



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

Business Plan 2024-25

April 2024

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Foreword

This is the 25th anniversary year of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC). As we reflect on progress made since the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement to protect and promote human rights it is important to remain focused on the many issues that are still unresolved. It is also important to look toward the future and identify those developing areas that will affect human rights in the years and decades ahead.

For us this means ensuring continuity in delivering the NIHRC mandate by advising a restored NI Assembly on matters of compliance, exercising our powers to litigate and investigate, publishing research on systemic concerns and promoting human rights across a range of platforms to as wide an audience as possible. 2024-25 will also be a year of transition during which the current NIHRC strategic plan will end, and a new set of priorities be agreed for the next three years. Engaging with as many stakeholders as possible will be a key task to ensure a set of objectives that resonate and where we can have maximum value-added impact.

After several years during which the ability of the NIHRC to operate was severely constrained we think a positive turning point may be on the horizon. Toward the end of 2023 the United Nations re-accredited us as an A status institution. This was achieved partly because the Northern Ireland Office published a generally supportive response to its commissioned independent review which identified the need for an increase in our funding. This year an economic assessment of the NIHRC will be completed and we hope the outcome will finally result in a baseline budget that puts the NIHRC on a sustainable footing.

After 25 years it is our hope that the vision of those who first conceived a National Human Rights Institution has been realised and properly reflected in our work and achievements to date. So much remains however to be done and we know much more can be delivered. Championing vulnerable and marginalised individuals must remain a focus. This is the litmus test for any National Human Rights Institution worthy of the name. Our business plan reflects some of those issues and the methods through which the NIHRC will continue striving to be relevant, taking actions that make a positive difference and assisting Northern Ireland to continue its transition as a human rights respecting society.

Dr David Russell
Chief Executive

Our vision:

A society with human rights values and standards at its heart to achieve fairness, peace and justice.

Our mission:

To protect and promote the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland.

Who we are:

The Commission was established as a result of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. Our governing legislation is the Northern Ireland Act 1998, as amended by the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 and the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020.

The Commission is a National Human Rights Institution with A status accreditation from the United Nations. This recognition means that the organisation operates independently in full accordance with the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 48/134 (the Paris Principles) reporting to UN treaty bodies and exercising speaking rights before the UN Human Rights Council.

The Commission is also a non-departmental public body and receives grant-in-aid from the United Kingdom government through the Northern Ireland Office. We report to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

There are seven Commissioners (a full time Chief Commissioner and six part-time Commissioners) appointed by the Secretary of State. As far as practicable, the Commissioners, as a group, is representative of the community in Northern Ireland.

Chief Commissioner: Alyson Kilpatrick BL

Commissioners: Helen Henderson
Mairead Holder
Jonathan Kearney
Justin Kouame
David Lavery CB
Stephen White OBE

Our principles:

Independence	We value and protect our independence, we act professionally and with integrity, and we make all our decisions based on objective evidence.
Participation	We involve people in the strategy for and implementation of decisions that affect their human rights. We empower people to participate to the fullest extent possible.
Effectiveness	We ensure that human rights protection is built into all law and practice so that it is guaranteed for everyone, and meaningful remedies are available.
Inclusion	We will oppose any form of discrimination or prejudice. Any group of people who face discrimination will be supported.
Partnership	We will work to achieve the greatest impact through partnership with the community and other stakeholders.

Our strategic objectives 2022-25:

1. To keep under review law and practice and advise government for the benefit of everyone across Northern Ireland
2. To ensure that rights protection is not diminished as a result of the United Kingdom having left the European Union; and, where required, ensure that Northern Ireland keeps pace with changes in European Union equality laws.
3. To build a society in which human rights are better understood, protected and valued, making a positive impact upon the delivery of services.
4. To work in partnership with other human rights and equality bodies to ensure the maximisation of human rights protection.
5. To be a learning organisation, improving our skills to achieve the greatest impact.

Our priorities:

We have identified a number of themes that require closer attention. In the course of achieving our strategic objectives we will pay particular attention to the following:

Impact of poverty on quality of living

This will include, in particular:

- (i) Housing and homelessness;
- (ii) Health and social provision.

