



23 March 2026

286th COMMISSION MEETING

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

Present: Alyson Kilpatrick
Jonathan Kearney
Justin Kouame
David Lavery
Mairead Holder (Online)
Stephen White (Online)

In attendance: David Russell, Chief Executive
Rhyannon Blythe, Director (Legal Services)
Lorraine Hamill, Director (Finance, Personnel, and
Corporate Affairs)
Claire Martin, Director (Engagement and
Communications)
Jhoanna Sto Domingo, Personal Secretary to the Chief
Commissioner
Darren Veighey, Administrative Officer
Colin Caughey, Director of Policy (Advice to
Government, Research, Investigations, and
International Treaties) (Online)
Eilis Haughey (Director, Human Rights after EU
withdrawal) (online)
Claire McCann (Senior Policy & Research Officer)
(Agenda Item 7)

Apologies: Helen Henderson

1. Apologies and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 An apology was recorded for Commissioner Henderson.
- 1.2 There were no declarations of interest.

2. Draft minutes of the 285th Commission meeting and matters arising/Draft minutes of the 285th Closed Commission meeting and matters arising

- 2.1 The minutes of the 285th Commission meeting were agreed.
Action: Minutes of the 285th Commission meeting to be uploaded to the website.
- 2.2 The minutes of the 285th Closed Commission meeting were agreed.

3. Chief Commissioner's Report

- 3.1 The Chief Commissioner's Report was noted.

4. Commissioners' Reports

- 4.1 Commissioner Lavery provided an update on the Audit and Risk Management Committee meeting held on 18 March 2026.

Commissioners Holder and Kouame had also attended the meeting to ensure a smooth transition period in relation to those Commissioners who were coming to the end of their term of office.

It was noted that the Committee had received a copy of the Cyber Security Readiness Evaluation Report that had been shared with Commissioners at the February Commission meeting.

SCC Ltd, the Commission's internal auditors presented the proposed internal audit plan for the next 3 years at the meeting. They have already completed the benchmarking report for the proposed new pay policy and will conduct internal audits on budget management and a follow-up audit on previous recommendations.

It was noted that the Committee members had recently completed an Audit Effectiveness Checklist. It was agreed that this would be reviewed further at a separate meeting of Audit Committee members only.

5. Chief Executive's Report

- 5.1 The Chief Executive reminded Commissioners to complete the Board Effectiveness Review as soon as possible.
- 5.2 It was noted that formal negotiations with NIPSA, (the Commission's recognised Trade Union) on the proposed new pay policy had concluded and a ballot had taken place between its members. NIPSA were due to confirm the outcome of the ballot in due course, after which the proposal would be sent to the NIO with an accompanying letter from the Chief Commissioner for the attention of the Secretary of State.
- 5.3 Staff numbers were increasing and the priority for 2026-27 would be to recruit an additional staff member for the Engagement and Communications team and a Human Resources staff member for the Corporate Services Team, with further Policy and Research posts also planned.
- 5.4 It was reported that a response to the complaint made by Gary Murray regarding comments made by the Chief Commissioner had been provided. Mr Murray has challenged the decision, and the appeal will be dealt with in line with the NIHRC process.

6. Finance Report February 2026

- 6.1 The Finance Report as at 28 February 2026 (for both Core and Dedicated Mechanism) was noted. This paper reflected actual spend for period April 2025-February 2026 and the budget going forward to the end of the financial year (March 2026).
- 6.2 The Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) provided an update on the successful staff team building day which was held on Thursday 19 March 2026.
- 6.3 The Director informed Commissioners that Dignity at Work training had been organised for staff on 25 and 26 March

2026. A staff survey had also been issued with a closing date of 27 March 2026.

7. KPI Report-Human Rights after Brexit Update

- 7.1 The Senior Policy and Research Officer presented the Bi-annual report to Commissioners on the Dedicated Mechanism Workstream for the period September 2025-March 2026).
- 7.2 The report covered the following areas:
- Policy and Legislation
 - Impact of advice and related developments
 - Research
 - Legal
 - Island of Ireland Dimension
 - Engagement
 - Communications & Education
 - International
 - Corporate and Human Resources
- 7.3 It was communicated to Commissioners that the Annual Report on the Implementation of Article 2 of the Windsor Framework 2024-25 with the Equality Commission NI would unfortunately not be published.
- 7.4 The Senior Policy and Research Officer highlighted the success of the NIHRC Research Launch – Windsor Framework Article 2: Enforcement and Remedies. This event was hosted at the Europa hotel, Belfast on 16 December 2025 with ninety participants attending. Feedback generated was very positive.

A mailshot of the report was currently being organised.

8. Draft Business Plan 2026-27

- 8.1 The Chief Executive presented the final draft version of the Business Plan 2026-27. Commissioners were encouraged to communicate any feedback. Commissioners approved the Business Plan, subject to the budget being finalised, and it was noted that it would be shared with the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and published on the Commission's website.
Action: The Business Plan 2026-27 to be shared with

the Northern Ireland Office and published on the Commission's website once the budget is finalised.

- 8.2 The Chief Executive highlighted three projects that would be initiated and developed over a number of years
- A website redesign;
 - An online training hub, and for the annual statement to be promoted digitally; and
 - A proposal for a Human Rights Conference to be organised in conjunction with key stakeholders.
- 8.3 The Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) advised that employment costs in the budget were based on the proposed new pay policy which required formal approval from the Secretary of State. The operating costs were based on actual agreed contracted costs with the remainder of the budget being allocated to programme costs.

9. Annual Statement 2026

- 9.1 The Director of Policy presented a proposal for consideration for the Annual Statement 2026 which would focus on policy issues which are most likely to see significant legislative or policy development during the reporting period.
- 9.2 Commissioners agreed with the process, and it was noted that a draft 2026 Annual Statement would be presented to the September 2026 Commission meeting for approval.
Action: Draft 2026 Annual Statement to be presented to the September 2026 Commission meeting for approval.
- 9.3 It was also noted that throughout the business year there will be exploration of new approaches to presenting the Annual Statement, and that options for future years will be presented in the final quarter of the 2026-27 business year for consideration.
Action: Annual Statement options for future years to be presented to the Commission for discussion and approval in the final quarter of 2026-27.

10. Any other business and Date of next meeting

10.1 The Chief Commissioner advised of a recent evidence session and appearance before the NI Assembly Education Committee.

Action: Link to the session will be distributed to Commissioners upon request.

10.2 Commissioner Lavery requested that public statements be shared at least a day before publication. It was noted that a recent joint statement with the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Scottish Human Rights Commission had been received late. The Chief Executive agreed and explained why unusually on this occasion the statement had been shared late. Commissioner Lavery conveyed his thanks.

10.3 The Director (Finance, Personnel, and Corporate Affairs) asked if the June 2026 Commission meeting date could be changed to accommodate approval of the Commission's Annual Report and Accounts. It was agreed that the Commission meeting would take place on Friday 26 June 2026.

10.4 The date of next meeting was arranged for Monday 27 April 2026 at 10am.

End of meeting 12:15pm.