



16 December 2019

**219th COMMISSION MEETING
IN THE OFFICE OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, TEMPLE
COURT, 39 NORTH STREET, BELFAST, BT1
1NA**

Present: Les Allamby, Chief Commissioner
Helen Ferguson
Helena Macormac
John McCallister (Agenda items 6-12)
Eddie Rooney
Graham Shields

In attendance: David Russell, Chief Executive
Lorraine Hamill, Director (Finance, Personnel and
Corporate Affairs)
Julie Stella, Boardroom Apprentice
Claire Martin, Director (Communications, Information
and Education, Public and Political Affairs) (Agenda
items 8-12)
Hannah Russell, Director (Legal, Research and
Investigations, and Advice to Government) (Agenda
items 9-12)
Sara Donnelly-Clegg, Senior Legal and Research Officer
(Agenda item 10)

1. Apologies and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Commissioner Paul Mageean.
- 1.2 There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of the 218th Commission meeting

- 2.1 The Minutes of the 218th Commission meeting held on 25 November 2019 were agreed as an accurate record.

Action: 218th Commission minutes to be uploaded to Commission website

- 2.2 It was noted that the Equality Commission NI (ECNI) were awaiting confirmation of Belfast City Hall as the venue for the joint event on 26 February 2020 to mark both Commissions 20th anniversaries (item 2.4 of the previous meeting refers).
- 2.3 It was noted that although the Commission had received an email from the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) finance department on its budget, a formal letter confirming the budget for 2019/20 had still not been received (item 5.3 of the previous meeting refers).
- 2.4 The issue was raised at the Commission's Audit and Risk Management Committee meeting on 12 December 2019 (item 5.4 of the previous meeting refers). Unfortunately, the NIO representative was unable to attend the meeting. The concerns were noted by the internal and external auditors.
- 2.5 Commissioners were updated on the Joint Committee research into birthright and citizenship after Brexit. It was noted that the Citizenship event would be taking place on 16 January 2020 (item 9.1 of the previous meeting refers).

3. Chief Commissioner's Report

3.1 The Chief Commissioner reported on meetings and events he had attended since the last Commission meeting. These included:

- Joint ECNI/NIHRC meeting
- Speech to Abortion Law Reform Conference, Alliance for Choice
- Meeting with Emma D'Souza
- Meeting with Eilis McDaniel, Department of Health and Declan McGeown, Department of Justice re: creation of a single campus/integration of Lakewood and Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centres
- Attendance at Law Centre Annual Lecture, Hazel Genn
- Meeting of Regulation and Oversight Forum
- Speech to Westcourt Centre – panel discussion on homelessness as part of homeless awareness week
- Speech at Civil Justice Council Annual Forum in London
- Meeting with researchers from Ulster University on gender budgeting
- Attendance at the NI Human Rights Consortium – Bill of Rights in a Time of Constitutional Change

3.2 The Chief Commissioner also reported on upcoming meetings and events that he would be attending. These included:

- Launch of the Commission's Annual Statement at Stormont
- Joint meeting of the four National Human Rights Institutions and ECNI

3.3 It was noted that the response to the NIO consultation on abortion law reform would be submitted no later than 17 December 2019.

4. Commissioners' Reports

4.1 Commissioner Ferguson provided an update on the recent Audit and Risk Management Committee meeting, including:

- The current uncertainty regarding the Commission's budget
 - Difficulties recruiting
 - Brexit and the Dedicated Mechanism
 - Internal and external audit
 - GDPR
 - Freedom of Information requests
- 4.2 The Commissioners who attended the joint meeting with ECNI provided an update from that meeting.
- 4.3 Commissioner Macormac reported on her and Commissioner McCallister's attendance at the British Irish Intergovernmental Association reception.

5. Finance Report

- 5.1 The Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) presented the financial report for November 2019 and provided details on any variances in budget.
- 5.2 It was noted that formal notification of the 2019/20 budget had not yet been received from the NIO but that the financial report had been amended to reflect any increase in budget in-year.

6. Update on Premises, Staffing and Review

• Premises

- 6.1 The Chief Executive provided an update on the proposed premises move.
- 6.2 It was hoped that Ministerial approval for the new premises would be received in January 2020.
- 6.3 The Crown Solicitor's Office had been instructed to commence negotiations on the new lease and to negotiate with the current landlord any compensation due on the current lease.

It was noted that sign-off of any new lease would not take place until Ministerial approval had been granted.

- 6.4 It was estimated that lease negotiations would take at least 8 weeks and that 12 weeks would be required for fit-out of the new premises, which would take us to the end of May 2020, allowing for holidays etc. It was noted that the current lease ends on 30 June 2020.

- **Staffing**

- 6.5 Staffing was discussed in a closed meeting.

- **Review**

- 6.6 It was noted that the suggested amendments for the terms of reference for the review had been accepted by the NIO and the document was currently with the Secretary of State for final sign-off.

7. Risk Register

- 7.1 The Director (Finance, Personnel and Corporate Affairs) presented the risk register for November 2019 and highlighted the risks that had changed since the previous meeting.
- 7.2 It was noted that the current rating for litigation and staffing capacity was critical, because of budget and recruiting difficulties.

8. Quarterly Report against the Business Plan

- 8.1 It was noted that as the Commission had still not received formal notification of its budget for 2019-20 the cash budget for the business plan objectives was estimated and subject to change.

- 8.2 Commissioners noted that the substantial majority of Business Plan Objectives had been or were due to be met for 2019-20. A small number were not going to be met due to resource constraints and were flagged as red accordingly.
- 8.3 Commissioners congratulated staff on their commitment to ensure that the Business Plan objectives were being met, given the financial constraints and the reduced size of the staff team.

9. Draft Business Plan 2020-2021

9.1 Commissioners considered the draft Business Plan 2020-2021. A number of suggestions were made and agreed by Commissioners.

9.2 It was agreed that the Chief Executive would update the draft taking into account comments from Commissioners.

Action: Chief Executive to update the Draft Business Plan 2020-2021

9.3 A revised version would be brought back to the Commission in January or February 2020 for final consideration.

Action: Revised version of the Draft Business Plan 2020-2021 to be presented by at the latest the February 2020 Commission meeting

10. Legal Report

10.1 Commissioners were provided with an update on the ongoing legal cases, including:

the NM case on access to pension - a second date for the strike out application is listed on 6 January 2020;

the unspent conviction case - the pre-action protocol response was received on 13 December 2019 and Junior Counsel has been briefed;

the case for leave for MC will take place on 3 February 2020.

10.2 Commissioners noted that the Senior Legal and Research Officer would be leaving the Commission on 20 December 2019 for a new job. Commissioners expressed their thanks and wished her well in her new role.

11. Communications Report

11.1 Commissioners were updated on events that had taken place and plans for the Annual Statement launch on 17 December 2019.

11.2 Forthcoming events that were highlighted included the joint event with ECNI in February 2020 and the Annual Lecture in March 2020.

11.3 Commissioners noted the Digital Communications Update and the Press Clippings for November/December 2019.

12. Any other business

12.1 There was nothing to report.

The meeting closed at 2.45 pm.