



NORTHERN  
IRELAND  
HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
COMMISSION

**BUSINESS PLAN  
2017-18**

April 2017

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## CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
Our mission	<b>3</b>
Who we are and how we work	<b>3</b>
The principles that underpin our work	<b>4</b>
The context in which we are working	<b>5</b>
Pillar one: Delivering human rights through excellent services to the public	<b>7</b>
Pillar two: Human rights and building the future in Northern Ireland	<b>9</b>
Pillar three: Social and economic rights in a time of change	<b>10</b>
Corporate	<b>11</b>
Budget 2017-18	<b>13</b>
Learning and development plan 2017-18	<b>14</b>
<b>Appendices:</b>	
1. Commissioners	<b>15</b>
2. Staff	<b>16</b>

## **Our mission:**

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission champions and guards the rights of all those who live in Northern Ireland.

## **Who we are and how we work:**

Established on the basis of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, we play a central role in supporting a society that, as it rebuilds following conflict, respects and upholds human rights standards and responsibilities.

Human rights values and standards need to be at the heart of our society if we are to achieve well-being, peace and justice. We are Northern Ireland's centre of excellence on human rights.

We hold government, elected representatives, statutory and other relevant organisations to account. To do this, we may work in partnership with these organisations and civil society.

We work to build strong relationships through local community engagement, to understand the issues affecting people. We shall continue with a programme of community visits and also further continue to develop our communications through social media and other tools.

## **Our core activities**

As the National Human Rights Institution in Northern Ireland, the Commission has a range of duties and responsibilities including contributing to the monitoring of international human rights treaties. The core aspects of our daily operation are fundamental to fulfilling our mission. They are key to our compliance with the United Nations Paris Principles on the role of a national human rights institution and the Nolan principles of ethical standards in public life.

Our statutory functions include:

- ✓ Advising the Westminster government, the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly, and key agencies on legislation and compliance with human rights frameworks
- ✓ promoting awareness of human rights through education, training and research
- ✓ monitoring the implementation of international treaties
- ✓ providing legal advice, including taking strategic legal cases
- ✓ engaging with other national human rights institutions in the United Kingdom
- ✓ working in partnership with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

Each year, the Commission reviews progress by government and public authorities with human rights laws and standards. Our Annual Statement published in December records progress on meeting human rights standards, and our Annual 'Human Rights Lecture' gives an opportunity to promote learning and discussion. The Annual Statement strongly informs our future work priorities and is a key feature of our 2016-2019 Strategic Plan.

In 2015, the Commission was elected to the chair of the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions. This reflects the esteem in which the Commission is held internationally. It is an important opportunity to share our own experiences and learn from others to achieve direct benefits for the people of Northern Ireland. The Commission will remain Chair of the Forum until 2018.

### **The principles that underpin our work:**

We promote and abide by the following core principles:

**Building a culture of human rights:** A goal of human rights is to establish a society that embeds such rights at its heart and where human rights values demonstrably guide society. The Commission is committed to fostering this culture in Northern Ireland. In doing so, it recognises the challenges presented in a society moving forward that has experienced a protracted and tragic conflict and where community divisions can run deep.

**Legality and independence:** The Commission operates on the basis of international human rights law, in compliance with a statutory mandate and independently of the State. We work for the promotion and protection of the human rights which the United Kingdom is legally committed to at the national, regional and international levels, and does so, on the basis of the mandate conferred on it by law and in conformity with the United Nations Paris Principles.

**Non-discrimination and equality:** Human rights must be enjoyed by everyone on the basis of non-discrimination and equality, a principle that is reinforced in Northern Ireland by the provisions of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. The Commission honours this principle, above all, by protecting the most powerless in society addressing the needs of vulnerable individuals and those who are marginalised.

**The equal status of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights:** Human rights, as recognised in the international treaties, have equal value and status and must be implemented in an integrated manner. The Commission respects this principle in its work and promotes full implementation in all engagements with the State and other partners.

**Participation:** Meaningful enjoyment of human rights must be based on the participation by those affected in any processes that may impact on their well-being. The Commission is committed to involving rights-holders in all relevant areas of its activities and it strives to promote broader participation across society.

**Accountability:** Accountability is central to human rights enforcement so decision making must be transparent. The Commission honours this requirement in its own actions. It demands similar standards in public life and calls to account all those with responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights. The Commission promotes human rights compliant independent oversight and accountability mechanisms.

