



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

Business Plan 2022-23

April 2022

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Foreword

This year's business plan aligns with the Commission's new strategic objectives for 2022-25. We will be tested operationally and financially over the next period to deliver against our broad mandate as resources become increasingly limited. Difficult choices have already been made when preparing this plan to decide what issues we should prioritise. Even more difficult decisions will have to be made in the next twelve months as the Commission is forced to choose which requests for advice and assistance we can respond to, and which we unfortunately will have to refuse due to constraints. When making these choices our primary focus will be driven by the aim of seeking to maximise impact, using the Commission's powers strategically and efficiently, where we can add value; and, to support those issues which might benefit the most from our intervention.

The Commission has two general duties. First, to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness in Northern Ireland of law and practice relating to the protection of human rights. This includes our advisory, legal and investigatory functions. Second, to promote understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights in Northern Ireland. This includes our engagement activities and education function. Over the next period we intend to fulfil the Commission's mandate by concentrating on three priorities – the impact of poverty on quality of living, victim's rights and access to justice. These are areas of substantive public interest, where we believe the Commission can make a real and lasting difference to benefit everyone living here.

As Northern Ireland emerges from the pandemic and faces into the increasing cost of living crisis, the Commission will redouble our efforts to make significant and lasting changes in relevant areas of law, policy and practice. This will involve both assisting and challenging government to raise the bar of human rights protections. We also recognise the importance of listening to those people who have a first-hand experience of the very issues we want to resolve. The Commission will continue to make a concerted effort to be a source of accessible expert advice and guidance that engages with those whose rights are being directly affected, and responds to their requests for assistance.



Dr David Russell
Chief Executive

Our vision

A society with human rights values and standards at its heart to achieve fairness, peace and justice.

Our mission

To protect and promote the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland.

Who we are

The Commission was established as a result of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. Our governing legislation is the Northern Ireland Act 1998, as amended by the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 and the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020.

The Commission is a National Human Rights Institution with A status accreditation from the United Nations. This recognition means that the organisation operates independently in full accordance with the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 48/134 (the Paris Principles) reporting to UN treaty bodies and exercising speaking rights before the UN Human Rights Council.

The Commission is also a non-departmental public body and receives grant-in-aid from the United Kingdom government through the Northern Ireland Office. We report to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

There are seven Commissioners (a full time Chief Commissioner and six part-time Commissioners – one of which is currently vacant) appointed by the Secretary of State. As far as practicable, the Commissioners, as a group, is representative of the community in Northern Ireland.

Chief Commissioner: Alyson Kilpatrick

Commissioners: Helen Henderson
Jonathan Kearney
David Lavery CB
Eddie Rooney
Stephen White OBE

Our principles:

Independence	We value and protect our independence, we act professionally and with integrity, and we make all our decisions based on objective evidence.
Participation	We involve people in the strategy for and implementation of decisions that affect their human rights. We empower people to participate to the fullest extent possible.
Effectiveness	We ensure that human rights protection is built into all law and practice so that it is guaranteed for everyone and meaningful remedies are available.
Inclusion	We will oppose any form of discrimination or prejudice. Any group of people who face discrimination will be supported.
Partnership	We will work to achieve the greatest impact through partnership with the community and other stakeholders.

Our strategic objectives 2022-25:

- 1.To keep under review law and practice and advise government for the benefit of everyone across Northern Ireland.
- 2.To ensure that rights protection is not diminished as a result of the United Kingdom having left the European Union; and, where required, ensure that Northern Ireland keeps pace with changes in European Union equality laws.
- 3.To build a society in which human rights are better understood, protected and valued, making a positive impact upon the delivery of services.
- 4.To work in partnership with other human rights and equality bodies to ensure the maximisation of human rights protection.
- 5.To be a learning organisation, improving our skills to achieve the greatest impact.

Our priorities

We have identified a number of themes that require closer attention. In the course of achieving our strategic objectives we will pay particular attention to the following:

Impact of poverty on quality of living

This will include, in particular:

- (i) Housing and homelessness;
- (ii) Health and social provision.