Victims' Rights

This will include in particular:

- (i) Victims of domestic and sexual violence;
- (ii) Legacy cases.

Access to justice

This will include, in particular:

- (i) Rule of law;
- (ii) Discrimination and equality.

How we will achieve our strategic objectives

This Business Plan sets out the Commission's work for the year April 2024 to the end of March 2025. It is based on five objectives agreed in our Strategic Plan 2022-25 and the delivery of three thematic priorities – impact of poverty on quality of living; victims' rights and access to justice. Each priority is one of substantive public interest, where we believe a real and lasting impact can be made to benefit the lives of people in Northern Ireland.

Objective 1: To keep under review law and practice and advise government for the benefit of everyone across Northern Ireland.

- (i) We will advise the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Executive of legislative and other measures which ought to be taken to protect human rights upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate.
- (ii) We will advise the Northern Ireland Assembly on whether legislative Bills are compatible with human rights upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate.
 - Screen all legislation introduced into the NI Assembly and provide advice upon request or where necessary. Priority will be given to those issues which align with the Commission's 2022-25 Strategic Priorities;
 - Engage with Committee inquiries upon request or where necessary. Priority will be given to those inquiries which align with the Commission's 2022-25 Strategic Priorities.
- (iii) We will advise the Westminster Parliament on whether legislative Bills affecting Northern Ireland are compatible with human rights upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate.
 - Screen legislation introduced into the Westminster Parliament and provide advice on those issues affecting human rights in Northern Ireland. Priority will be given to those Bills which align with the Commission's 2022-25 Strategic Priorities;
 - Engage with Committee inquiries upon request or where necessary. Priority will be given to those inquiries which align with the Commission's 2022-25 Strategic Priorities.
- (iv) We will advise Government Departments (Northern Ireland and, Westminster) upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate.

- Screen consultation documents issued by NI Executive and Westminster Departments, subject to resources. Priority will be given to those proposals which align with the Commission's 2022-25 Strategic Priorities.
- (v) We will keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness in Northern Ireland of law and practice relating to the protection of human rights this may include initiating investigations and reviewing previous investigations.
- Publish a progress report on the provision of education on sexual and reproductive health in Northern Ireland in accordance with the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 and the recommendations in the 2018 CEDAW inquiry report Paragraph 86 (d) to "Make age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights a compulsory component of curriculum for adolescents, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion, and monitor its implementation";
 - Develop internal guidance on the exercise of our investigatory powers;
 - Publish and launch the Annual Statement 2024 in association with the Office of the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- (vi) We will undertake research that the Commission considers necessary or expedient.
- Develop a report addressing online disinformation and the role of National Human Rights Institutions;
 - Develop and publish a Northern Ireland Business and Human Rights Index. This pilot project will be in partnership with the Law School at Queen's University Belfast and supported by the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions;
 - Commence research into women's health and the relevant human rights framework.
- (vii) We will engage with the United Nations and Council of Europe treaty examination processes and the United Nations Human Rights Council.
- Engage with the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its examination of the UK;
 - Engage with the United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights;
 - Engage with the United Nations Human Rights Council on issues relevant to Northern Ireland, in conjunction with the other United Kingdom National Human Rights Institutions;

- Engage with the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in respect of its ongoing supervision of judgments relating to Northern Ireland.
- (viii) We will promote compliance with international reporting obligations by supporting the treaty working group composed of government officials with reporting duties within the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Executive departments.

Objective 2: To ensure that rights protection is not diminished as a result of the United Kingdom having left the European Union; and, where required, ensure that Northern Ireland keeps pace with changes in European Union equality laws.