**Partnership:** The promotion and protection of human rights needs the commitment of all who live in Northern Ireland, mindful that rights are balanced with responsibilities. It requires the engagement of government (central, regional and local) elected representatives, statutory bodies and civil society. As a Paris Principles 'A' Status NHRI, the Commission plays a pivotal role in building and sustaining the necessary partnerships. The Commission recognises the importance of its partnerships with the other United Nations-accredited human rights institutions in developing human rights values.

## **The context in which we are working**

The Commission has faced year on year reductions in its budget since 2011/12 and this is projected to continue until 2019/20. We are now functioning with less core budget and staff than sixteen years ago (when inflation is taken into account). During those years, as our expertise has grown we have found new, more effective and efficient ways of working. Inevitably, however, budget reductions and fewer staff means a change in service.

The Commission is entering the 2017-18 with 7 part time Commissioners, one Chief Commissioner, 10 permanent staff and 4 temporary staff. This will be a year of significant changes. The current part time Commissioners terms of office are due to end on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017 with new Commissioners appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. A list of Commissioners and the Commission's staff as at April 2017 are attached at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

For 2017-18 the Commission has a core budget of £1,124,000. This is funded by grant-in-aid from Parliament through our sponsor branch, the Northern Ireland Office.

In recent years the Commission has developed programmes to increase the capacity of public authorities to protect and promote the human rights of their service users through changes in law, policy and practice. Building

strong partnerships is key to the Commission using its available resources to maximum effect. For example:

- support has been provided to the Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman on complaint handling;
- a training programme has been developed for the Northern Ireland Civil Service in partnership with the Centre for Applied Learning and the Executive Office; and,
- two projects are ongoing to embed a human rights-based approach to healthcare with the Northern and Belfast Health and Social Care Trusts.

In 2017-18 the Commission will continue to build partnerships through our work on litigants in person with Ulster University, the provision of secretarial support for the Northern Ireland Business and Human Rights Forum and assistance given to the Department of Finance on public procurement. The Commission will also continue in this year as Chair of the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions supported by the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The wider environment in which the Commission will operate is likely to be one of continuing political uncertainties. The Northern Ireland Assembly was dissolved in January 2017. Elections then took place on 2 March 2017. A further round of inter-party negotiations followed during which a number of significant human rights issues were on the agenda. These included mechanisms to address the legacy of conflict, the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, equality protections, legislation to support the Irish language and the application of the Armed Forces Covenant. During three weeks of talks leading up to the start of the new business year the parties failed to reach the agreement necessary to form a new Executive.

At the same time, negotiations on the United Kingdom leaving the European Union began in earnest. On 29 March 2017 the Prime Minister gave notification under Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon. This has started a two year process to agree the terms of exit. Leaving the European Union will also have significant consequences for the protection and promotion of human rights. These include impacts on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice, the many Directives transposed into domestic law and the particular circumstances of sharing a land border with Ireland.

2017-18 may be a year in which the domestic framework, through which the Commission conducts its business, starts to change significantly with far reaching consequences for the future of human rights in Northern Ireland.

**Dr David Russell**  
**Chief Executive**  
**April 2017**

## **BUSINESS PLAN 2017-18**

This Business Plan describes the Commission's work for the incoming year. It is based on three key work-streams or 'pillars' agreed in our Strategic Plan 2016-19. Each of these is in an area of substantive public interest, where we believe a real and lasting impact can be made to benefit the lives of people in Northern Ireland. The priority is to focus attention on protecting the most powerless in society by addressing the needs of vulnerable individuals and those who are marginalised.

**Pillar one: Delivering human rights through excellent services to the public**

This work stream builds on our previous programmes to embed human rights at the heart of government, and in how the state's policies and strategies are shaped and delivered. We want to develop this work further with stakeholders to ensure human rights are applied to delivery of services to the public. In this work, the Commission is committed to a participatory approach including working with and supporting government and its agencies, and also civil society and the business community.

**Actions** To advise, support and build the capacity of government and public authorities to apply a human rights based approach to the design and delivery of services to the public, develop a programme to embed a human rights based approach to statutory complaints processes and health and social care trust services and keep under review policy and practice in prison and other places of detention. In addition we will:  
Enhance human rights standards in business and procurement through our Business and Human Rights Forum.

Advise government on its responsibilities for human rights in the context of existing and potential future changes to domestic human rights laws and frameworks alongside Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement commitments to a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and the possibility of 'A Charter of Rights for the island of Ireland'.

