



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

26 August 2025

279th COMMISSION MEETING
Held in the Commission's Offices,
Alfred House, 19-21 Alfred Street, Belfast, BT2 8ED

Present: Alyson Kilpatrick
Helen Henderson
Mairead Holder
Jonathan Kearney
Justin Kouame
David Lavery
Stephen White

In attendance: David Russell, Chief Executive
Rhyannon Blythe, Director (Legal)
Colin Caughey, Director of Policy (Advice to
Government, Research, Investigations, and
International Treaties)
Eilis Haughey, Director (Human Rights after EU
withdrawal) (online)
Claire Martin, Director (Engagement and
Communications)
Jhoanna Sto Domingo, Personal Secretary to the Chief
Commissioner
Darren Veighey, Administrative Officer
Jason McKeown, Senior Engagement & Communications
Officer (Agenda Item 8)
Michael Clements, Solicitor (Legal & Research Officer)
(Agenda Item 9)
Claire McCann, Senior Policy & Research Officer (Agenda
Item 11)
Hannah Russell, Senior Policy & Research Officer
(Agenda Item 12) (online)

Apologies: Lorraine Hamill

1. Apologies and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 There was one apology from Lorraine Hamill, Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs).
- 1.2 There were no declarations of interest.

2. Draft minutes of the 278th Commission meeting and matters arising and draft minutes of special Commission meeting and matters arising

- 2.1 The minutes of the 278th Commission meeting were agreed.
Action: Minutes of the 278th Commission meeting to be uploaded to the website when finalised.
- 2.2 The minutes of the special Commission meeting held on 16th July 2025 were deferred until the end of the meeting.

3. Chief Commissioner's Report

- 3.1 The Chief Commissioner had provided a report which detailed events, meetings and conferences she had attended. The report also included events that she was due to attend in the near future.
- 3.2 The Chief Commissioner's Report was noted for the record.

4. Commissioners' Reports

- 4.1 Commissioner Henderson updated members on an event she had previously spoken at. The event concerned the definition of antisemitism and freedom of expression.
- 4.2 There were no other updates from Commissioners.

5. Chief Executive's Report

- 5.1 The Chief Executive provided an update on the UK Government Spending Review and the subsequent letter that had been sent to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The Chief Executive also confirmed that he had received correspondence from the Permanent Secretary setting out next steps.
- 5.2 It was also reported that the Senior Management Team had met recently to discuss the Spending Review to plan the allocation of resources taking account of the recommendation contained in the Independent Review and Budget Review.
- 5.3 The Chief Executive and Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) were formulating a business case for the NIO and HM Treasury.
- 5.4 It was agreed that the 2025-26 Business Case would be shared with Commissioners once complete.
Action: Business Case for 2025-26 to be shared with Commissioners when completed.

6. Finance Report July 2025

- 6.1 The Finance Report as at 31 July 2025 (for both Core and Dedicated Mechanism) was presented by the Chief Executive. This paper reflected actual spend for the period April-July 2025 and the confirmed budget going forward to the end of the financial year (March 2026). The need to account for additional resources still to be approved were noted.

7. KPI Report – Quarter 1 (April to June 2025)

- 7.1 The KPI report for quarter 1 was presented to Commissioners by the Directors with responsibility for the following areas:
 - Policy (Advice to Government, Research, Investigations, and International Treaties)
 - Engagement & Communications
 - Legal
 - Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs (this area was delivered by the Chief Executive)

8. Engagement Report

- 8.1 The Senior Engagement and Communications Officer and respective Director presented the Engagement Report for the first quarter of 2025-26.
- 8.2 An overview of post-primary school visits by the Engagement team was provided (this included number of visits and positive feedback from students).
- 8.3 The Senior Engagement and Communications Officer also informed Commissioners of the stakeholders involved in facilitating the educational workshops delivered to young people
- 8.4 The Sport and Human Rights Forum has been successful with recent meetings used as a mechanism for discussion in areas including:
 - Racism
 - Children & Young People
 - Tackling violence against women and girls
 - Asylum seekers and refugees
 - People with a disability

The next meeting will focus on mental health.

