



16 December 2024

272nd COMMISSION MEETING

**Held in the Commission's Offices,
Alfred House, 19-21 Alfred Street, Belfast, BT2 8ED**

Present: Alyson Kilpatrick
Helen Henderson
Jonathan Kearney
Mairead Holder
David Lavery

In attendance: David Russell, Chief Executive
Colin Caughey, Director (Advice to Government,
Research, and Investigations)
Éilis Haughey, Director (Human Rights after EU
Withdrawal)
Claire Martin, Director (Engagement and
Communications)
Hannah Russell (Senior Policy & Research Officer)
(Agenda Item 3)
Darren Veighey (Administrative Officer)

Apologies: Justin Kouame
Stephen White
Lorraine Hamill (Director of Finance, Personnel and
Corporate Affairs)

1. Apologies and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Commissioners Kouame and White. There was also an apology from the Director of Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs.

1.2 There were no declarations of interest.

2. Draft minutes of the 271st Commission meeting and matters arising

2.1 The minutes of the 271st Commission meeting were agreed in principle bar a few minor adjustments.

Action: Minutes of the 271st Commission meeting to be uploaded to the website when finalised.

3. Disinformation research

3.1 The Director (Advice to Government, Research and Investigations) and Senior Policy and Research Officer updated the Commissioners on the university research paper surrounding the use of disinformation on social media platforms.

Both staff members agreed that amendments would need to be made before publishing.

The Commissioners agreed that the research paper would be useful for information purposes, however there was also agreement that the piece of work formed more of an analysis of social media disinformation rather than the impact of disinformation on Human Rights. In general, primary research was lacking with investigation not supporting the recommendations.

The Chief Commissioner opined that if it was costing too much to get quality research tenders then perhaps internal resources and knowledge could be utilised, especially with the expected substantial financial uplift from government.

Staff members were thanked for their endeavours however it was decided not to publish the paper.

Commissioner Lavery was concerned how the Audit and Risk Management Committee would react to £25,000 being spent without expected outcome.

It was agreed to thoroughly discuss how the Commission should conduct its research in the new year.

The Senior Policy and Research Officer left the meeting.

4. Team Updates

Report from Director (Advice to Government, Research and Investigations)

- 4.1 It was stated that there had been no responses for the tender on Women's Health.
- 4.2 It was also reported that Fernanda Hermosilla had successfully interviewed for the vacant Policy and Research Officer role. Fernanda would commence her new role in the new year.

Further, it was noted that other candidates for this role would be suitable to work with on future projects considering the recent financial review of the organisation.

- 4.3 It was highlighted that the Annual Statement Launch on 9th December 2024 at Stormont was a huge success. There was positive engagement from stakeholders who attended in person and online.
- 4.4 The Commission has received several requests for advice from the Department of Justice in relation to legislative consent motions. The Director advised that whilst the Commission will provide general advice on Human Rights Compliance it does not take a view on whether legislation should be passed at Stormont or Westminster.

Report from Director (Human Rights after EU Withdrawal)

- 4.5 The Director advised that the Commission had issued preliminary advice on proposed powers to enable access by criminal justice authorities to driver licensing information.
- 4.6 The Director also advised that staff had attended two conferences relating to Windsor Framework Article 2, one hosted by the Law Society (which the Director spoke at) and the other by Queens University (which the Solicitor (Legal and Research Officer) Htaik Win spoke at)).

Report from Director of Engagement & Communications

- 4.7 The Director thanked both the Corporate and Communications teams for all their efforts in making the Annual Statement Launch a success.

The Director was pleased with the numbers attending which included local MLAs. Also attending were members of the Youth Assembly and civil society organisations. Feedback generated post event was very encouraging.

- 4.8 The Director also reported that the Communications team hoped to have a new Digital Communications Assistant in place very soon.
- 4.9 The Director reviewed the press statement published by the Equality Commission on 13th December 2024. It was noted that the Commission's response was accurately reflected. The Director would also keep Commissioners abreast of any developments and monitoring of social media channels.

Report from Chief Executive

- 4.10 Although the Annual Statement Launch was deemed a success for the organisation, it was disappointing to report that the Speaker of the NI Assembly declined to sponsor the event. This decision was communicated to the Commission at short notice with the Speaker quoting impartiality as the justification.
- 4.11 The Chief Executive also informed the meeting that Commission staff had recently met with the Minister of Health, Mike Nesbitt surrounding the proposed Public Health Bill which is expected to be approved. The Chief Executive commended the work done through the lens of a human rights perspective.
- 4.12 The Chief Executive restated that he expected a substantial uplift in financial resources for the Commission following a recent government review. The proposal still had to pass through the Secretary of State, however the Chief Executive was confident that this was a formality.

5. Any other business

5.1 There being no other business the meeting closed at 11.00 am.

6. Date of Next Meeting

Friday 31 January 2025.