- (i) We will monitor and report on law and practice impacting upon this priority objective by, for example, Annual Reports with the Equality Commission Northern Ireland and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.
- Publish and publicly launch, jointly with Equality Commission Northern Ireland the Annual Report on the implementation of Windsor Framework Article 2;
 - Collaborate with Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission on the Annual Report on the island of Ireland dimension to Article 2;
 - Further develop capacity to monitor and screen primary and subordinate legislation and relevant European Union legislative and policy developments.
- (ii) We will advise the Secretary of State and Northern Ireland Executive of legislative and other measures which ought to be taken to ensure this objective is met, upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate.
- (iii) We will advise the Northern Ireland Assembly on whether legislative Bills are compatible with this objective upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate.
- Screen all legislation introduced into the NI Assembly and provide advice on those which engage Windsor Framework Article 2 upon request or where necessary. Priority will be given to those Bills which align with the Commission’s 2022-25 Strategic Priorities;
 - Engage with Committee inquiries which engage Windsor Framework Article 2 upon request or where necessary. Priority will be given to those inquiries which align with the Commission’s 2022-25 Strategic Priorities.

- (iv) We will advise the Westminster Parliament on whether legislative Bills affecting Northern Ireland are compatible with this priority upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate and engage with relevant United Kingdom government departments.
- Screen legislation, subject to resources, introduced into the Westminster Parliament and provide advice on those issues which engage Windsor Framework Article 2 upon request or where necessary;
 - Engage with Committee inquiries which engage Windsor Framework Article 2 upon request or where necessary;
 - Priority will be given to those Bills and Committee inquiries which align with the Commission's 2022-25 Strategic Priorities.
- (v) We will promote understanding and awareness of this priority; and for this purpose, the Commission may undertake, contract or provide financial or other assistance for research and educational activities.
- Continue engagement with the Executive Office and Northern Ireland Office on the development or revision of guidance for officials responsible for ensuring compliance with Windsor Framework Article 2;
 - Run two workshops on Windsor Framework Article 2 for Departmental officials working on policy or legislative development;
 - Ensure our work is well informed and seek to build capacity amongst civil society stakeholders through regular engagement including by organising two workshops targeted at relevant sectors as well as continuing to hold round-table discussions on research findings on Windsor Framework Article 2;
 - Conclude ongoing research projects on the interaction of Windsor Framework Article 2 and Environmental rights; and the interaction of Windsor Framework Article 2 and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and organise stakeholder seminars to launch and discuss the research;
 - Initiate further projects to continue researching the scope and application of Windsor Framework Article 2, including on the interaction of Article 2 with (a) continuing access to remedies under EU law and (b) the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
 - Produce materials to assist government officials and stakeholders in considering and implementing Windsor Framework Article 2;
 - Deliver and monitor a communications strategy in partnership with Equality Commission Northern Ireland to support in year activities;
 - Review, maintain, monitor and develop content for website;
 - Maintain, monitor and develop content for social media platforms.

- (vi) We will bring any appropriate matters of relevance to the attention of the Specialised Committee on issues related to the implementation of the Windsor Framework (formerly Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland) of the European Union Withdrawal Agreement.
- Seek regular engagement with EU and UK officials supporting the Joint Consultative Working Group and Specialised Committees;
 - Seek to use early identification and discussion of issues to ensure policy and legislation develops in compliance with Windsor Framework Article 2;
 - Engage with the Specialised Committee to raise issues of concern where domestic and informal avenues have proven unsuccessful.
- (vii) We will consider using our legal powers to initiate judicial review proceedings in respect of an alleged breach (or potential future breach) where the Commission considers rights protection diminished as a result of United Kingdom having left the European Union and where Northern Ireland fails to keep pace with changes in European Union equality laws; or intervening in legal proceedings, whether for judicial review or otherwise, in so far as they relate to an alleged breach (or potential future breach).
- Continue engagement with legal practitioners to advise on potential for challenges under Windsor Framework Article 2;
 - Provide assistance to individuals through weekly advice clinics;
 - Consider supporting cases on issues brought to our attention via regular meetings with civil society stakeholders.

Objective 3: To build a society in which human rights are better understood, protected and valued, making a positive impact upon the delivery of services.