Victims' Rights

This will include in particular:

- (i) Victims of domestic and sexual violence;
- (ii) Legacy cases.

Access to justice

This will include, in particular:

- (i) Rule of law;
- (ii) Discrimination and equality.

How we will achieve our strategic objectives

This Business Plan sets out the Commission's work for the year April 2022 to the end of March 2023. It is based on five objectives agreed in our Strategic Plan 2022-25 and the delivery of three thematic priorities – impact of poverty on quality of living; victims' rights and access to justice. Each priority is one of substantive public interest, where we believe a real and lasting impact can be made to benefit the lives of people in Northern Ireland.

Objective 1: To keep under review law and practice and advise government for the benefit of everyone across Northern Ireland.

(i) We will advise the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Executive of legislative and other measures which ought to be taken to protect human rights upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate.

This will include:

- Commitments arising from the New Decade New Approach Agreement, including any legislation introduced in respect of Irish language and Ulster Scots language, culture and heritage;
- Legislation to address the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict;
- Measures to give effect to commitments under the NI (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, including the provision of abortion services and Relationship and Sexuality Education.

(ii) We will advise the Northern Ireland Assembly on whether legislative Bills are compatible with human rights upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate, including when advice is requested following a Petition of Concern.

- Screen all legislation introduced into the NI Assembly and provide advice upon request or where necessary. Priority will be given to those issues which align with the Commission's 2022-25 Strategic Priorities;
- Engage with Committee inquiries upon request or where necessary. Priority will be given to those Bills which align with the Commission's 2022-25 Strategic Priorities.

(iii) We will advise the Westminster Parliament on whether legislative Bills affecting Northern Ireland are compatible with human rights upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate, and engage with relevant United Kingdom government departments.

- Screen legislation, subject to resources, introduced into the Westminster Parliament and provide advice on those issues affecting human rights in Northern Ireland. Priority will be given to those Bills and Committee inquiries which align with the Commission’s 2022-25 Strategic Priorities.
- (iv) We will advise public authorities by responding to consultations and policy reviews when the Commission can add value and when considered necessary or expedient to do so.
- This will include advice to government departments (Northern Ireland and, where appropriate Westminster) and other public authorities, subject to resources, and may involve representation on reference and working groups. Priority will be given to those consultations and requests which align with the Commission’s 2022-25 Strategic Priorities.
- (v) We will undertake, contract or provide financial or other assistance for research; and, conduct investigations that the Commission considers necessary or expedient.
- Produce and publish a report on the provision of education on sexual and reproductive health in Northern Ireland in accordance with the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 and the recommendations in the 2018 CEDAW inquiry report Paragraph 86 (d) to “Make age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights a compulsory component of curriculum for adolescents, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion, and monitor its implementation”;
 - Publish a landscape review on the prevention of drug addiction and substance abuse; and following this,
 - Conduct a human rights analysis on the prevention of drug addiction and substance abuse, subject to resources;
 - Contract an impact assessment on the cumulative impact on the allocation of public resources to address homelessness and the right to shelter and housing.
- (vi) We will monitor and report on law and practice that impacts upon the protection of human rights in Northern Ireland. This will include the production of an Annual Statement and engagement with the United Nations and Council of Europe treaty examination processes and the United Nations Human Rights Council.
- Publish and launch the Annual Statement 2023 on Human Rights in association with the Office of the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly;

- Engage with the monitoring visit by the Advisory Committee on the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities;
- Submit a parallel report and engage with the Universal Periodic Review of the United Kingdom by the United Nations Human Rights Council;
- Submit a parallel report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Child and engage with pre-sessional working group and examination;
- Submit a parallel report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- Submit a response to the United Nations Committee against Torture on the list of issues for the Convention against Torture;
- Submit a response to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the list of issues for the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and engage with the pre-sessional working group;
- Engage with the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in respect of its ongoing supervision of judgements relating to Northern Ireland;
- Engage with the United Nations Human Rights Council on issues relevant to Northern Ireland, in conjunction with the other United Kingdom National Human Rights Institutions.

