

Minutes  
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission  
48<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Plenary Meeting  
20 April 2021

**Present:**

- Sinéad Gibney, Chief Commissioner (SG)
- Heydi Foster Breslin (HFB)
- Jim Clarken (JC)
- Dr Frank Conaty (FC)
- Prof Caroline Fennell (CF)
- Michael Finucane (MF)
- Adam Harris (AH)
- Prof Kathleen Lynch (KL)
- Salome Mbugua (SM)
- Dr Rosaleen McDonagh (RMcD)
- Sunniva McDonagh SC (SMcD)
- Dr Lucy Michael (LM)
- Prof Ray Murphy (RM)
- Colm O'Dwyer SC (COD)

**Apologies:**

- Tony Geoghegan (TG)

**In attendance:**

- Laurence Bond, Director (LB)
- John Maher, Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee (JM - Agenda Item 2.1c)
- Michael O' Neill, Head of Legal (MON), Items 5.1, 7.1
- Jean O'Mahony, Head of Strategic Engagement (JOM) - Agenda Item 8.1
- Brian Dawson, Communications Manager (BD) - Agenda Item 8.1
- Niall Kelly, Head of Corporate Services (NK) - Item 9.1
- Muireann Ní Thuairisg, Minute Taker

The 48<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Plenary Meeting of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission took place between 9:30am-12.00pm and 2.00pm-4:35pm on 20 April 2021 by video conference.

## 1.1 Apologies, Quorum and Declaration of Interest

Apologies were noted from TG and the meeting was quorate. MF declared an interest in relation to Item 5.1 and SMcD, HFB and AH declared an interest in relation to Item 10.1. In respect of Items 6.1 and 8.1, CF noted that she is Independent Chair of the Anti-Racism Committee.

## 1.2 Closed session for Members

It was agreed that the draft Code of Conduct will be finalised taking account of members' comments. A survey will issue to Commissioners on (a) meeting format and (b) induction follow up.

### 1.3(a) Draft Minutes - 47<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Plenary Meeting – 9 March 2021

The draft minutes of the 47<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Plenary meeting held on 9 March 2021, were approved, proposed by RM and seconded by KL.

### 1.3 (b) Draft Minutes - Extraordinary Meeting – 7 April 2021

The draft minutes of an extraordinary meeting held on 7 April 2021, were approved, proposed by HFB and seconded by KL.

## 1.4 Matters arising, not otherwise dealt with on the Agenda

There were no matters arising.

## 1.5 Chief Commissioner Update

The Chief Commissioner's report was taken as read.

In response to queries SG updated briefed members on an episode she recorded for the Pol-Soc podcast where she discussed the work of the Commission. LM will feature on a later episode speaking on the treaty monitoring process.

Members noted the valuable listening sessions with representatives of communities of African descent, which many had attended. Future actions on anti-racism would be considered under Agenda Item 6.1. Members noted that the full attendance was not accurately recorded in the Chief Commissioner report. The attendance was as follows:

- Session 1 – SG (chair), LM (breakout chair), CF, TG, AH, KL, SMcD, RMcD, COD
- Session 2 – SG (chair), HFB (breakout chair), SM, LM, KL, JC

Members noted the strong media engagement over the last period.

On key correspondence it was noted that SG intends to schedule an introductory meeting with the CEO of HIQA. It was agreed to follow up the HIQA correspondence and to circulate the HIQA regulatory reform paper for discussion at a future plenary meeting.

It was agreed to discuss the response from the Chair of GSOC, received on 26 January under Agenda Item 6.1.

## 2.1 Committee Updates

### a. Casework Committee

An update note on the most recent meeting of the Casework Committee on 12 April 2021 was taken as read. [REDACTED]

### b. Section 35 Inquiry Working Group

An update note on the most recent meeting of the Working Group on 8 April 2021 was taken as read. The revised Process Map will be circulated to members for their information.

### c. Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)

John Maher (JM), Chair of the ARC joined the meeting and gave an update on the meetings held on 3 March and 29 March.

The special meeting of 29 March reviewed the 2020 Appropriation Accounts and advised the Accounting Officer who, in accordance with statutory provisions, has signed and submitted the Appropriation Account to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General by 31 March.