- (i) We will support individuals seeking legal assistance and this may include initiating or intervening in proceedings involving law or practice relating to the protection of human rights in Northern Ireland. Priority will be given to issues which align with the Commission's 2022-25 Strategic Priorities.
- Provide advice, assistance, information and support to individuals through weekly advice clinics;
 - Provide continuing support to ongoing legal cases, subject to resources and strategic value;
 - Support third party interventions in legal proceedings in the domestic UK courts and before the European Court of Human

- Rights, by own motion and in conjunction with European Network of National Human Rights Institutions;
- Consideration of establishing an informal forum for legal practitioners engaged in strategic litigation.
- (ii) We will promote understanding and awareness of the of human rights in Northern Ireland; and for this purpose, may undertake, commission or provide financial or other assistance for educational activities.
- Develop our information resources, digital platforms and events to inform and promote awareness of human rights in Northern Ireland;
 - Engage in and support the Northern Ireland Human Rights Festival, Northern Ireland Pride Festival and Northern Ireland Refugee Week;
 - Deliver an annual human rights lecture in association with the Lady Chief Justice of Northern Ireland and the Bar of Northern Ireland;
 - Review our website content and scope a redesign project;
 - Review and launch a second series of the 'Shared Goals' podcast.
- (iii) We will deliver direct engagement with the community to support the Commission's 2022-25 Strategic Priorities and their implementation in wider society.
- Provide secretarial support and assist the Northern Ireland Sport and Human Rights Forum to meet at least three times in year and deliver its programme of work based on the Declaration on Sport and Human Rights;
 - Support the implementation of the PPN 05/21 Human Rights in Public Procurement, subject to resources, respond to requests for assistance from contractors and commissioning public authorities;
 - Provide two sessions of policy and human rights training in partnership with the NI Civil Service;
 - Facilitate a forum that meets regularly, in partnership with the Equality Commission Northern Ireland, providing an opportunity for the Commissions and faith communities to share their views on broad areas of equality and human rights;
- (iv) We will engage directly with young people in schools and education settings with a particular focus on promoting understanding and empowering them as rights-holders.
- Continue to deliver a programme of work for post primary schools based on the Commission's 2022-25 Strategic Priorities to include at least ten workshops in year; Continue to develop our partnerships with local Universities, education providers and the Eco Schools programme;

- Include climate change and climate justice as a thematic focus, education on international human rights norms and standards; and the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals;
 - **Objective 4: To work in partnership with other human rights and equality bodies to ensure the maximisation of human rights protection.**
- (i) We will develop and implement a programme of work with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission focused on issues in the island of Ireland. This will be delivered through the joint committee of the two Commissions created in accordance with the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and will be in addition to our work under strategic objective 2.
- Facilitate meetings of the Joint Committee;
 - Deliver a programme of work with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.
- (ii) We will work in partnership with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to deliver the mandate of the designated Independent Mechanism under Article 33 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This work will also include collaboration with the Scottish Human Rights Commission and the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Great Britain on issues that affect the protection and promotion of the rights of disabled people in Northern Ireland.
- Facilitate and provide secretarial support of at least two meetings of the Independent Mechanism Disability Forum;
 - Support Disability Forum Members, to engage directly with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- (iii) We will engage with the other National Human Rights Institutions and National Equality Bodies in the United Kingdom and Ireland on issues of common interest that align with the Commission's priorities and affect the protection and promotion of human rights in Northern Ireland.
- Co-operate with the Scottish Human Rights Commission and Equality and Human Rights Commission (Great Britain) in responding to any proposals to reform the Human Rights Act 1998;
 - Co-ordinate, as appropriate with the Scottish Human Rights Commission and Equality and Human Rights Commission (Great Britain) on Westminster excepted and reserved matters;
 - Facilitate and attend the annual meeting of the National Human Rights Institutions and National Equality Bodies.

- (iv) We will cooperate with the UN and any other organisations in the United Nations system, the regional institutions and the National Human Rights Institutions of other countries that align with the Commission's priorities and those affecting the protection and promotion of human rights in Northern Ireland. This will include, in particular, engagement with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions and the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions.
- Deliver a partnership project with the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Rwanda National Commission for Human Rights in support of establishing a permanent secretariat for the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions;
 - Maintain membership of working groups within the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions, including AI, Business and Human Rights; Climate Change; Communications; the Legal working group; Rights of Older Persons; Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Objective 5: To be a learning organisation, improving our skills to achieve the greatest impact.