Objective 2: To ensure that rights protection is not diminished as a result of the United Kingdom having left the European Union; and, where required, ensure that Northern Ireland keeps pace with changes in European Union equality laws.

- (i) We will monitor and report on law and practice impacting upon this priority objective by, for example, Annual Statements with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.
- Publish and publicly launch, jointly with Equality Commission for Northern Ireland the first Annual Statement on the implementation of Protocol Article 2;
 - Collaborate with Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission on the first annual report on the island of Ireland dimension to Article 2;
 - Further develop capacity to monitor and screen primary and subordinate legislation and relevant European Union legislative and policy developments.
- (ii) We will advise the Secretary of State and Northern Ireland Executive of legislative and other measures which ought to be taken to ensure this objective is met, upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate.

(iii) We will advise the Northern Ireland Assembly on whether legislative Bills are compatible with this objective upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate.

- Screen all legislation introduced into the NI Assembly and provide advice on those which engage Protocol Article 2 upon request or where necessary. Priority will be given to those Bills which align with the Commission's 2022-25 Strategic Priorities;
- Engage with Committee inquiries which engage Protocol Article 2 upon request or where necessary. Priority will be given to those Bills which align with the Commission's 2022-25 Strategic Priorities.

(iv) We will advise the Westminster Parliament on whether legislative Bills affecting Northern Ireland are compatible with this priority upon request and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate, and engage with relevant United Kingdom government departments.

- Screen legislation, subject to resources, introduced into the Westminster Parliament and provide advice on those issues which engage Protocol Article 2 upon request or where necessary. Priority will be given to those Bills and Committee inquiries which align with the Commission's 2022-25 Strategic Priorities.

(v) We will promote understanding and awareness of this priority; and for this purpose, the Commission may undertake, contract or provide financial or other assistance for research and educational activities.

- Engage with the Executive Office and Northern Ireland Office on the development or revision of guidance for officials responsible for ensuring compliance with Protocol Article 2;
- Ensure our work is well informed and seek to build capacity amongst civil society stakeholders through regular engagement including by organising a series of round-table discussions on research findings on Protocol Article 2;
- Initiate further projects to continue researching the scope and application of Protocol Article 2, including on the interaction of Protocol Article 2 with the European Convention on Human Rights; and environmental protection;
- Produce materials to assist government officials and stakeholders in considering and implementing Protocol Article 2.
- Deliver and monitor a communications strategy in partnership with Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to support in year activities;
- Maintain, monitor and develop content for website;
- Maintain, monitor and develop content for social media platforms;

(vi) We will bring any appropriate matters of relevance to the attention of the Specialised Committee on issues related to the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland of the European Union Withdrawal Agreement.

- Seek regular engagement with EU and UK officials supporting the Joint Consultative Working Group and Specialised Committees;
- Seek to use early identification and discussion of issues to ensure policy and legislation develops in compliance with Protocol Article 2;
- Engage with the Specialised Committee to raise issues of concern where domestic and informal avenues have proven unsuccessful.

(vii) We will consider using our legal powers to initiate judicial review proceedings in respect of an alleged breach (or potential future breach) where the Commission considers rights protection diminished as a result of United Kingdom having left the European Union and where Northern Ireland fails to keep pace with changes in European Union equality laws; or intervening in legal proceedings, whether for judicial review or otherwise, in so far as they relate to an alleged breach (or potential future breach).

- Provide assistance to individuals through weekly advice clinics;
- Consider supporting cases on issues brought to our attention via regular meetings with civil society stakeholders.

Objective 3: To build a society in which human rights are better understood, protected and valued, making a positive impact upon the delivery of services.

(i) We will support individuals seeking legal assistance from the Commission and this may include initiating or intervening in proceedings involving law or practice relating to the protection of human rights in Northern Ireland.

- Provide assistance to individuals through weekly advice clinics;
- Provide continuing support to ongoing legal cases, subject to resources and strategic value;
- Support third party interventions in legal proceedings in the domestic courts and European Court of Human Rights, by own motion and in conjunction with European Network of National Human Rights Institutions.

