



## FORUM MEETING

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> December 2013 @ 10.30 am

City Hall, Belfast

## MINUTES

### **In Attendance**

Mitch Bresland

Alex Bunting

Lesley Carroll

Liz Clarke

Violet Craig

Stephen Gault

Geoffrey Hamilton

Peter Heathwood

Fiona Kelly

Irene Kerrigan

John Loughran

Errol McDowell

Jennifer McNern

David Scott

Jude Whyte

Eibhlin Glenholmes

Roberta Holmes

Ann Travers

Briege Voyle

### **Apologies**

Sandra Peake

Jeff Smith

Michael Arlow

Alan Brecknell

Tina McCann - CVS

### **Present**

Kathryn Stone-  
Commissioner (Chair)

Adrian McNamee-CVS

Neil Foster- CVS

Alana Fisher - CVS

### **Apologies**

The apologies were given and Kathryn commented briefly on the issue of claiming expenses by Forum Members.

### **Minutes of meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2013**

The minutes of the previous meeting were checked for accuracy. All members agreed accuracy of minutes and no changes were made. The minutes were proposed by Mitch and seconded by Eibhlin.

**AP: Minutes to be recorded and uploaded to CVS website by Tina.**

## **Matters Arising**

Kathryn commented briefly on a meeting held with Richard Haass and his team on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013. Kathryn relayed a point made by Haass that comments expressed by Forum Members during their meeting with him have made a significant impact on their thinking and that of politicians engaged in the process.

Kathryn commented that in her view Forum members should claim their expenses after each meeting.

Kathryn raised the issue of Forum members' expenses being claimed on a monthly basis. It was agreed that the trial (of claiming expenses on a monthly basis) would end and that members in future will claim expenses after each meeting.

## **Forum Evaluation**

Adrian provided an overview of the key points coming out of the Forum Evaluation. These are as follows:

- Over the last 18 months the Forum has become increasingly important to the Commission as a place for consultation and discussion;
- The Forum is increasing its credibility, through the advice it has produced and the quantum and quality of meetings that it has held with Ministers, Committees, political parties, key organisations and individuals;
- In terms of outputs the Forum has produced:
  - Three Working Groups that have all performed to a high standard;
  - Three advice papers to the Commission;
  - Advocacy on Welfare Reform;
  - Contributions to Pensions Advice;
  - Contributions to the Commission's reviews of the VSS; and
  - Influencing the Commission's research proposals.
- In the business case for the current Forum approval was granted for 18 meetings of the Forum and 6 meetings of the Steering Committee. In reality, over the last 18 months (April 2012- Nov 2013) the Forum and its members have participated and engaged with the Commission on 70 separate occasions;
- The Forum has significantly contributed to the increased public awareness and profile of the Commission;

- Forum members have high levels of satisfaction and confidence in the Commission. You reported that the Forum and the Commission have a positive impact on victim and survivors issues;
- A common emerging theme from the Forum members was that there was insufficient time devoted to the sharing of information between the Working Groups and that more of this is required;
- The important role of the Associate Members is recognised but this requires more development;
- High levels of satisfaction with how the Forum is convened, communicated with and services delivered to members by the Commission staff. However, it was observed that it is quite “Belfast-centric” and the Commission should seek to hold more events across the region;
- Not enough time is allowed for the Forum to fulfil its role and the current estimated time commitment is not realistic;

Kathryn advised that some time has been allocated at the end of the meeting to provide an opportunity for each Working Group to feedback

Adrian concluded his comments by outlining the next steps involved in the business case process.

- The Commission will begin work on developing a new business case for the Forum for a three year period from April 2014 to March 2017;
- It is expected that this will be completed by the end of January 2014;
- The business case will have to identify options and a preferred option and the preferred option will have to be approved by an economist and the department by end of March 2014;
- The Commission envisage that the current Forum will continue to operate in its current Format until the end of 2014 and that if any changes are to be made that these will be implemented in an phased way thereafter;
- We are conscious, however, that come the end of March some members may wish to step down;

- The Commission will keep you updated and informed on developments at Forum meetings between January to March 2014.

Jude stated that in his view in acknowledging the significant increased level of commitment and work required of Forum Members serious consideration should be given to paying Members going forward.

Kathryn acknowledged Jude's comments relating to the payment of Forum Members. She stated that the Commission are continuing to look at the issue as part of the wider evaluation process.

Ann commented that the recent request by the Commission to ensure car insurance cover include the use of their vehicle for business purposes could result in an added expense for Forum Members. Roberta commented that the amendment to her insurance to include business use had not resulted in an increase to her premium. Jennifer made the point that under the terms of the Motability scheme, cars are not allowed to be use for business purposes.

