



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE 93RD COMMISSION MEETING

**HELD ON MONDAY 16 JULY 2007 AT 10.00am AT THE
NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,
TEMPLE COURT, 39 NORTH ST, BELFAST BT1 1NA**

Present: Monica McWilliams, Chief Commissioner
Tom Duncan
Christine Eames
Colin Harvey
Alan Henry
Ann Hope
Eamonn O'Neill
Geraldine Rice

Apologies: Jonathan Bell
Kevin McLaughlin

In attendance: Angela Stevens, Caseworker
Marie Anderson, Information Commissioner
for Northern Ireland (agenda item 8)

1. Minutes of the last meetings (HRC 93.1(a) and (b))

- 1.1 The minutes of the 92nd Commission meeting held on 14 May 2007, and a special Commission meeting held on 18 June 2007 to approve the Commission's Annual Report and Accounts for 2006–07 and a pay award for Commission staff, were agreed as accurate records, subject to minor textual revisions.

2. Matters arising

- 2.1 It was noted that work to re-establish the Commission's Black and Minority Ethnic Group has started (paragraph 2.1 of the minutes of the 92nd Commission meeting refers).

- 2.2 The Chief Commissioner has written to Nigel Dodds MP to establish who represents Northern Ireland in the Parliamentary Assembly at the Council of Europe (paragraph 2.3 of the minutes of the 92nd Commission meeting refers).
- 2.3 Commissioners noted that, following the recent Cabinet reshuffle, Paul Goggins MP has replaced Maria Eagle MP as the Minister at the Northern Ireland Office with responsibility for human rights (paragraph 2.5 of the minutes of the 92nd Commission meeting refers). A meeting with the Minister has been arranged for 19 September 2007.
- 2.4 Commissioners noted that Asma Jahangir, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, and Francesca Klug, from the Commission for Equality and Human Rights in Great Britain, have agreed to speak at the Commission's conference on religion and human rights on 1/2 November 2007 (paragraph 7.2.5 of the minutes of the 92nd Commission meeting refers).

3. Report from the Chief Commissioner (HRC 93.2)

- 3.1 Commissioners noted the Chief Commissioner's report.
- 3.2 The Commission has registered its interest in contributing to the Strategic Review of Policing in Northern Ireland, which was announced recently and which is being chaired by Lord Ashdown.
- 3.3 The Commission is seeking expert legal advice in respect of the extent that information about conflict-related events can be disclosed by the police and other statutory bodies, outside of the judicial process.
- 3.4 Commissioners noted that the Commission will host a meeting of the Northern Ireland Policing Board's Human Rights and Professional Standards Committee on 12 September 2007, as part of the regular liaison arrangements between the two bodies.
- 3.5 The Commission has accepted a request from the Committee for the Administration of Justice for a meeting. A date for the meeting is being arranged.

- 3.6 The Chief Commissioner reported that the NIO intends advertising for new Commissioners in August, with interviews scheduled for October. The advertisements will encourage applications from disabled people. It is hoped that the new Commissioners will be appointed in time to attend the Commission's Bill of Rights residential event on 30 November / 1 December 2007.

4. Reports from Commissioners

- 4.1 The Chief Commissioner and Eamonn O'Neill reported on the Commission's appearance before the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on 4 July 2007 to give evidence in respect of the Committee's inquiry on the Northern Ireland Prison Service. The Commission's recent report on the experiences of women in prison was made available to the Committee prior to its launch on the following day.
- 4.2 Ann Hope reported on her meeting with OFMDFM officials on 20 June 2007 on proposed single equality legislation. The meeting was also attended by the Head of Legal Services, Policy and Research.
- 4.3 Ann Hope reported on the Commission's seminar on the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), which was held on 26 June 2007, the 20th anniversary of the Convention, and the 10th United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, in Belfast. The seminar was considered very worthwhile and well attended by key figures from the UK national preventative mechanism, the Ministry of Justice, and the human rights community.
- 4.4 Ann Hope and Colin Harvey reported on their attendance as observers at the Bill of Rights Forum on 29 June. The Forum has agreed to set up six working groups to consider specific issues. The next meeting of the Forum is scheduled for Friday 27 July 2007 – Ann Hope and Christine Eames hope to attend.