(ii) We will promote understanding and awareness of human rights in Northern Ireland; and for this purpose, may undertake, commission or provide financial or other assistance for educational activities.

- Review the Commission’s partnership with the Centre for Applied Learning and delivery of human rights training for the Northern Ireland Civil Service;
- Review and update the Northern Ireland Civil Service online human rights guide in partnership with the Executive Office, subject to resources;
- Develop a communications strategy to support the Commission’s 2022-25 Strategic Priorities;
- Maintain, monitor and develop content for the Commission’s website;
- Maintain, monitor and develop content for NIHRC’s social media platforms;
- Respond to general information and engagement requests from the public and civil society stakeholders, subject to resources. Priority will be given to those issues which align with the Commission’s 2022-25 Strategic Priorities;
- Engage in and support the Northern Ireland Human Rights Festival;
- Engage with the media proactively on the Commission’s 2022-25 Strategic Priorities and respond to enquiries upon request;
- Deliver an annual human rights lecture in association with the Lady Chief Justice of Northern Ireland and the Bar of Northern Ireland.

(iii) We will develop a strategy focused on direct engagement with the community to support the Commission’s 2022-25 Strategic Priorities and their implementation in wider society. This will include partnerships such as the Northern Ireland Business and Human Rights Forum and the Northern Ireland Sport and Human Rights Forum.

- Deliver, subject to resources, community engagements;
- Provide secretarial support and assist the Northern Ireland Business and Human Rights Forum, to meet regularly and deliver its programme of work for 2022-2023;
- Support the implementation of the PPN 05/21 Human Rights in Public Procurement through the business and human rights forum and, subject to resources, respond to requests for assistance from contractors and commissioning public authorities;
- Provide secretarial support and assist the Northern Ireland Sport and Human Rights Forum, to meet regularly and deliver its programme of work based on the Declaration on Sport and Human Rights;
- Facilitate a forum that meets regularly, in partnership with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, providing an opportunity for the Commissions and faith communities to share their views on broad areas of equality and human rights.

(iv) We will engage directly with young people in schools with a particular focus on promoting understanding and empowering them as rights-holders.

- We will develop and deliver a programme of work for post primary schools based on the Commission’s 2022-25 Strategic Priorities;
- We will include climate change and climate justice as a thematic focus, education on international human rights norms and standards; and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Objective 4: To work in partnership with other human rights and equality bodies to ensure the maximisation of human rights protection.

(i) We will develop and implement a programme of work with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission focused on issues in the island of Ireland. This will be delivered through the Joint Committee of the two Commissions created in accordance with the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement and will be in addition to our work under strategic objective 2.

- Facilitate meetings of the Joint Committee;
- Agree and begin delivering a programme of work for 2022-2025 with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

(ii) We will work in partnership with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to deliver the mandate of the designated Independent Mechanism under Article 33 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This work will also include collaboration with the Scottish Human Rights Commission and the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Great Britain on issues that affect the protection and promotion of the rights of disabled people in Northern Ireland.

- Facilitate and provide secretarial support of at least two meetings of the Independent Mechanism Disability Forum;
- Respond to the list of issues due to be published by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, submit a follow up response and engage with the examination process;
- Scope potential to support Disability Forum Members, to engage directly with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

(iii) We will engage with the other National Human Rights and Equality bodies in the United Kingdom and Ireland on issues of common interest that align with the Commission’s priorities and affect the protection and promotion of human rights in Northern Ireland.