### **Code of Conduct**

Members requested that a copy of their signed Code of Conduct forms be copied and sent to them for their records.

**AP: Signed copies of the Code of Conduct forms to be sent to Members by Tina**

### **Dealing with the Past Conference**

Adrian took Members through a draft Agenda and associated flyer for the Commission's Dealing with the Past Conference planned for the 25 February 2014. Adrian stated that the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister have been invited to the Conference and are awaiting a response. Also Richard Haass and members of his team have been invited but he is unable to attend as he will be in Australia at this time. There remains a possibility a member of the Haass Team could attend the event.

Mitch stated that it was unfortunate that Forum Members cannot attend all of the workshops that are planned as part of the Conference due to them running simultaneously during the event.

Lesley Carroll recommended that the theme of 'non-Recurrence' should be integrated into the Conference as it reflects a key message supported by the entire

Forum that the past must not be allowed to ever happen again.

### **Any Other Business**

Kathryn provided feedback on the Roundtable Event hosted by the Commission on 17 December 2013. Kathryn noted that 77 people had attended the event and that a very useful and respectful discussion took place providing important feedback and recommendations for the Victims and Survivors Service to implement. Kathryn stated it was now the responsibility of CVS, the VSS and OFMDFM to ensure changes are made.

Eibhlin Glenholmes and Alex Bunting were invited to comment on the Roundtable Event.

Eibhlin commented that it was good to see all the key stakeholders in the room including key officials from the Department. She expressed a belief that since the Commissioner raised issues at the OFMDFM Committee on 9 October 2013 positive changes have been made and there has been an admission that mistakes have been made. She expressed her belief that if the recommended changes are made the Victims and Survivors Service can become 'fit for purpose'.

Alex commented that he was reassured by the feedback from the event in that many of the issues raised had been identified and highlighted by the Services Working Group. Alex highlighted the quotation issue that had been raised during the event as one which needs to be addressed urgently. He expressed his view that in placing the responsibility on clients of the Service (including Carers) to obtain three quotes runs the risk of making them feel like they are begging for financial support. Alex also stated that he believed things have improved since the Commissioner's comments at the OFMDFM Committee meeting on 9 October 2013.

Geoff [Hamilton] commented that many of the victims and survivors he knew living in the mid-Ulster area felt isolated and burdened by the unreal amount of bureaucracy relating to the application for funding and support from the VSS.

Mitch shared feedback from this table at the roundtable discussion regarding the issue of groups being made to feel isolated when they put clients forward to VSS and are never advised of progress or outcomes. Mitch also outlined that the treatment of victims and survivors had made some members (belonging to his group) resentful towards CVS, VSS and the Department.

Kathryn concluded discussion on the Roundtable Event by saying it is was a very timely event for the Independent Review Team that have recently started their work. Kathryn also stressed that while the Roundtable Event was for the purpose of

Victims Groups, individuals would have an opportunity to engage with the Independent Review process.

### **Eames Bradley Report**

Jude initiated a discussion about the need for all Forum members to read the Eames-Bradley Report published in 2009. Given recent events around the Haass Talks and the reference to the Eames-Bradley Report, Jude requested that Members review its main findings and recommendations over the Christmas break and for Members to reconvene in January to engage on a discussion about the Report.

A discussion followed and a number of comments were made by Members.

Lesley, as chair of the Dealing with the Past Working Group commented that the Group has already considered the content including recommendations of the Eames-Bradley Report as part of its ongoing work.

A number of members commented that while Jude's points relating to the need to review the Eames-Bradley Report is timely, it is important that in doing so there is no undermining of the work of the Dealing with the Past working group.

Kathryn proposed that the Eames-Bradley Report be brought to the Dealing with the Past Working Group and distributed to all members of the Forum. This was proposed by Mitch and seconded by Geoff (H).

**AP: Eames Bradley Report (full report and executive summary) to be sent to all Forum members by Tina.**

Kathryn asked that we record her thanks to the Associate Members for their hard work and dedication in supporting the work of the Forum in the past year.

Kathryn brought the meeting to an end by thanking all Members and the Commission staff for the hard work throughout 2013.

David [Scott] commented that in moving forward with the work of the Forum there needs be greater engagement with the Chief Constable of the PSNI. David stated that it was important to closely work with the PSNI to discuss ways that can prevent young people from getting involved in conflict-related activity.

### **Working Group Feedback**

Before breaking for lunch, Kathryn invited Members to provide an update on the business of the three Working Groups. A discussion ensued among all Forum

members relating to the issues emerging recent Working Group activity including those that will feature within each of the paper to be completed in the weeks ahead.

**Date and time of next meeting**

10.30am on Thursday January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014, venue to be confirmed.