

ps/hmhf

7 December 1999

NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Minutes of the 11th Commission Meeting

Monday 8 November 1999

2:00pm

Present: Brice Dickson (Chief Commissioner)
Christine Bell
Tom Donnelly
Tom Hadden
Angela Hegarty
Harold Good
Paddy Kelly
Frank McGuinness
Inez McCormack

Apologies: Margaret-Ann Dinsmore apologised in advance that she would be late for the meeting.

In Attendance: Paddy Sloan (Chief Executive)
Bernadette McFadden (Administrative Officer)

1. WELCOME

- 1.1 The Chief Commissioner welcomed Paddy Sloan to the Commission in her new post as Chief Executive.
- 1.2 Inez McCormack was congratulated by Commissioners on her recent presentation of the Aisling Award, 'Person of the Year'.

2. AGENDA ITEMS

2.1 Business Plan 1999/2000

The urgency of the debate on this document was acknowledged and Commissioners expressed their dissatisfaction at this process. Pressure from the NIO demanded that the 1999/2000 Business Plan be submitted within a week and the Chief Executive, whilst regretting the necessarily limited debate, was seeking approval from Commissioners at this meeting to submit the proposals.

The Business Plan for 1999/2001 will be presented to the Commission for fuller discussion at the next meeting in December.

2.2 **Patten Report**

It was agreed that neither a telephone conference nor an “add-on” to the current Commission meeting would suffice to debate this paper. A special meeting was arranged for Tuesday, 16th November at 3:30pm at which the Commission’s response to the Patten proposals would be finalised.

There was some discussion regarding the eligibility for selection for the Police Service and it was agreed that this discussion would be deferred until the meeting on the Patten Report on 16th November. Tom Hadden will do a briefing paper prior to that meeting.

3. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

3.1 An amendment was proposed under Section 5 on Page 4 regarding the Selection of Commissioners to represent the Commission at meetings. The phrase (eg “with statutory bodies”) is to be removed.

3.2 Commissioners again expressed their desire to have the Commission represented proportionally in terms of gender and community balance at all meetings. The Chief Executive agreed that where possible this would happen and that all members would be kept informed of meetings held and of representation at those meetings.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

4.1 **Logo**

The designated group of Commissioners has not yet met to discuss this issue but will do so as soon as is practical.

4.2 **ADACS Funding**

There has been no progress on this proposed series of seminars which will be discussed between the Chief Commissioner and Paddy Kelly as Director of the Children’s Law Centre.

*At this point the meeting was adjourned due to the arrival of the Secretary of State.
Margaret-Ann Dinsmore arrived at 4:20pm.*

4.3 **Council of Europe Funding**

The Chief Commissioner had applied to the Council of Europe for funding for a variety of projects during the year 2000. The submission was completed as a matter of urgency due to the deadline for funding.

4.4 **Section 75 Sub-Group**

Inez McCormack agreed to set up a meeting of this sub-group as soon as possible.

4.5 Consultation on Draft Strategic Plan

4.5.1 Commissioners expressed some concerns regarding the process of consultation.

4.5.2 The venue of St Columb's Park in Derry was questioned as to its accessibility; inside the building is very disabled friendly but public access to the area is perceived to be more difficult. It was agreed that the Development Worker would review this venue.

4.5.3 A Commission meeting would be arranged dedicated to reviewing the responses to the Strategic Plan.

4.5.4 A proactive approach should be taken to engaging with the political parties in discussion about the Strategic Plan.

4.5.5 All District Council areas are not familiar with the draft Strategic Plan and local area based consultation should be considered.

4.6 Media Training

4.6.1 It was agreed that Carr Communications would train up to six Commissioners and Staff on 1st December 1999. Commissioners expressed a desire that this be held in Belfast as opposed to Dublin and that it should be held outside the office to avoid interruption.

4.6.2 Chief Executive is to pursue quotations from other consultants.

4.6.3 Christine Bell, Frank McGuinness and Paddy Sloan plus two other Commissioners expressed an interest in this training.

4.7 Visits to Places of Detention

Margaret-Ann Dinsmore and Frank McGuinness have exchanged reports of their visit to Lisnevin with Paddy Kelly and the three will compile a composite report having visited other juvenile justice centres. The Chief Commissioner was unable to accompany the Commissioners on this visit to Lisnevin but is anxious to be involved in the programme of visits. The three Commissioners will meeting with the Chief Commissioner to agree a process that ensures best use is made of the programme of visits.

