



**181st COMMISSION MEETING
TUESDAY 31 MAY 2016 AT 10:00 am
IN THE OFFICE OF
THE NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,
TEMPLE COURT, 39 NORTH STREET, BELFAST, BT1 1NA**

Present: Les Allamby, Chief Commissioner
Christine Collins left after item 8
John Corey
Milton Kerr
Alan McBride attended from item 7
Marion Reynolds left after item 8
Paul Yam

Apologies: Grainia Long

In Attendance: Virginia McVea, Director
David Russell, Deputy Director
Rhyannon Blythe, Legal Caseworker (agenda items 7 and 8)

1. Declarations of interest

1.1 David Russell declared a declaration of interest for item 7 on the agenda and left the meeting at item 7.

2. Minutes of the 179th Commission Meeting and Minutes of the 180th Commission Meeting (HRC181.1)

2.1 Commissioners discussed the minutes of the 29 February 2016 meeting. A note of paragraph 9.2 of 29 February 2016 was to be agreed following discussion between the Chief Commissioner and relevant

Commissioner. The minute 9.2 of paper HRC 179.7 was agreed.

- 2.2 The minutes of the 180th Commission meeting were discussed.
- 2.3 It was agreed that paragraph 3.3 of the previous minutes would be reworded to include reference to key submissions agreed by Commissioners between Commission meetings.
- 2.4 It was agreed that further discussion with Commissioners with concerns on paragraph 5.1 of the previous minutes would take place outside the meeting and be brought back to the next meeting.
- 2.5 Paragraph 9.1 of the previous minutes - it was agreed to record that Commissioners received an updated paper from Rhyannon Blythe.
- 2.6 Paragraph 10.1 of the previous minutes - it was agreed to reword 10.1.
Action: Chief Commissioner to consider wording of paragraphs 3.3, 5.1, 9.1 and 10.1

3. Matters arising

- 3.1 It was noted that the Commission had been notified of the decision of the UN GANHRI sub-committee on accreditation to reaccredit the NIHRC as an 'A' status National Human Rights Institution. Thanks were recorded to staff.
- 3.2 It was noted that the website has been updated and was operational.
- 3.3 Commissioners were advised that the paper referring to the Referendum on EU membership should be available on the website (paragraph 13.1 of the previous minutes refers).
Action: Director to ensure inclusion on website
- 3.4 Commissioners were advised of the CFNHRI training day at the Commission on 25 May 2016 and the success of the engagement.

- 3.5 It was agreed that the corporate planner would be provided in the next commission papers (paragraph 16.1 of the previous minutes refers).

Action: Director to ensure inclusion in next Commission papers

- 3.6 Commissioners were advised that there was as yet no further date for the meeting with ECNI (paragraph 2.3 of the previous minutes refers).

4. Chief Commissioner's report (HRC181.2)

- 4.1 An update was provided on the potential Secretariat for the joint working with IHREC. Commissioners were advised that the Charter work would be considered as would engagement with North South bodies. A discussion on issues of interest across the island followed. IHREC will progress attempts to secure funding and return to update and discuss job description.

- 4.2 Further detail on the meeting with the DFA Minister was provided to Commissioners and it was agreed to raise the issue of a secretariat with the NIO.

Action: Further paper on the secretariat to be shared with Commissioners. Chief Commissioner to raise the issue of secretariat with the NIO

- 4.3 Commissioners were advised that the process of reaccreditation was being documented for archive for future years as a guidance document.

5. Commissioners' Reports

- 5.1 Commissioner Kerr referred to recent Equality Commission training and reflected on the Programme for Government
- 5.2 Commissioner Corey advised that efforts would be made to re-engage with political representatives on the Bill of Rights over the summer months

6. Human Rights Investigation/Inquiry

- 6.1 The subject areas for a possible human rights inquiry or investigation were discussed. Two potential areas of

interest were identified, namely, mental health suicide and self-harm and homelessness.

- 6.2 It was agreed that a potential timeline (no subject area having been identified) and further scoping papers would be provided for Commissioners for consideration prior to a meeting on 17 June 2016, at which agreement was to be reached on the area to be focused on and whether an inquiry or investigation would be the most appropriate approach to take.

Action: Director to provide Commissioners with timeline and further scoping papers for consideration prior to meeting on 17 June 2016, at which agreement would be reached on the way forward.

7. Legal Assistance (HRC181.3)

David Russell left the meeting

Rhyannon Blythe, Legal Caseworker joined the meeting

- 7.1 Rhyannon Blythe provided a report on an application for legal assistance around the issue of individual funding review of medical treatments. It was agreed that the Commission would encourage the applicant to seek legal advice generally. However, the Commission would not support taking legal action. It was further agreed that the Commission would confirm that it would write to the DHSS&PS about implementation of recommendations following a recent review of the process and to the HSCB to ask about whether written reasons were given for the decision and how these were communicated. Staff were to consider guidance available from the MS Society.

David Russell rejoined the meeting

8. Termination case

- 8.1 Rhyannon Blythe provided an update on the case and on liaising with the Centre for Reproductive Rights. A table illustrating how certain cases were dealt with around the world had now been provided to Counsel.

Action: Rhyannon Blythe to make summaries available to Commissioners

8.2 Commissioners were advised that skeleton arguments from the AG and Department of Justice were due on 1 June 2016. Reference was made to further submissions from Sarah Ewart and Amnesty. Commissioners were advised that the Commission's skeleton argument was due on 8 June 2016 and the case was listed for four days from 20 June 2016. It was agreed to provide the papers for Commissioners once they were all received.
Action: Commissioners to receive the papers for the Court of Appeal Hearing

8.3 Commissioners discussed international developments relating to the termination case and reflected on the connection between Treaty submissions, reports and reporting. It was agreed that Commissioners would be notified of any change in international standards and that the Commission's position of following international standards remains unchanged.

Rhyannon Blythe left the meeting

8.4 The Chief Commissioner and Director discussed the use of emails with the Commissioners.

9. Litigants in Person Research – Advisory Group and Terms of Reference (HRC181.4)

9.1 The Chief Commissioner updated on the Litigants in Person project and advised Commissioners that staff and partner colleagues from the Ulster University would provide a presentation to the June Commission meeting. Commissioners considered a draft Terms of Reference for the advisory group which was agreed.

Action: Presentation of the Litigants in Person Project to be made at the June Commission meeting

10. Update on Community Engagement

10.1 A Community engagement report was to be provided to the next Commission meeting in June 2016.

Action: Community engagement report to be provided to the June Commission meeting

11. UN Convention Against Torture

11.1 Commissioners considered the list of issues for UNCAT.

12. Any Other Business

- 12.1 The Director requested that time in Commission meetings be allocated so as to ensure appropriate resource for corporate matters.
- 12.2 The Chief Commissioner advised that he would write to the NIO in relation to the 'A' status reaccreditation process after the end of the 28 day period. He advised that staff were raising a few minor points to be dealt with in the draft report for accuracy.
- 12.3 The Chief Commissioner requested that Commissioners reply to the Doodle poll on dates for Commissioner appraisals.

Action: Commissioners to complete appraisal doodle poll

The meeting closed at 2.55 pm.