21 September 2026

290th COMMISSION MEETING
Held in the Commission's Offices, Alfred House, 19-21 Alfred Street, Belfast, BT2 8ED

Present: Alyson Kilpatrick
Orla Drummond
Gavin Gray
Mairead Holder
Jackie Witherow
Justin Kouame (Online)
Ben Warwick (Online)

In attendance: David Russell, Chief Executive
Rhyannon Blythe, Director (Legal)
Colin Caughey, Director of Policy (Advice to Government, Research, Investigations and International Treaties)
Lorraine Hamill, Director (Finance, Personnel, and Corporate Affairs)
Claire Martin, Director of Engagement and Communications
Eilis Haughey Director (Human Rights after EU withdrawal) (Online)
Jhoanna Sto Domingo, Personal Secretary to the Chief Commissioner
Darren Veighey, Administrative Officer
Michael Boyd, Senior Engagement and Education Officer (Agenda items 8 and 9)

Apologies: None

1. Apologies and Declarations of Interest

1.1 There were no apologies or declarations of interest.

1.2 The Chief Commissioner took this opportunity to welcome the new Commissioners to their first official meeting. It was noted that Commissioners Drummond, Gray and Witherow had completed induction training in advance. Commissioner Warwick would complete his induction training in due course.

2. Draft minutes of the 289th Commission meeting and matters arising

2.1 The minutes of the 289th Commission meeting had been previously agreed by the outgoing Commissioners and those who had retained their position in office.
Action: Minutes of the 289th Commission meeting to be uploaded to the website when finalised.

3. Chief Commissioner's Report

3.1 The Chief Commissioner had supplied a report which detailed events, meetings and conferences for which she had attended (and was due to attend). New Commissioners were welcome to ask any questions relating to this information.

4. Commissioners' reports including update from Audit, Risk and Remuneration Committee

4.1 Commissioner Kouame updated Commissioners with regards to the Audit, Risk and Remuneration Committee meeting which had been held on Monday 14th September 2026.

4.2 The Committee received and reviewed the following papers:

- Financial position as at July 2026 with an oral update for August 2026
- Absence statistics
- High value purchases
- Internal Audit recommendations tracker
- Risk Register
- Freedom of Information requests
- Terms of Reference for the Legal Services Review which had commenced and was near completion

- Internal Audit Plan – Progress Report
- Contract Management Procedures
- Whistleblowing Policy
- International travel
- Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Annual Progress Report 2025-26
- Revised draft of the Managing Unacceptable Behaviour from Members of the Public Policy
- Revised Draft Audit, Risk and Remuneration Committee Terms of Reference

4.3 The Internal Auditors provided an update on progress with this year's planned internal audits which include:

- Corporate Governance and risk management
- Cyber security and Business Continuity Plan
- Communications Review
- Financial Controls and Procurement
- Approach to Project Management

4.4 A closed session was held immediately after the Committee meeting to consider the pay remit for 2026. The pay award of 3.5% for staff below the Senior Civil Service grade and 2.5% for the Senior Civil Service grade was approved. **Action: Pay award proposal to be forwarded by Chief Executive to the NIO for final approval.**

5. Chief Executive's Report

5.1 It was communicated that recruitment for a Deputy Principal Officer in the Dedicated Mechanism team would be completed by the end of financial year, with planned recruitment for a similar position in the Core team for the financial year 2027/28.

Committee members were informed that it was also intended to recruit for a Human Resources role in the Corporate team.

It was further reported that the Paralegal position had become vacant since the end of August. This was likely to remain the case for the next 3 months as discussions were ongoing in relation to how best to fill the vacancy.

5.2 The Chief Executive stated that a draft budget for 2027/28 would be provided to Commissioners in due course.

This budget would include expenditure on programme costs to support a website redesign, reconfiguring of the Annual Statement, a Human Rights Conference, and an online hub for training resources.

5.3 It was noted that within the next 18 months the Chief Commissioner is expected to assume the Chair of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). To support the transition it has been proposed that a strategic planning session may take place with support from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

5.4 Commissioners were asked to note that the 2026 Annual Statement Launch would be held on Thursday 10th December at Parliament Buildings, Stormont. Guest speakers will be Professor Elisa Morgera and Dara McAnulty.

5.5 The Chief Executive also informed Commissioners that he had be informed of an individual complaint made to the Sub-committee on Accreditation of GANHRI. Commissioners will be kept informed if there are any further developments.

5.6 The Director (Legal) updated new commissioners in relation to the Gary Murray case which will proceed to full hearing.

5.7 The new Commissioners were also updated on the recent staff survey which had been completed. Heads Together would be discussing the findings with the Senior Management Team in due course, with a presentation to staff arranged for Tuesday 6th October 2026. The Chief Executive was pleased with the results and has accepted all of the recommendations. A plan for implementation will be developed.

6. Finance Report August 2026

6.1 The Finance Report as at 31 August 2026 (for both Core and Dedicated Mechanism) was presented by the Director (Finance, Personnel, and Corporate Affairs). This paper reflected actual spend and commitments to the end of the financial year.

7. KPI Report Quarter 1 (April-June 2026)

7.1 The KPI Report for the first quarter of 2026/27 was presented to Commissioners. Presentations were made by the Director of Policy, Director (Human Rights after EU Withdrawal), Director (Legal), and Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs).

8. KPI Engagement Report

8.1 The Director of Engagement and Communications and the Senior Engagement and Education Officer presented the KPI Engagement Report for August 2025-August 2026.

9. Draft Engagement and Education Strategy

9.1 The Director of Engagement and Communications and the Senior Engagement and Education Officer presented the draft Engagement and Education Strategy 2026-29.

10. Draft Annual Statement 2026

10.1 The Director of Policy presented Commissioners with information concerning the draft Annual Statement 2026.

10.2 The Director provided a brief history of the publication and stated that it was intended that the number of issues would be reduced in this year's print due to capacity constraints within the core Policy Team.

Commissioners were invited to provide any comments on the draft Annual Statement by email by close of play on Monday 28th September 2026.
Action: Commissioners to provide comments on the draft Annual Statement by close of play on 28 September 2026.

10.3 It was further stated that this year's publication would be available online only with invitations to key stakeholders being issued in due course.

11. Any other Business and Date of Next Meeting

11.1 It was noted that approval had been gained by email for a Legal Application for Assistance on 6th August 2026.

11.2 Commissioner Gray agreed to become a member of the Audit, Risk and Remuneration Committee.

11.3 Commissioners Drummond and Witherow agreed to become members of the Independent Monitoring Committee for the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in NI.

11.4 The date of next Commission meeting was arranged for Monday 26 October 2026.

End of meeting (12:25pm)