5. CHIEF COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

5.1 The Legal Aid Consultation Paper

The Commission's response has been submitted to the Northern Ireland Court Service by the Chief Commissioner.

5.2 LRAC and OLR Consultation Papers

The Chief Commissioner responded on behalf of the Commission to the Law Reform Advisory Committee on its paper regarding matrimonial property and to the Office of Law Reform on its paper concerning orders charging land. Commissioners with additional comments should submit these directly to the relevant bodies.

5.3 Stephen King

There was some discussion among Commissioners regarding the response to Stephen King's article about the Commission published in the Belfast Telegraph on 28th October 1999. Given the mixed views of Commissioners in terms of responding to the article the Chief Executive agreed to prepare a draft set of procedures for media response to be discussed by the Commission.

5.4 Victims Groups

Christine Bell and Harold Good will prepare a report on a meeting chaired by the NIHRC on 1st November for members of Victims Groups to meet with Father Michael Lapsley from South Africa.

5.5 International Reports

It was agreed that a schedule of deadlines for submissions will be prepared and circulated to Commissioners. The deadline for the submission on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is 20th November 1999.

5.6 Section 75

This group needs to meet with some urgency in order to respond to the request from the Equality Commission to comment on their re-issued draft Guidelines on Public Authority Equality Scheme by 1st December 1999.

5.7 Holocaust Remembrance

Commissioners are concerned that the Holocaust Remembrance be taken in context of current human rights abuses that occur globally. The Chief Commissioner will write expressing the Commission's desire to ensure that the Remembrance event acknowledges ongoing abuses and makes a positive contribution to the promotion of current human rights protections.

5.8 Australian Diplomats

Three significant Australian Diplomats will be in Belfast on 17th November and wish to meet with the Commission from 3:05-3:50pm. Paddy Kelly, Inez McCormack and Angela Hegarty agreed to attend, as did Frank McGuinness if there is no overlap with the Task Force publicity group.

5.9 Meetings Attended

With regard to the meeting with Tony McCusker of the Central Secretariat, Commissioners were concerned that the Commission's position had been misrepresented to the Minister, Adam Ingram. The Chief Commissioner agreed to write

to the Minister to clarify the potential role of the Commission in the negotiations regarding the marching season.

6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

6.1 It was agreed that Paddy Kelly and Frank McGuinness would act as additional cheque signatories with Paddy Sloan and Brice Dickson.

6.2 The Chief Executive hopes to arrange a brief meeting with each of the Commissioners as soon as is practical.

6.3 It was agreed following a discussion on symbols and emblems in the workplace, that Paddy would discuss with staff the possibility of introducing a harmonious working policy. Commissioners felt that this organisation should seek to be progressive and respectful of diversity in promoting tolerance of individual allegiances as opposed to the neutral, scorched earth policy which is easier to implement. Paddy will report back to Commissioners following discussions with staff.

6.4 Accommodation

Commissioners agreed to provide a further month's grace to review the options available in terms of city centre office accommodation. It was also suggested that offices outside the inner city boundary be considered and that the option of purchase rather than rent should be explored with the NIO.

7. BILL OF RIGHTS

It was agreed that a Bill of Rights programme would become a regular item on the agenda, given its strategic importance for the Commission.

8. BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN

8.1 Acknowledging the limitations of the discussion, given the timeframe, the Chief Executive explained the thinking behind the current proposal. It is essentially a re-draft of the draft Strategic Plan with the inclusion of an associated budget.

8.2 A review of staffing needs was requested for discussion at the December Commission meeting.

8.3 A separate budget head was sought for work with victims' rights.

8.4 A separate budget head was also sought for the work associated with the Human Rights Commission to be established in the Republic of Ireland. In addition further text was requested around this work.

8.5 Commissioners reluctantly agreed that the Business Plan could be submitted to NIO on the understanding that a more detailed Plan for 2000-2002 would be discussed in more depth.

9. **SUB COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Reports of meetings and sub committees were noted.

The meeting concluded at 6:00pm

Brice Dickson
Chief Commissioner

Dated: _____