



**Thursday 2 July 2015 @ 10.30am,
Irish Secretariat's Residence Belfast**

MINUTES

In Attendance

Alex Bunting
Roberta Holmes
Stephen Gault
Violet Craig
Fiona Kelly
Peter Heathwood
Irene Kerrigan

Ann Travers
Jude Whyte
Jennifer McNern

Apologies

Mitch Bresland
Liz Clarke
Eibhlin Glenholmes

David Scott

Present

John Beggs (Chair)
Adrian McNamee
Tina McCann

1. Minutes from Forum meeting: 21 May 2015

The minutes were checked for accuracy and no amendments were recorded.
The minutes were proposed for adoption by Jennifer McNern.

2. Matters Arising

On review and update of the action points from the previous meeting, Adrian proposed the Commission would identify the appropriate personnel to brief the members on the background and role of the European Court of Human Rights with a view to a presentation when the Forum reconvenes after summer recess. Members agreed to this proposal.

AP: AMN to organise EU presentation to members for September 2015

John advised that he followed up with the department regarding the meeting held in March and was advised that the meeting with groups was convened at the request of the Junior Ministers however, subsequently the Ministers did not attend.

John updated the members on the appointment process for a Commissioner. Names are now with Ministers who wish to meet the candidates before summer recess with a view to the appointee taking up post by September. Members reiterated their concern at the delay in the appointment and queried the delay. Members agreed that the daily

concerns and issues for victims and survivors remained of grave concern and that despite the unsatisfactory delay, the Forum will continue to work on in the absence of a Commissioner and review if no appointment is in place by September. They thanked the Commission for the work they have done in the absence of a Commissioner.

3. Feedback on Consultation of Stormont House Agreement Model Implementation Bill

A discussion was had on the draft model implementation bill and the Stormont House Agreement Update Paper that was recently issued by the NIO. Members expressed concern that if welfare reform is not agreed, the institutions for dealing with the past will be lost with the rest of the Stormont House Agreement. Members also expressed concern that there is speculation that the oral history project will be led by PRONI rather than building on the extensive work already conducted in this area. Members also asked if academics are leading the path in shaping the institutions- who selects the academics as academia is perceived as subjective.

John informed the members that the Commission has been approached by the Department of Justice to engage in a consultation session on the draft bill which is anticipated to be released in July. Members agreed to feed their comments into a formal consultation response when the actual draft bill is released for consultation.

4. 1st Day Brief to Commissioner from Victims and Survivors Forum

John discussed with the members the 'First Day Briefs' that are being prepared by the Commission in anticipation of an appointment of a Commissioner. He asked the members to identify the key areas they wished to bring to the Commissioner's attention when they take up their post. Members advised on the key areas from the Forum's perspective as follows;

- Forum- Address recruitment, representation and replenishing of membership and review of Forum policies primarily attendance, use of social media and working groups.
- Services- Pilot for Personal Budgets, emerging funding issues and the impact on individuals and service providers.
- Pension.
- Trans-generational Issues - including addiction and representation of the voice of younger people to the Forum and on victims issues.
- Definition of a Victim- review of dealing with the past working group paper March 2014.

5. Evaluation of Victims and Survivors Forum

Adrian gave an overview of 15 recommendations from the Executive Summary of the draft evaluation report on the Forum. Members discussed the recommendations and said that they were not content with some of the recommendations including production of minutes and facilities for Forum meetings and the use of direct quotes from members, even though they are anonymised.

The Forum members stated that it should be specifically made clear that they are volunteers who receive no remuneration as there are public misconceptions on their role and remit. A recommendation should have considered the wider communications with civic society on their role and function. Members suggested more detailed information clarifying some issues on the Commissions website and revisiting the Communications Plan for the Forum to include engagement.

AP: Tina to review Forum section on website to include a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section and revisit engagement plan for Forum.

John advised that this report is still in draft and is not finalised and will be used to inform the Commissioner when appointed.

6. Pension

Steering Committee members asked that the pension be raised on the agenda in response to recent media coverage and commentary. Members were offered the opportunity to revisit Adrian's presentation on the research produced in May 2014. Members declined to revisit the presentation however a discussion was held and some concerns over media coverage of the pension were addressed. John confirmed the Commission's position on the pension. Clarification was given on issues such as eligibility, jurisdiction and psychological injury to avoid confusion.

Members discussed the Private Members Bill that is to be brought to the NI Assembly by Brenda Hale MLA (DUP). Members agreed that a meeting should be sought with Ms Hale, DUP representatives and members of the SDLP to discuss the Bill and in order to keep misunderstanding to a minimum.

AP: Commission to convene meeting between Forum and DUP and SDLP to discuss the Bill.

7. Social Media

The Steering Committee asked for the use of social media to be raised as an agenda item in the absence of an appropriate Forum protocol. John informed the members that the Commission will be reviewing the Forum's policies, procedures and protocols over

the summer recess and as several attempts have been made to address issues around social media, they will draft a 'social media policy' for consideration. Members comments included that members should not mention their Forum membership in any capacity and should certainly refrain from engaging with each other in social media fora as this poses a risk to the trust and business within and about the Forum.

It was discussed and agreed that social media is an important mechanism for advocating on victims and survivors issues but must be managed in an appropriate and respectful manner that is compliant with the Nolan Principles and Code of Conduct as previously agreed by members.

AP: Tina to review Forum policy on social media.

8. A.O.B

John informed members that the Commission would be moving premises in the near future to ECNI in Shaftesbury Square.

Tina informed the Forum Services Working Group members that the review of the Victims Practitioners Working Group was now taking place and that she would forward the members the questionnaire. On return of the questionnaire or comments she would draft a response based on their submissions and forward to them for comment, amendment or approval by Thursday 9th July.

Adrian advised that there may be a consultation event on Stormont House Agreement Draft Legislation over the summer months but would advise further when more information received.

9. Date & Time of Next Meeting

Tina to advise on date and venue of next meeting.