**Outcomes** The Commission can identify demonstrable improvement in the delivery of services to the public which have arisen from our work.

### **In year targets:**

- (a) Research and publish the 2017 Annual Statement on Human Rights in Northern Ireland (December 2017).

- (b) Continue to develop and deliver human rights training for the Northern Ireland Civil Service, in partnership with the Centre for Applied Learning and the Executive Office (March 2018).
- (c) In partnership with health and social care trusts deliver projects on developing a human rights-based approach to emergency health care and participatory decision making to be piloted by the Trusts (March 2018).
- (d) Facilitate a work programme and provided secretarial support to Northern Ireland business and human rights forum (ongoing).
- (e) Work in partnership with Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman to embed a human rights-based approach to complaints handling and investigations (December 2017).
- (f) Develop and deliver a programme of work addressing the human rights of looked after children who go missing from home or whilst in the care of the state (February 2018).
- (g) Engage in International Treaty Body Monitoring and in particular:
  - (i) submit a parallel report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (March 2018) and engage with the examination process;
  - (ii) engage in the United Nations Human Rights Council on the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle Universal Periodic Review of the United Kingdom pre-sessional meeting (April 2017) and review process (September 2017);
  - (iii) engage with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities United Kingdom examination process (August 2017).
  - (iv) engage with the Committee of experts for the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages following submission of the United Kingdom state report (July 2017 ongoing).
- (h) Continue to provide advice on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland any developments in relation to the Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights.
- (i) Work in partnership with other National Human Rights Institutions and domestic equality authorities in the United Kingdom and Ireland



regarding the human rights implications of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union (ongoing March 2018).

**Pillar two: Human rights and building the future in Northern Ireland**

Tolerance recognises the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. A tolerant society based on mutual respect and understanding requires the enforcement by the state of human rights laws and standards, as well as public education and awareness. In building a positive future, the Commission will continue to advise government and its agencies as it deals with Northern Ireland's past, and we will also focus our attention more broadly on those who are marginalised due to intolerance and hate crime.

**Actions**                      Develop a programme of work to build the capacity of government and public authorities to respond to all forms of hate crime and promote tolerance and non-discrimination

Provide advice to Government on implementation of relevant strategies to address the past and take action on rights engaged in relation to conflict related deaths, those who are injured, and legacy inquests

**Outcomes**                      The Commission can demonstrate examples of changes to policy and practice as a result of our work

**In year targets:**

- (a) Publish research on human rights law and the implications for the treatment of those injured through the Northern Ireland conflict (September 2017).
- (b) Liaise with Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on post conflict investigations and the implementation of the package of measures adopted by the United Kingdom Government and Northern Ireland Executive (ongoing).
- (c) Provide advice to Government on the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement and any future negotiated mechanisms that aim to address the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict (March 2018).
- (d) Deliver an initiative, in partnership with the Equality Commission Northern Ireland, that considers the relationship between human rights and building tolerance and the promotion of good relations (December 2017).

- (e) Develop a series of films to highlight issues affecting members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender community, the rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and the work of Commission (ongoing March 2018).
- (f) Develop a partnership with the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council on sport and human rights in preparation for the Belfast 2021 Commonwealth Youth Games (ongoing March 2018).

**Pillar three: Social and economic rights in a time of change**

This work recognises the importance of social and economic rights and their equivalent status with other rights. Social and economic rights include the right to an adequate standard of living, to housing and protection against destitution. In the current economic environment, this work seeks to ensure individuals social and economic rights are protected and promoted.

Human rights are also embracing issues of tax justice in tackling poverty and addressing social and economic rights issues.

Actions	<p>Through a focus on tax and spending decisions taken by government, to build the capacity of government to promote and protect social and economic rights</p> <p>Undertake a human rights inquiry to examine the rights of particular groups living in poverty or at risk of destitution incorporating a tax justice dimension</p> <p>As part of access to justice, undertake research and then work to implement recommendations on the needs of litigants in person.</p>
Outcomes	<p>The Commission can identify demonstrable rights based approaches to tax and spending decisions by government in Northern Ireland arising from our work.</p>

**In year targets:**

- (a) Engage in a knowledge exchange with the Research and Information Service in the Northern Ireland Assembly, to scope potential areas for further engagement addressing human rights and departmental public expenditure decision-making (ongoing).