5. Minutes of committee and working group meetings (HRC 93.3)

- 5.1 Commissioners noted the minutes of the following meetings:
- **Audit and Risk Management Committee** – 27 April and 4 June 2007

- **Bill of Rights Working Group** – 19 April 2007
- **Detention, Policing and Justice Committee** – 3 May 2007
- **Economic, Social and Cultural Committee** – 28 March and 10 May 2007
- **Equality Committee** – 13 April and 18 May 2007
- **Legal Committee** – 17 April and 21 May 2007, and the emergency meetings held on 24 and 25 May 2007
- **Policy Committee** – 16 April 2007

6. Interim management arrangements

- 6.1 Following discussions at the Audit and Risk Management Committee meeting on 28 June 2007, the Chief Commissioner met the Chair of the Committee to discuss the interim management arrangements of the Commission pending the appointment of a new Chief Executive. As a new Chief Executive is unlikely to be appointed until the autumn, it was proposed to augment the interim management arrangements with additional support from the Chair of the Audit and Risk Management Committee, consistent with his role.
- 6.2 Commissioners agreed that the Chair of the Audit and Risk Management Committee should take on additional roles in respect of aspects of the financial and human resource management of the Commission and be available to provide advice and guidance to the Chief Commissioner and/or members of the Management Team in respect of issues that may arise concerning risk management.

7. Team reports

7.1 Corporate Services (HRC 93.4)

- 7.1.1 Commissioners noted the Corporate Services report.

- 7.1.2 NIPSA requested, at the Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee (JNCC) meeting on 7 June 2007, membership of the Commission's Equality Committee and to be able to observe the Audit and Risk Management Committee because these two committees impact on personnel policies and practices. After consideration, it was agreed to decline this request on the ground that the committees' role is one of oversight of the development and implementation process in respect of the policies, rather than a development or editing role. It was agreed that the JNCC is the appropriate forum to discuss issues of mutual interest between the Commission and NIPSA.
- 7.1.3 Commissioners noted expenditure against budget for the period up to the end of June 2007. It was noted that expenditure on legal services, including casework, has been significant during the first quarter. The Head of Corporate Services will review expenditure plans for easements elsewhere in the Commission's budget, which might be vired to offset pressures in the legal services budget and provide a report to the next Commission meeting.
- 7.1.4 Commissioners noted a progress report on activities to minimise the occurrence and / or impact of the risks set out in the Commission's risk register for 2007–08.
- 7.1.5 Commissioners noted the Commission's response to a request for information made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which was processed within the statutory time frame.

7.2 **Information, Education and Development (HRC 93.5)**

- 7.2.1 Commissioners noted the Information, Education and Development report.
- 7.2.2 Commissioners noted that the Commission's annual conference will take place on 21 September 2007 in Templepatrick.

7.3 **Legal Services, Research and Policy (HRC 93.6)**

- 7.3.1 Commissioners noted the Legal Services, Research and Policy report.

- 7.3.2 Commissioners noted the list of current consultations which are being reviewed by the Commission for possible response.
- 7.3.3 Commissioners commended the staff involved in preparing the Commission's response to consultation by the Home Office's Border and Immigration Agency on the implementation of new powers to prevent illegal migrant working in the UK.

Marie Anderson joined the meeting

8. Freedom of Information Act 2000

- 8.1 Marie Anderson, the Information Commissioner for Northern Ireland, gave a presentation on the work of the Information Commission's Office, its powers and examples of cases and investigations undertaken by it.

The meeting was suspended for lunch at 1.20pm.

The meeting resumed at 2.25pm

Marie Anderson left the meeting

9. Report on progress against Business Plan 2007–08 (HRC 93.7)

- 9.1 Commissioners noted progress against the Commission's Business Plan made during the first quarter of the year. Staff were commended on progress to date.

10. Revised Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (HRC 93.8)

- 10.1 Commissioners considered a draft revised Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM), which sets out the Commission's relationship with the NIO, its sponsoring department, in terms of roles and responsibilities in respect of the corporate governance and financial management. The draft revised MSFM is the result of the NIO's 'light touch review' of the Commission and discussions between Commission staff and NIO officials.

- 10.2 Commissioners approved the draft revised MSFM. Commissioners noted that the document also requires Treasury approval.

11. Any other business

- 11.1 Commissioners noted that the next meeting of the Joint Committee with the Irish Human Rights Commission is scheduled for 12 September 2007 in Belfast.

12. Dates of next meetings

- 12.1 The next meeting of the Policy Committee, comprising all Commissioners, takes place on 20 August 2007 in Temple Court, Belfast.
- 12.2 The next business meeting of the Commission will be held on 17 September 2007 in Newry.

The meeting closed at 3.00pm.

Approved: _____

Date: _____

17 September 2007