The underspend on pay in 2020 and in earlier years was noted. It was agreed that the executive will prepare a note for an upcoming plenary meeting on staffing expenditure over the lifetime of the Commission

The ARC meeting of 3 March considered 2 internal audit reports. On the recommendation of the Accounting officer who was in attendance at this meeting, these reports were reverted to the executive for further work with the final reports to come to the next ARC. The meeting had also received updated risk register but had asked to executive to resubmit to the next ARC as there were drafting and proofing errors in the document.

The Commission noted the importance of assurance that risk is being managed appropriately and it was agreed to discuss the risk register at the next plenary meeting.

The minutes of ARC meetings will be provided on the Commission portal.

It was suggested the Commission could schedule a dedicated discussion on the roles of ARC, the Director (as Accounting Officer), and the Commission, in relation to finance and risk.

### d. Worker Employer Advisory Committee



An update note on the most recent meeting of the Worker Employer Advisory Committee held on 30 March was taken as read.

SG reported that TG had asked that the issue of broader work on disaggregated data be considered. It was noted that WEAC and workplace issues need to be looked at in our strategy process.

### 3.1 Selection Process

A memo outlining a proposed process for the selection of nominations to external bodies previously circulated to members was discussed.

SG will revise the paper to incorporate comments from members.

### 4.1 Strategic Planning

SG had circulated a presentation outlining the planning process for development of the Commission's next Strategic Statement 2022 – 2024. Members welcomed the presentation which included an overview and timeline of what is proposed, the relevant statutory obligations and the objectives of the strategic planning process; expected workload for the Commission; and a number of other matters to consider. In the discussion, a number of matters on approach to consultation were emphasised, noting the provisions in the IHREC Act and the need to hear from critical voices, and the importance of engaging with the community and voluntary sector. The importance of the IHREC legislation as a driver was noted and the value of horizon scanning over a longer time period was emphasised.

A dedicated Commission session will be organised shortly. The Commission sub committees and Advisory Committees will also play a key role in assisting the planning process.

### 5.1 [REDACTED]

MF recused himself from the meeting.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

MF re-joined the meeting.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]



## 6.1 Anti-Racism Discussion Follow-Up

The Commission previously discussed a proposal paper on an appropriate Commission response to Anti-Racism and two listening sessions were subsequently organised to engage with communities of people of African descent.

The Chair of GSOC responded to a letter from the Commission on 29 January. Members suggested the Commission should write again to the GSOC Chair to emphasise the importance of Article 2 compliance. The importance of not prejudicing any future actions was noted. Following discussion it was agreed a letter to GSOC will be drafted and circulated to members.

The policy and research discussion will be tabled at the next Policy and Research Committee meeting.

## 7.1 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## 8.1 Presentation on the Impact of the 2021 Public Awareness Campaign on Combatting Racism

JOM and BD gave a presentation on the impact of the 2021 Public Awareness Campaign on Combatting Racism.

The presentation covered the campaign rollout; Red C attitudinal research results; campaign performance metrics; responses by sector and key learnings.

The campaign resonated with a broad range of organisations and a number of public bodies have requested the use of the materials as a staff training aid. There was cross-party political support for campaign and it received wide support from civil society organisations.

It was noted that the role of public awareness campaigns and their impact could be considered in more depth in the Commission strategy planning discussions.

## 9.1 Director's Report and Finance Report

The Director's Report and Finance report was taken as read.



An advisory paper to the Interdepartmental Group on the Government's planned development of a 'Restorative Recognition Scheme for former residents of Mother and Baby Homes and County Homes' was submitted to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The Department has invited the Commission to attend a meeting of the Restorative Recognition Scheme Inter Departmental Group on 29 April.

The new Anti-Human Trafficking unit has been set up with 3 staff members and as agreed previously, the Head of the Team will brief members at the next plenary meeting.

Members wished [REDACTED] well in her move from IHREC to another position and noted their appreciation for her enormous contribution to the work of the Commission over the years.

There will be further discussion of the Commissions research and international reporting at the next Policy and Research Committee which is provisionally scheduled for 17 May.

#### 10.1 [REDACTED]

AH and HFB recused themselves from the meeting.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

#### 11.1 Any Other Business

The Department of Justice has written to the Commission requesting a nominee to sit on a Working Group on the expungement of convictions of gay men for certain qualifying offences.

It was agreed to participate in the working group and once the selection process is agreed, members will have the opportunity to express an interest in the role.

The meeting concluded at 4:35pm.

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sinéad Gibney  
Chief Commissioner

Date: 1 June 2021