- (b) Continue to deliver a joint research project with the Ulster University School of Law on the right to access to justice and experiences of litigants in person (ongoing to complete in 2018).
- (c) Complete an investigation and publish a report on travellers' accommodation (August 2017).
- (d) Scope a subject of significant public concern in the area of economic and social rights for a Human Rights Inquiry (August 2017).
- (e) Conduct a scoping study on access for prisoners to social care to meet their needs in Northern Ireland prisons (October 2017).

## Corporate

### **In year targets:**

In fulfilment of and in compliance with its statutory obligations and the strategic objectives for 2016-19 the Commission has identified key organisational and institutional development targets:

- (a) Complete implementation of the Commission's move to paperless systems (March 2018).
- (b) Deliver a minimum of four Commission community engagements (ongoing March 2018).
- (c) Complete a review of the Commission's Code of Governance and Standing Orders (June 2018).
- (d) Review the Commission Corporate processes and develop an operational manual (March 2018).
- (e) In fulfilment of our obligations as the International Monitoring Mechanism for Northern Ireland on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland the Commission will continue to deliver a programme of work within the Joint Monitoring Framework (ongoing).
- (f) Engage with other United Kingdom Commissions in relation to legal and policy matters on cross-jurisdictional issues as appropriate and taking account of our Strategic Plan (ongoing).
- (g) Engage with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in relation to cross-jurisdictional issues as appropriate to include the establishment of a secretariat for the Joint Committee (ongoing)
- (h) Provide continuing support to the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and its advisory group on ageing; and, continue

to support the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions and its working groups on disability, business and human rights, socio-economic rights and legal issues. (ongoing)

- (i) Develop the Commission's digital resources to include the launch of a Blog/Vlog and online quarterly newsletter (May 2017).
- (j) Review and revise the Commission's corporate brand and style (December 2017).
- (k) Develop and run a series of four pop up engagement events in fulfilment of the Commission's promotional and educational function (March 2018).
- (l) Engage in and support the Belfast Human Rights Festival (December 2017).
- (m) Deliver an annual human rights lecture (February 2018).

## BUDGET 2017-18

	<b>Revised 2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>
	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Budget</b>
<b>EMPLOYMENT COSTS</b>		
Staff	£610,375	£620,283
Commissioners	£171,260	£173,987
<b>Total</b>	<b>£781,635</b>	<b>£794,270</b>
<b>OPERATING COSTS</b>		
Advertising, Publicity and Publications	£20,192	£16,500
Auditor's (NAO) Remuneration	£15,000	£15,000
Building maintenance and expenses	£31,212	£15,000
Conferences, seminars and events	£5,200	£3,950
Insurance	£9,012	£5,775
Internal Audit	£10,000	£8,220
IT	£18,761	£24,000
Legal casework (non-recoverable)	£60,000	£65,520
Light and heat	£11,640	£10,765
Printing, postage and stationery	£5,982	£6,000
Professional fees	£15,384	£18,000
Rates	£17,232	£24,000
Rentals under operating leases	£38,400	£38,400
Rent for car park	£1,500	£1,500
Research	£36,000	£24,000
Staff training and recruitment	£6,200	£7,500
Telephone	£12,612	£9,600
Travel, subsistence and hospitality	£35,800	£36,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£350,127</b>	<b>£329,730</b>
<b>CAPITAL</b>	<b>£17,238</b>	<b>£0</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>£1,149,000</b>	<b>£1,124,000</b>
<b>DEPRECIATION</b>	<b>£18,384</b>	<b>£20,004</b>

## **LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2017-18**

In addition to staff personal development plans and the Commission’s ongoing mentoring scheme, this plan sets out the main learning and development activities to be undertaken by Commissioners and staff during 2017-18 to achieve the objectives set out in this Business Plan.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Staff</b>
Enhanced mentoring through project participation in addition to the rolling mentoring programme which will continue.	Tailored mentoring and then an enhanced opportunity through application of skills in agreed projects with leading experts.	All staff and the project engagements for relevant staff
Social Media and Broadcast media training	Social media training will allow the development of our public facing opportunities for raising awareness of human rights and increase accessibility as well as the quality of our work.	Staff and Commissioners
Induction of newly appointed Commissioners	Induction will explain the role of a National Human Rights Institution and individual Commission member responsibilities.	Commissioners and senior staff

## **Appendix 1 - Commissioners**

**Chief Commissioner:** Les Allamby

**Commissioners:** John Corey  
Christine Collins  
Milton Kerr  
Grainia Long  
Alan McBride  
Marion Reynolds  
Paul Yam

**Appendix 2 - Staff**

