



FORUM MEETING:

Thursday 17th October 2013 @ 10.30 am

MINUTES

In Attendance

Michael Arlow
Alan Brecknell
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
Sandra Peake
David Scott
Jude Whyte
Apologies
Eibhlin Glenholmes

Roberta Holmes
Jeff Smith
Ann Travers
Briege Voyle

Present

Kathryn Stone-
Commissioner (Chair)
Adrian McNamee-CVS
Neil Foster- CVS
Tina McCann-CVS

Apologies

The apologies were given and Kathryn read an email from Jeff Smith in his absence in which he wished to express some issues to the Forum.

Minutes of meeting held on 26th September

The minutes of the previous meeting were checked for accuracy and amendments but no changes were made. The minutes were proposed by Alex and seconded by Irene.

Matters Arising

A brief review was held of the action points from the last minutes and no further matters were raised.

Media Coverage

Kathryn told members that she would like to reflect on the prolific media attention she and the Commission have received in recent weeks. She stated that both she and the Commission unequivocally denounce the use of all violence by anyone.

The recent media interest has highlighted that in taking the sound advice of the Forum to stay away from any politicised debate, this has led to her being asked impossible questions which will inevitably lead to someone taking offense.

Kathryn thanked Ann and Alex for their public support in the media.

It has also been brought to her attention that a victims group has launched a social media campaign against her and the Commission regarding the wearing of the poppy. She advised this is a somewhat premature response pending the outcome of the review of CVS policy including legal advice on this matter.

However, she thanked the Forum members for the advice they gave her on this issue on the 18th April when they advised that she should not wear any symbols or emblems in order to maintain absolute integrity and neutrality with all victims and survivors.

A discussion followed and Kathryn was commended for her “impeccable integrity” in the face of personal attacks. It was also commented that members were acutely aware that there must be a personal cost to her for enduring these attacks.

However, members added that she is fully supported and they hope she continues to demonstrate her commitment to victims and survivors best interests as demonstrated at the Committee appearance on the 9th October.

The complexities of the use of language and the anxiety amongst some victims and survivors were also discussed. Some feel that their perspective is being ignored and not heard. Kathryn assured that she will continue to engage with victims and survivors from all perspectives and narratives in order to fully represent the views of all fully.

Summary of conduct and values for the Forum

Tina briefed on the paper circulated that contains a synopsis of last month's feedback from the members on core values, principles and guidance for conduct by members. She said that this was a Forum paper and not a Commission paper. She invited Forum members to comment to her on it and when agreed by all members, it will be formally adopted and all members will be invited to sign a copy at next month's meeting.

AP: Tina to ask members for comments, amend if necessary and present agreed paper at next Forum meeting for signature by members.

Steering Committee Feedback

Lesley informed the group of the content of this month's Steering Committee meeting. Items discussed were the recent media coverage, the role of the Forum in supporting the Commissioner and the critical role of relationship building.

The Steering Committee also received a presentation from JIVT (Justice for Innocent Victims of Terrorism). This was a very helpful presentation and it was agreed that the Forum should hear from other groups like these as it highlights the commonalties across the groups and this needs to be explored further.

Commissioner's Feedback

Kathryn gave feedback to the Forum on the recent Commission appearance on 9th October to the Committee for the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister. This presentation was on the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) and she was very disappointed to relay the shortcomings of the VSS.

However, the services delivered to victims and survivors should be the very best possible; this is not being reported to the Commission by individuals and groups and this is unacceptable. Groups and individuals are telling the Commission that they are thankful for the comments as they feel that they cannot complain because of a perceived threat to their funding.

A Project Board has now been established to oversee implementation of services with significant political representation engaged and Special Advisers are also involved.

It is envisaged that there will be an increased role for the Forum Services Working group. Kathryn had asked for the voice of the service user to be part of the project board but this was not agreed. It was agreed that the Forum Services Working group would be consulted with in the decision making process.

Kathryn was asked would she be able to feedback to the Forum on the work of the Project Board. She replied that the ethos of the Commission was that there would “be nothing about victims without victims”, so yes she would.

Kathryn advised that she continues to spend significant time with groups and individuals as this ensures that her voice is informed, credible and reflects the issues facing groups.

An invitation has been extended to the Commission from the Haass team to meet with the Commission and members of the Forum to discuss dealing with the past on Friday 1st November at 11.30am.

The Commission felt that the most appropriate delegates would be members of the Dealing with the past Working Group. However, after discussion with Forum members it was agreed that;

1. Any other Forum members who wished to attend should notify Tina as soon as possible,
2. The dealing with the past Working Group would give a presentation to Dr Haass and his team which would be approved by the full Forum membership.

AP: Any interested members who wish to attend the Haass meeting should notify Tina as soon as possible in order for logistical arrangements to be made.

Kathryn invited John and Stephen to brief the Forum on a Steering Committee proposal to hold urban and rural visits. They explained that the purpose of these visits were to offer an experience that would broaden members understanding of the environment that many victims are living in and highlight the commonalities and differences. These issues had arisen in the course of the Forum’s discussions on issues such as Maze Long Kesh Development and the need to build and consolidate relationships.

Any other business

Adrian advised on a request from Eamonn Baker on a story telling project and information was circulated. Mr Baker has requested the member’s participation and involvement in this project.

Sandra advised that the Commission should ensure that consent and support systems are in place before the Commission recommends projects to members so that they can recommend projects with full knowledge that members are supported.

David informed the group that he attended a launch of a film in Lurgan about forgiveness which drew comparisons between the Amish community in the USA and

the experience in Northern Ireland. He recommended this film to the other Forum members.

Alex added that Northern Vision had also developed a film about aspirations for the future from a broad cross section of civic society.

It was agreed that as there were many resources amongst members, the Commission would consider how best to utilise and share these across members.

AP: Commission to consider how best to share learning and information from resources across members.

Sandra advised that there is an exhibition in Belfast City Hall by the Families of the Disappeared for four weeks. Following this will be the launch of a joint BBC/RTE film production which will preview on the 9th November and a publication to follow.

Date and time of next meeting

10.30am on Thursday November 21st, venue to be confirmed.

NB: TINA REMINDED ALL MEMBERS TO BRING SHOE BOXES FOR ROAD OF HOPE TO THE MEETING ON NOVEMBER 21ST