



Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

Minutes

Extraordinary Commission Meeting

26 January 2024 | 10:00am – 12:15pm

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 16-22 Green St., Dublin 7 & Online

Present:

- Sinéad Gibney, Chief Commissioner (SG)
- Noeline Blackwell (NB)
- Michael Finucane (MF)
- Dr Andrew Forde (AF) – remotely
- Caoilfhionn Gallagher, KC, (CG) – remotely
- Prof Kathleen Lynch (KL) – remotely
- Dr Lucy Michael (LM)
- Dr Rosaleen McDonagh (RMD) – remotely
- Prof Ray Murphy (RM) – remotely
- Eoin Ronayne (ER)
- Sunniva McDonagh, SC, (SMD) – remotely
- Prof Colin Harvey (CH) – remotely
- Dr Salome Mbugua (SM) – remotely

Apologies:

- Jim Clarken (JC)
- Adam Harris (AH)

In attendance:

- Deirdre Malone, Director (DM)
- Anthony Bates (minute-taker)

An extraordinary meeting of the Commission took place on 26 January 2024 from 10:00am – 12:15pm in the IHREC offices and online.

Following the previous extraordinary meeting, the Commission met to further discuss arrangements to be made on foot of SG's announcement that she intends to resign as Chief Commissioner in March.

1.1 Apologies, Quorum and Declaration of Interest

Apologies were noted from JC and AH. The meeting was quorate. It was agreed that the Chief Commissioner would not chair the remainder of the meeting and the Commission nominated MF as chair who accepted.

2.1 Protocol for Chief Commissioner until 15 March

A memo drafted by the Chief Commissioner to the Commission had been circulated in advance.

DM re-stated her position from the previous Extraordinary meeting that no protocol can satisfactorily address the existence of perceived conflict of interest in the current context. In light of that position, SG had agreed to draft the proposal.

As set out in the memo, it is proposed that a shadow member be identified for liaison with DM and SG regarding any potential conflicts of interest that might arise in addition to other safeguards in place, such as SG's recusal from all legal matters, media and public engagements. The shadow member would not be a decision maker but would instead raise any concerns arising with the wider Commission at plenary. Also proposed is that correspondence would be responded to by the Office of the Director. SG would continue to chair plenary meetings but would step aside if a particular item gives rise to any perceived conflict of interest. Stakeholder management would continue to be handled by SG who would also develop handover materials for the next Chief Commissioner.

Members discussed concerns about the potential for perceived conflicts of interest to arise in respect of stakeholder engagement, including attendance at non-public events. It was noted that the Chief Commissioner attended the Leadership Forum of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions 22-24 January.

Members agreed by a majority that SG would not chair a number of specific items due for consideration at the upcoming Plenary meeting on 1 February 2024. It was agreed that LM would chair these items.

The Commission agreed to nominate LM and RMD to act as shadow members. It was noted the Office of the Director will record any conflicts of interest arising in line with the conflict of interest policy.

The Commission agreed that the minutes of today's meeting should be expedited and sent to members along with minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of 19 January 2024.

SG informed members that she proposes bringing forward the date of her resignation by two weeks to 29 February.

Any other business

DM informed the Commission about recent press queries and an FOI request regarding the Chief Commissioner's resignation. It was agreed that a response would be developed with the Head of Strategic Engagement and that this would outline developments in terms of governance arrangements to the querists. The details of the response will be circulated to members.



**Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas**
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

Interim arrangements for when SG's resignation takes effect will be discussed at the upcoming plenary meeting.

Members thanked DM and SG for their work in respect of this matter.

The meeting closed at 12:15.