- Co-operate with the Scottish Human Rights Commission and Equality and Human Rights Commission (Great Britain) in responding to the

United Kingdom government review of the Human Rights Act 1998 (March 2023);

- Host the annual meeting of the four National Human Rights and Equality bodies.
- (iv) We will cooperate with the UN and any other organisations in the United Nations system, the regional institutions and the National Human Rights Institutions of other countries that align with the Commission's priorities and those affecting the protection and promotion of human rights in Northern Ireland. This will include, in particular, engagement with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions and the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions.
- Support and engage with the 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting;
 - Work in partnership with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (Great Britain) and the Rwanda National Commission for Human Rights to secure funding for a permanent secretariat for the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions;
 - Maintain membership of working groups within the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions, including Business and Human Rights; Climate Change; Communications; the Legal working group; Rights of Older Persons; Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Objective 5: To be a learning organisation, improving our skills to achieve the greatest impact.

- (i) We will advocate for the Commission's effectiveness as a National Human Rights Institution and seek support from the UK government to successfully complete the United Nations re-accreditation process and retain 'A status' compliance with the Paris Principles.
- Complete the deferred five-year periodic review and re-accreditation process conducted by the Sub Committee on Accreditation of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions;
 - Engage in any independent review of the Commission initiated by the Northern Ireland Office.
- (ii) We will maximise continuous professional development by encouraging and facilitating ongoing learning opportunities for each staff member and Commissioners.

The training and development programme will include the following:

- Inclusion;
- Health and Safety including Fire Safety;
- First Aid including Mental Health First Aid;
- CIPD and CPD;
- Risk Management;
- Data Protection;
- Cyber Security including Information Security;
- Microsoft Teams;
- Enabling shared learning between staff and Commissioners.

(iii) We will review the Commission's response to the Covid-19 pandemic to learn lessons and improve our future performance.

Corporate activities

To comply with our obligations as National Human Rights Institutions and a Non-Departmental Public Body, the Commission will deliver the following corporate activities:

- The production and publication of Annual Report and Accounts including the financial statements for the year ending 31 March 2022 completed and laid in Parliament;
- Continue to respond to requests under the Freedom of Information Act within 20 working days;
- Submit required monthly financial and workforce management reports to the Commission's sponsoring department, the Northern Ireland Office;
- Complete a follow-up audit of the Commission's website to ensure accessibility compliance;
- Comply with the Commission's equality duties and reporting requirements;
- Continue to work with the Commission's internal auditors and follow up on any recommendations as a result of their audit;
- Respond to any complaints made to the Parliamentary Ombudsman, if applicable;
- Review the Commission's policies, including Code of Governance, financial and internal procedures manuals;
- Ensure the safeguarding of all personal data and follow the General Data Protection Regulation as it applies in the United Kingdom, tailored by the Data Protection Act 2018 and will report any personal data related incidents formally to the Information Commissioner's Office, if applicable;
- Continue to meet the Government target of paying 80% of undisputed invoices within five working days.

BUDGET 2022-23

	2022-23 Core Budget £	2022-23 Dedicated Mechanism Budget £	2022-23 Total Budget £
EMPLOYMENT COSTS			
Staff	1,076,374	546,717	1,623,091
Commissioners	156,840	0	156,840
Total	£1,233,214	£546,717	£1,779,931
PROGRAMME COSTS			
Advertising, Publicity and Publications	6,214	29,341	35,555
Conferences, seminars and events	16,500	13,000	29,500
Education and Training	0	12,000	12,000
Legal Casework	107,352	89,034	196,386
Research	30,000	60,000	90,000
Total	£160,066	£203,375	£363,441
OPERATING COSTS			
Auditor's (NAO) Remuneration	11,250	6,250	17,500
Building maintenance and office expenses	20,743	8,057	28,800
Insurance	4,886	2,714	7,600
Internal Audit	6,429	3,571	10,000
IT	22,100	11,595	33,695
Light and heat	6,686	3,714	10,400
Printing, postage and stationery	2,117	923	3,040
Professional fees	18,484	9,942	28,426
Rates	17,067	9,481	26,548
Rentals under operating leases	60,764	33,758	94,522
Staff training and recruitment	5,000	10,000	15,000
Telephone	6,585	3,503	10,088
Travel, subsistence and hospitality	30,000	5,400	35,400
Total	£212,111	£108,908	£321,019
GRAND TOTAL	£1,605,391	£859,000	£2,464,391

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