



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE 79TH COMMISSION MEETING

HELD ON MONDAY 8 AUGUST 2005 AT 10:30AM AT
THE NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,
TEMPLE COURT, 39 NORTH ST, BELFAST, BT1 1NA

Present: Christine Eames (Acting Chairperson)
Kevin McLaughlin (by telephone)

In attendance: Paddy Sloan, Chief Executive
Don Leeson, Head of Corporate Services
Ciarán Ó Maoláin, Head of Legal Services, Policy and
Research
Peter O'Neill, Head of Information, Education and
Development

1. Minutes of the 78th meeting (HRC 79.1)

- 1.1 The minutes of the 78th Commission meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

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2. Matters arising

- 2.1 Kevin McLaughlin was unable to attend the June meeting of the 'Promoting Social Inclusion' (PSI) working group on disability, on which he represents the Commission (paragraph 2.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). The next meeting is scheduled for 28 September 2005. Kevin will give feedback on the working group's discussions, as well as an update on the PSI project more generally, to the October Commission meeting.

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- 2.2 The Commission, the Northern Ireland Commission for Children and Young People and the Equality Commission met to discuss the response of statutory bodies to the needs of Travellers generally, and the provision of basic amenities at the Monagh Road site in Belfast in particular (paragraph 3.7 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). OFMDFM has suggested that each of the Commissions might write to the Housing Executive about concerns in respect of access by Travellers to minimum standards of sanitation and power. While the Housing Executive has already responded positively to correspondence from the Equality Commission, it was agreed that the Commission should also write to reinforce the issues and stress the need to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. The Commission will continue to monitor the situation.
- 2.3 The Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland cancelled its briefing on parades, which was scheduled for 28 June 2005 (paragraph 4.3 of the minutes of the last meeting refers).
- 2.4 The report on the conditions of women prisoners, 'The Hurt Inside', has been printed (paragraph 5.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers) and will be launched at a conference the Commission is planning on the issue on 12 October 2005.
- 2.5 The pace of Government proposals for the introduction of biometric identity cards and an accompanying national identity register has slowed (paragraph 6.2 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). It was agreed, therefore, that there is no immediate imperative for the Commission to develop its own policy perspective on the issue.
- 2.6 It was agreed that consideration of the Commission's approach to conflict intervention is a longer term issue and should wait until the new Commissioners are in post (paragraph 11.1 of the minutes of the last meeting refers). In the meantime, the Institute for Conflict Resolution has received funding from the Community Relations Council for a project on human rights and conflict resolution, which will involve the Commission.

The Commission meeting was suspended at 11am for consideration by the Casework Committee of an emergency application for funding.

The Commission meeting resumed at 11:30am.

3. Report from the Chief Executive (HRC 79.2)

- 3.1 The Chief Executive reported on meetings between the Chief Commissioner Designate and Peter Hain MP, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, on 19 July 2005 and between the current Commissioners and David Hanson MP, Minister of State for Northern Ireland, on 25 July 2005. Both the Secretary of State and the Minister are keen to visit the Commission's offices and meet all of the Commissioners later in the year.
- 3.2 The Government is considering developing a consultation document on revised powers for the Commission, possibly in the autumn. It might be possible to coincide the launch of the consultation document with the Minister's visit to the Commission.
- 3.3 Commissioners approved proposals for a residential event for staff on 18/19 August 2005 to develop a first draft of the Commission's Strategic Plan for 2006–09.
- 3.5 A prior commitment means that the Chief Commissioner is unable to accept an invitation to attend a meeting of the British/Irish Association on 9–11 September 2005 in Cambridge. Commissioners agreed that the Chief Executive should represent the Commission.
- 3.6 The Commission's responses to a request made under the Freedom of Information Act and two Parliamentary Questions were noted by Commissioners.

4. Commission accounts (HRC 79.3)

- 4.1 Following advice from the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Commission's financial statements for 2003–04 and 2004–05 required amendment in respect of pension disclosures. The amended financial statements were approved by Commissioners at a specially convened meeting on 28 July 2005. Commissioners noted a paper explaining the reasons for the amendments.

5. Briefing papers for incoming Commissioners (HRC 79.4)

- 5.1 An induction programme for the new Commissioners who are due to take up office in September 2005 is being developed. As part of this, a series of briefing papers on various aspects of the work of the Commission are planned. The current Commissioners endorsed the proposed topics for the briefing papers.

6. Staff, Committee and Working Group Reports

6.1 Corporate Services (HRC 79.5)

- 6.1.1 The body of the report was noted, included the Commission's current financial position.
- 6.1.2 Commissioners approved a proposal to join the Government Procurement Card scheme to enable the Commission to book travel and accommodation more cheaply and pay invoices more efficiently.
- 6.1.3 Commissioners approved expenditure on proposed signage at the front of the Commission's building.
- 6.1.4 Commissioners were informed of vandalism to a glass door at the front of the Commission's building and noted that work to install protective security shutters is pending planning permission.

6.2 Information, Education and Development (HRC 79.6)

- 6.2.1 The body of the report was noted.
- 6.2.2 Commissioners noted the significant and continuing political and media attention attracted by the appointments of the new Chief Commissioner and Commissioners. This higher profile has led, in part, to an increase in requests for training and presentations on human rights issues and information on the work of the Commission more generally.

6.3 Legal Services, Research and Policy (HRC 79.7)

- 6.3.1 The body of the report was noted.

- 6.3.2 Work on the Migrant Workers' Handbook is at an advanced stage. The development of this project has benefited from the input of an advice group, which specialises in migrants' rights. Commissioners agreed to consider crediting the group as a co-author of the handbook.
 - 6.3.3 Commissioners are concerned at the apparent increase in race hate crimes. It was agreed that race issues should be a focus of the Commission's next meeting with the Equality Commission. Furthermore, action on hate crimes will be raised at the next meeting of the Black and Minority Ethnic Forum. In the meantime, it was agreed that the Commission should write to OFMDFM on how the Race Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland might be improved.
 - 6.3.4 With Nazia Latif due to go on maternity leave in September 2005, it was agreed to review the resourcing of the Commission's research into immigration services.
 - 6.3.5 Commissioners agreed to proposals to respond to a number of consultation documents listed in the report. It was also agreed to review the decision not to respond to the draft Older People's Health and Well Being Strategy 2005–2015.
- 6.4 **Casework Committee minutes (HRC 79.8)**
- 6.4.1 The minutes of the Casework Committee meetings held on 6 June and 4 July 2005, and those of Emergency Casework Committees held on 21 and 27 June 2005, were noted.

7. Any other business

- 7.1 Commissioners agreed to write to Bob Collins to congratulate him on his recent appointment as Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission and to Dame Joan Harbison, the outgoing Chief Commissioner, to pass on their appreciation for her work.

7.2 A progress report from the 6th session of the United Nations' Ad Hoc Committee developing a convention on disability, and a report on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, were tabled at the meeting.

8. Next meeting

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8.1 The next meeting of the Commission will be held on 16 September 2005 at 10.30am in Temple Court.

The meeting closed at 1pm.

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Date: 16 September 2005