- 8.5 The Communications Team had presented to local organisations the 'Declaration on Sport and Human Rights'.
Commissioner Lavery requested that the Declaration be circulated to all Commissioners for information purposes.
Action: Commissioners to receive a copy of the Declaration on Sport and Human Rights for information.
- 8.6 The Director presented work completed on Business and Human Rights and the resulting publication of the NI Business and Human Rights Index. In June 2025, two workshops were delivered in partnership with Queen's University.
- 8.7 It was reported that the team attended a number of external events in the first quarter of 2025-26, including the Refugee Picnic, and Pride, in which they were able to engage with members of the public.

8.8 Training was also designed in relation to climate change and human rights standards which will be delivered in November 2025.

9. Application for Assistance - Children's Law Centre

9.1 The Solicitor (Legal and Research Officer) explained that the Commission is being asked to intervene in two joined judicial review applications on behalf of the Children's Law Centre.

9.2 After careful consideration Commissioners declined the application for assistance.

10. Own Motion Challenge to the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 and Pre-action Protocol Letter on Data (Use and Access) Act

10.1 The Director (Legal) provided an update as the Commission has now received a response to its pre-action correspondence. A response was received on 22 August 2025 and Senior Counsel's views are awaited.

10.2 Commissioners considered the proposal to delay issuing proceedings until after the UK Supreme Court's judgment in *Dillon* is received. Any issues arising from the receipt of Counsel's advice will be brought back to the Board.

10.3 Commissioners decided to delay any further decision until after receipt of the *Dillon* judgment.

11. Dedicated Mechanism Annual Report 2025

11.1 The Senior Policy and Research Officer presented the Joint Annual Report with the Equality Commission Northern Ireland (ECNI) for the period 1 April 2024-31 March 2025. A provisional date of 23 October 2025 has been set for the launch.

11.2 The Commissioners approved the report as it stands subject to any corrections or amendments.

12. Investigation Guide

12.1 The Senior Policy and Research Officer updated Commissioners on the formulation of an Investigation Guide.

This documentation would serve as internal information source for staff and Commissioners on how to exercise investigatory powers.

12.2 The document was noted by Commissioners and approved.

13. Update on Legacy

13.1 At a special Commission meeting on 16 July 2025, it was agreed that a paper would be produced setting out the rationale for the Commission's advice regarding the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR) and Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 (Legacy Act).

The Chief Commissioner presented a draft for comment in advance of the meeting.

13.2 Commissioner Lavery agreed that the paper was comprehensive, and requested that some additional material be added to account for recent court decisions. This was agreed.

Action: a further draft of the paper to be circulated with the additional material on recent court decisions inserted.

13.3 Commissioners discussed the merits of supplementing the paper with a public statement. It was agreed that this would be drafted and circulated to Commissioners for comment as a matter of priority. Once approved it was agreed that both the statement and paper would be published on the Commission's website and stakeholders directed to it.

Commissioner Kearney agreed with the Legacy note being published online, however, he expressed a nuanced dissent. That dissent related to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's expressed view that a proper requirement for independence in the appointment of ICRIR Commissioners would at least exclude any person who had served with the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Concern was raised by Commissioner White on the period of time that had lapsed since the publication of recent media articles, and the need to correct misrepresentation or misreporting. The particular sensitivity of addressing the issue of Legacy was acknowledged by all Commissioners and the need to finalise both the paper and a public statement as soon as possible noted.

Action: A proposed public statement to be circulated to Commissioners for comment as soon as possible.

14. Any other Business and Date of next meeting.

14.1 The next meeting would take place on Monday 29 September 2025 at 10.00 am.

The meeting ended at 1:05pm