

Interim Business Plan

2007-08

Executive summary

Foreword from the Chair


The creation of the Equality and Human Rights Commission is a significant development in the history of equalities and human rights in Britain. It will bring about a shift in focus from single equality issues to a powerful integrated mandate, working to promote a society that offers real freedom, fairness and respect for all.

We will be an ambitious organisation. From our first days we will work towards a society built on fairness and respect, with people confident in all aspects of their diversity. We will use expertise from staff transferring from the legacy Commissions, work with external stakeholders to promote debate and increase awareness, and focus directly on inequality and injustice throughout Britain.

Our organisation will be open and authoritative, able to work with others but also able to say no. We cannot, and should not, work alone or seek to solve every problem. We will act strategically, but openly and accessibly, taking decisions based on our objectives, vision and mission.

At the heart of our strategic plan will be clear priorities, derived from our vision and forged through wide and robust debate. These will in the longer term become a statement of the way in which we deliver our vision. And they will be a clear declaration of the Commission's independence from political pressures.

When the Equality and Human Rights Commission opened its doors for business in October 2007, we were only at the start of the process of developing these priorities. But we will need to provide a basis for resource allocation, and business and operational planning. We will need another annual plan for 2008-09 after which we will move to a three year strategy supported by an annual planning cycle. We will develop and consult on our first strategic plan for the years 2009-12 which will set our priorities once the organisation is established. In the interim period to April 2008 this plan outlines how we will work towards this point, to ensure a successful start for our new organisation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Trevor Phillips', with a stylized, cursive script.

Trevor Phillips
Chair

Our vision

A society built on fairness and respect. People confident in all aspects of their diversity.

Background

The Commission for Equality and Human Rights is a body corporate established under the provisions of the Equality Act 2006 ('the Act') with new powers to enforce legislation and to encourage and promote equality for all. (Its working name will be the Equality and Human Rights Commission.)

The Commission will cover England, Scotland and Wales. It will have three statutory committees, for Scotland, Wales and Disability.

As an integrated and independent single body with new powers, it brings together and adds to the work of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). The Commission opened its doors on 1 October 2007.

Statutory duties

The Commission has duties relating to equality and diversity, and human rights. These are to:

- Promote understanding of the importance of equality and diversity
- Encourage good practice in relation to equality and diversity
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Promote awareness and understanding of rights under the equality enactments
- Enforce the equality enactments
- Work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination
- Work towards the elimination of unlawful harassment
- Promote understanding of the importance of human rights
- Encourage good practice in relation to human rights
- Promote awareness, understanding and protection of human rights
- Encourage public authorities to comply with section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 (c. 42) (compliance with Convention rights)

The Commission must also promote good relations among and between groups and others. ‘Groups’ are defined by the Act as:

A group or class of persons who share a common attribute in respect of any of the following matters:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Proposed, commenced or completed reassignment of gender [within the meaning given by section 82(1) of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (c. 65)]
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation

The Commission is required to monitor the effectiveness of laws relating to equality and human rights and must monitor and report progress and outcomes.

The Commission must prepare and consult on a strategic plan which should be reviewed at least once every three years.

Statutory powers

The Equality Act empowers the Commission to carry out a number of functions and to enforce the law. The general powers conferred on the Commission are to provide information, advice, undertake research, and provide education and training.

The Commission can also issue codes of practice, to help others interpret and abide by laws relating to discrimination and human rights [Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Race Relations Act 1976, Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003, Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003].

Under the general powers granted by the Act, the Commission may also carry out inquiries into any matters relating to their statutory duties or give grants or legal assistance in order to take cases forward.

The Commission is able to enforce the law by carrying out investigations. If an investigation is set to find that an unlawful act has taken place the Commission can require an individual to carry out an action plan to remedy the situation. This requirement can be backed up through a county court (in England and Wales) or sheriff (in Scotland).

Our powers allow us to enter into agreements with those we suspect may have committed an unlawful act, so that joint action can be taken. We may also apply to courts to prevent a likely unlawful act or restrain advertising,

instructions or pressure to discriminate against any group under the main anti-discrimination acts.

The Commission can arrange conciliation for disputes arising from any action relating to the relevant acts and may provide legal assistance to a person who has been discriminated against.

The Commission is also empowered to institute or intervene in legal proceedings for judicial review, if the proceedings relate to our functions.

