230<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting and matters arising**

2.1 The minutes of the 230<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting held on 14 December 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

**Action: 230<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting minutes to be uploaded to the website.**

2.2 It was noted that a response was received from the NIO regarding the letter and Counsel's opinion on the Commission's powers (item 2.2 of the 230<sup>th</sup> minutes refers).

**Action: Chief Commissioner to share response with Commissioners.**

2.3 It was noted that recruitment for an Independent Chair for the Audit and Risk Management Committee was discussed at the Audit Committee and that recruitment would commence in February (item 2.3 of the 230<sup>th</sup> minutes refers).

2.4 Commissioners agreed that a training session explaining the operational aspects of the Dedicated Mechanism would be arranged. (item 2.4 of 230<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting refers)

**Action: Dedicated Mechanism training session to be arranged shortly.**

### 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:

- Evidence to the NI Assembly Economy Committee on the Commission's Business and Human Rights forum with Glenn Bradley of Hardscape and forum chair
- Meeting Shadow Civil Justice Council
- Meeting RQIA re Abortion Monitoring initiative
- Evidence to expert panel re Tackling Educational Underachievement
- Litigant in Person research advisory panel meeting
- Speaker at NICVA policy seminar on Brexit

- meeting Litigants in Person reference group
- joint seminar on dedicated mechanism with ECNI as part of human rights festival
- launch of Annual Statement
- Civil Justice Council annual forum
- speaker at All Party Parliamentary Group seminar on abortion services in Northern Ireland

3.2 It was noted that the following submissions had been made since the previous meeting:

- Submission to Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

## **4. Commissioners' Reports**

4.1 Commissioner Helen Henderson reported on her involvement in the Bloody Sunday: A conversation programme.

4.2 Commissioner Jonathan Kearney reported on his attendance at the Business and Human Rights Forum.

4.3 Commissioner David Lavery reported on an event that the Law Society is hosting in collaboration with the Bar Council on the Independent Review of the Human Rights Act with Sir Peter Gross.

## **5. Chief Executive's Report**

5.1 The Chief Executive reported on the recent recruitment for Policy and Research Officer, Head of the Dedicated Mechanism and Solicitor posts. Staff will start in February, March and April.

5.2 The Chief Executive provided an update on the JEGs evaluations with appeals process due to be completed by the end of January.

5.3 The Chief Executive reported on ongoing work with the Bill of

Rights Committee including training being provided by the Commission to Committee members.

5.4 The Chief Executive presented and discussed the provisional organisational chart to reflect the new posts under core and the dedicated mechanism.

5.5 The Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) presented the draft budget for 2021/2022.

## 6. Business Plan

6.1 Commissioners discussed the first draft of the Business Plan for 2021-2022.

6.2 The Chief Executive has asked senior management to discuss the draft business plan among their teams the SMT meeting with a view to having the final document with Commissioner's at the March Commission meeting for sign off.

**Action: Final draft to be presented at March Commission meeting.**

## 7. Finance Report

7.1 The Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) presented the financial report for December 2020 and provided details on variances against budget, and the financial report on the Dedicated Mechanism.

7.2 It was agreed that a summary of the finance report would be provided with each spreadsheet going forward.

**Action: The Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) to provide a summary of key issues alongside the Finance reports.**

## 8. Legal Functions Report

8.1 The Director (Legal, Research and Investigations, and Advice to Government) provided an update on the Legal Functions

Report with updates on the MC case (Requirement of candidates to publish home address to stand for local council/EU elections) which has now settled. Press to highlight this result will follow.

8.2 The Director (Legal, Research and Investigations, and Advice to Government) provided an update on the Abortion legal challenge on failure to fully implement abortion services in line with the NI Executive Formations Act etc 2019. The Commission has submitted an affidavit on behalf of a victim and is seeking anonymity on her behalf.

8.3 The Director (Legal, Research and Investigations, and Advice to Government) provided an update on the JR123 legal challenge to provisions in Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation. Supporting affidavits have been submitted by NIACRO and UNLOCK. Leave has been granted and a date fixed of 6 May 2021 for the full substantive hearing.

## 9. Communications report

9.1 The Director (Communications, Information and Education, Public and Political Affairs) presented the Communications report which highlighted press relating the Abortion and JR123 legal challenges and the MC legal case settlement.

9.2 The Director (Communications, Information and Education, Public and Political Affairs) updated Commissioners on the adverts on the Dedicated Mechanism, issued in conjunction with the ECNI which has appeared in newspapers across Northern Ireland.

9.3 Commissioners noted that the visits to schools are continuing, albeit virtually.

## 10. Abortion Monitoring Report

10.1 Commissioners were provided with the background to the Abortion Monitoring Report.

10.2 Commissioners discussed the draft report and made a number of suggestions. It was agreed that a further draft would be presented at either February or March Commission meeting.

**Action: Further draft of Abortion Monitoring report to be presented at either February or March Commission meeting.**

## **11. Bill of Rights consultation response**

11.1 Commissioners were provided an update on the Bill of Rights consultation response. A draft paper is currently with the Chief Commissioner and will be shared as soon as possible.

**Action: Paper on Bill of Rights consultation response to be shared.**

## **12. Any Other Business**

13.1 There was no any other business.

The meeting closed at 15:45pm.