- (i) We will advocate for the Commission's effectiveness as a National Human Rights Institution and seek support from the UK government, regional partners and United Nations to ensure that the institution is 'A status' compliant with the Paris Principles.
- Work in partnership with the Northern Ireland Office to implement the UK Government Response to the Independent Review of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission 2022.
- (ii) We will continue to develop a Key Performance Indicator framework based on existing good practice models from other A status National Human Rights Institutions and government guidance, with the transition to this operating model to be completed by year end.
- (iii) We will maximise continuous professional development by encouraging and facilitating ongoing learning opportunities and promoting well-being for each staff member and Commissioner, including through the staff well-being committee.

The training and development programme will include the following:

- Inclusion;

- Understanding Autism and neuro-diversity;
- Health and Safety including Fire Safety;
- First Aid including Mental Health First Aid;
- CIPD and CPD;
- Risk Management;
- Data Protection;
- Cyber Security including Information Security;
- Freedom of Information Act;
- Microsoft Teams;
- Enabling shared learning between staff and Commissioners.

Corporate activities

To comply with our obligations as a National Human Rights Institution and a Non-Departmental Public Body, the Commission will deliver the following corporate activities:

- The production and publication of a Strategic Plan 2025-28;
- Develop and initiate an engagement and communications plan for the strategic planning process 2025-2028;
- The production and publication of Annual Report and Accounts including the financial statements for the year ending 31 March 2025 completed and laid in Parliament;
- Continue to respond to requests under the Freedom of Information Act within 20 working days;
- Submit required monthly financial and workforce management reports to the Commission's sponsoring department, the Northern Ireland Office;
- Complete a follow-up audit of the Commission's website to ensure accessibility compliance;
- Comply with the Commission's equality duties and reporting requirements;
- Continue to work with the Commission's internal auditors and follow up on any recommendations as a result of their audit;
- Respond to any complaints made to the Parliamentary Ombudsman, if applicable;
- Review the Commission's policies and procedures manuals;
- Ensure the safeguarding of all personal data and follow the General Data Protection Regulation as it applies in the United Kingdom, tailored by the Data Protection Act 2018 and will report any personal data related incidents formally to the Information Commissioner's Office, if applicable;
- Continue to meet the Government target of paying 90% of undisputed invoices within five working days.

BUDGET 2024-25

	2024-25 Core Budget	2024-25 Dedicated Mechanism Budget	2024-25 Total Budget
	£	£	£
EMPLOYMENT COSTS			
Staff	1,300,168	553,572	1,853,740
Commissioners	167,847	0	167,847
Total	1,468,015	553,572	2,021,587
PROGRAMME COSTS			
Advertising, Publicity and Publications	9,090	38,782	47,872
Conferences, seminars and events	7,771	19,601	27,372
Education and Training	0	25,000	25,000
Legal Casework	82,742	100,568	183,310
Research	15,000	66,907	81,907
Total	114,603	250,858	365,461
OPERATING COSTS			
Auditor's (NAO) Remuneration	17,500	8,750	26,250
Building maintenance and office expenses	31,094	16,264	47,358
Insurance	6,764	3,382	10,146
Internal Audit	5,694	2,847	8,541
IT	50,548	25,836	76,384
Light and heat	7,635	3,998	11,633
Printing, postage and stationery	3,409	1,694	5,103
Professional fees	13,454	12,186	25,640
Rates	22,603	11,444	34,047
Rentals under operating leases	63,014	31,507	94,521
Staff training and recruitment	1,308	10,021	11,329
Telephone	9,719	4,906	14,625
Travel, subsistence and hospitality	16,640	9,325	25,965
Total	249,382	142,160	391,542
GRAND TOTAL	1,832,000	946,590	2,778,590