

**NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**  
**MINUTES OF THE RE-CONVENED 41<sup>ST</sup> COMMISSION MEETING**  
**HELD AT 10 AM ON 24<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2002**  
**AT THE NIHRC OFFICES, TEMPLE COURT, BELFAST**

**Present** Brice Dickson, Chief Commissioner  
Christine Bell (*By telephone*)  
Christine Eames (*By telephone*)  
Tom Donnelly  
Tom Hadden  
Inez McCormack  
Patrick Yu

**In attendance:** Paddy Sloan, Chief Executive

**Apologies:** Margaret Ann Dinsmore  
Harold Good  
Paddy Kelly  
Chris McGimpsey  
Frank McGuinness  
Kevin McLaughlin.

Re-convened at Agenda point 7 **Committee Reports**

*Nadia Downing, Miriam Titterton and Angela Stevens joined the meeting.*

**7.3 Casework (continued)**

7.3.4 An amended memorandum of understanding with the Equality Commission will include the capacity for jointly granting assistance. It will also note the need to inform applicants of time limitations.

7.3.5 When informing telephone enquiries that the Assistant Case-worker could no longer accept new enquiries, it was made clear to those individuals that the hiatus in new enquiries was a direct result of lack of resources at the Commission which we hoped would be temporary and in fact, lasted for just one week.

7.3.6 The PSNI Force order on handling threats has not as yet been given to the Commission for consideration. The Chief Commissioner will write to the Acting Chief Constable expressing his concern.

- 7.3.7 Counsel's opinion has been sought on the draft criteria for reviewing cases and this is now with Commissioners for consideration and was considered by the Casework Committee at its meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> May.
- 7.3.8 The note of the meeting with the Coroner's Inquest Review Team implies that the Commission does not have a policy with regard to amnesty. In fact the position is that it has not as yet been discussed by the Commission. Similarly the Weston Park document has not been discussed by the Commission. Reference should also have been made to the Jordan guidelines which were discussed at the meeting.
- 7.3.9 The Chief Commissioner will consider how best to take forward a proposal to prepare advice for Commissioners on amnesties and on the implications of the Jordan decision from the European Court.
- 7.3.10 *\*Brice are you happy that this is included?*  
"Commissioners discussed how financial pressures would be handled with regard to Casework. A specific position was recorded from Inez McCormack "I object to the proposal from the Chair that financial assistance be withdrawn from the applicants in this case on the grounds of financial pressures and the controversial nature of the case as the proposal, in my view, puts us in serious breach of our duties and powers. It is my view for the Commission to decide criteria for review of Casework assistance in the context of a particular case is an abuse of our duties and powers under the NI Act. It is our duty to decide fair and transparent criteria for the exercise of our responsibilities and to change funding criteria or review a funding decision in light of a request tabled by a respondent to withdraw financial assistance or because of potential embarrassment to the Commission or the Chief Commissioner is, in my view, a completely improper exercise of our powers and duties"."

#### 7.4 Committee for Victims

- The committee is due to meet on 27 May at which time it will discuss the criteria for prioritisation of issues.
- 7.4.1 Christine Bell's humanity framework for working with state/non-state actors needs further discussion. It had been agreed some time ago that three Commissioners would take this forward and this work should be revitalised.
- 7.4.2 It was suggested that the Committee for Victims, as all committees, should gender-proof its work.
- 7.4.3 Prior to any further work on non-state abuses, it is necessary to establish basic standards on human dignity. Further advice to be provided to the Committee for Victims.

Christine Bell, Brice Dickson, Tom Hadden will liaise with Ciarán and Denise on this.

- 7.4.4 A programme of work for this committee was discussed briefly in the context of current unfinished business. The Chief Executive pointed out that there is no dedicated budget allocated to the Victims' Committee and therefore any new work requires to be planned and costed prior to commitments being made.

7.5 Development Workers' Report

This report was noted.

7.6 Education Committee Report

- 7.6.1 Commissioners agreed to accept, when formally offered, £8,000 from the Department of Education to prepare materials for use in the Bill of Rights for Schools project. This will become a priority for the education workload over the next three months.
- 7.6.2 Mark Kelly's report on the monitoring of the Human Rights training of PSNI should be with the Commission very soon. PSNI have asked for two months to comment on the report.
- 7.6.3 The leaflet outlining the Human Rights issues in the Burns Review has attracted significant publicity and has been widely circulated.
- 7.6.4 The Chief Commissioner spoke with the Principals of Grove and Currie Primary Schools. There was no proposal that the NIHRC become involved and the Principals did not want any public statement to be issued. It was proposed that the Chief Commissioner discuss his meetings with the Ministers, Jane Kennedy and Martin McGuinness with the two Principals. This will be considered by the Chief Commissioner and the Education Committee.
- 7.6.5 Dr Tony Gallagher will come to the Commission on 10<sup>th</sup> June but can only attend in the morning. He will therefore meet with the Education Committee at 11.00 o'clock and any other Commissioners are welcome to join that meeting. The next Commission meeting will commence at 1.00pm and complete by 6.00 pm.
- 7.6.6 Committee minutes will not be presented to the Commission until they have been agreed by the respective committees.
- 7.7 Information Workers Report
- 7.7.1 Good coverage of the Human Rights Human Wrongs publication was noted as was a good response to the "In our Care" Juvenile Justice Report.

- 7.7.2 It was agreed that the Chief Executive would prepare an options paper on how to take forward a communications strategy for the Commission.
- 7.7.3 Photographs and bio-pics of new Commissioners need to go on the web-site as a priority. Commissioners are therefore urged to make this information available to Nadia as soon as possible.
- 7.7.4 There will be a discussion of a communication strategy and any conditions attaching to the NIO funding at the next Commission meeting.

## 7.8 Investigations and Research

- 7.8.1 It was agreed that the Chief Executive would meet with Help the Aged to discuss the costings of the project and to identify options for securing the second £7,500 to complete this work. Funding for the first half only of the project was given by the NIO last year.
- 7.8.2 Research into transgender and transsexual issues will be produced separately. The Commission's position on the Single Equality Bill on how sexual orientation is dealt with needs to be confirmed. This will be considered at the next Commission meeting.
- 7.8.3 It was proposed that the Commission's work on plastic baton rounds should focus on the Army and let the Police Ombudsman monitor Police use of plastic baton rounds. It was agreed that this would be further explored not as a joint project but to work in parallel and coordinate the research. The Chief Commissioner will ask to meet the Commanding Officer in Belfast to discuss the use of plastic baton rounds and military accountability.

*At 11.45 am Christine Eames had to leave the meeting which then became inquorate.*

*The meeting reverted to an informal discussion on the Bill of Rights strategy for Phase 3.*

*At 12.30pm Harold Good arrived and the meeting became quorate.*

## 8.0 Report on Policing Developments

The report was noted.

## 9.0 Bill of Rights

This discussion was deferred in light of the intended debate on Phase 3 to be undertaken later in the day.

*At 12.45pm staff left the meeting.*

**10.0 Policy on Openness**

- 10.1 A memo from Inez McCormack was discussed, as was the proposed policy from the Chief Commissioner and the comments attached from the Chief Executive. It was agreed that the proposed policy be adopted for points 1 to 5 and that points 6 and 7 be deleted. These to be replaced by the following:

*The Commission will hold open meetings in Northern Ireland on human rights issues and will undertake practical outreach measures to facilitate access to those discussions.*

- 10.2 The Chief Executive will talk individually to each Commissioner on what practical steps might be taken to facilitate their attendance at Commission meetings.

**11.0 The meeting closed at 1.00pm.**