The Commission will also assess compliance with public sector duties, to ensure public authorities comply with the duties to eliminate discrimination under the main anti-discrimination acts. We may give notice to the affected party and, if required, apply to court for further action.

Strategic priorities and business objectives

The Commission will consult widely on its first strategic plan, helping us to set our priorities and the programme of work for future operational planning. The Board has developed a limited number of initial interim strategic priorities to guide our work until we have in place a fully developed strategic plan for 2009-12. They are:

1. Building a credible and independent Commission
2. Mapping, analysing and targeting key equality battlegrounds
3. Improving life chances and experiences
4. Developing new narratives and accounts

Objectives

We have set our business objectives to fit these interim strategic priorities which point the way towards our longer term ambitions and are clearly tied to the vision and mission of the Commission.

- 1. Building a credible and independent Commission.** The Equalities and Human Rights Commission will be an authoritative, evidence based organisation. From our first week, the Commission will build on its inherited authority and expand its expertise to lead an informed and forward looking debate.
- 2. Mapping, analysing and targeting key equality battlegrounds.** The Commission will be an ambitious, forward looking organisation. It will demonstrate leadership and build trust, fulfilling our statutory requirements in the Equality Act 2006 – as change agent, advocate, challenger, protector and enforcer. It will tackle the causes of inequality rather than just treating the symptoms.

- 3. Improving life chances and experiences.** The Commission will be an accessible, outward facing organisation. From our first day, the Commission will have a people friendly interface with the public. It will provide effective advice and complainant services, an inclusive network of partners, including engagement with independent and government established reference groups or their successor bodies, and a constructive partnership with government.
- 4. Developing new narratives and accounts.** Our ambition includes showing how human rights can be the ground rules for a fairer society. We want to help shift from a compensation to a prevention culture. To support and communicate this, we will establish a responsive and well informed external affairs team to ensure accurate coverage of our work, prompt and effective media management of our issues and delivering comprehensible and comprehensive briefing for journalists and information for the public.

Remit

The Commission is tasked with carrying out its duties for the whole of Great Britain.

It therefore exists to champion fairness for just over 58 million people (sources: Office for National Statistics, National Assembly for Wales and General Register Office for Scotland). The question of how we live together is as big a threat as climate change, and a more immediate one. The Commission will work to ensure that, in an age of difference, equality is seen as a foundational principle, in everybody's interests.

The Commission will have offices in Manchester, London, Glasgow, Birmingham, Cardiff and a co-located presence in Edinburgh, north Wales and the English regions.

Management structure

The Board of Commissioners, led by the Chair Trevor Phillips, is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the Commission. The Chief Executive and Commissioner Nicola Brewer, supported by the senior management team (SMT), is accountable to the Board for business delivery and for advising the Board on emerging strategic priorities. The Commission's three statutory committees for Disability, Scotland and Wales are each chaired by a member of the Board of Commissioners: Jane Campbell (Disability), Morag Alexander (Scotland) and Neil Wooding (Wales).

Initial work plan and services

The programmes, projects and services the Commission will operate by April 2008, along with the resource implications and initial measurement mechanisms provided in detail in the business plan, will include:

Legal assistance and casework	Projects
Inquiries and investigations	Equality impact assessments
Policy and research	Helpline
Public affairs and media	Website
Stakeholder engagement	Grants

The work plan is designed to maintain the momentum of the rich inheritance from the legacy Commissions and to incorporate legacy work on the new equality mandates, for example by encouraging action on areas such as age discrimination which currently operates in a more limited legislative framework. As the Commission builds up, the findings from its consultations on the first strategic plan and stakeholder mapping will increasingly drive business priorities and activities.

Organisation

The organisational design has been developed to be accessible, authoritative and ambitious. Based on a model called 'matrix management', it is designed to maximise expertise, effectiveness and efficiency and is a flexible structure, neutral to priorities. Staff will predominantly work in cross-functional project teams, with practice leaders maintaining and developing specialisms across the organisation, rather than relying on specialists working exclusively on a small range of issues or topics. A significant proportion of staff will have a portfolio of responsibilities.

Resources and risk

The Commission's budget for 2007-08 agreed with the sponsor department is £65.6 million with an additional potential liability for lease breaks up to £5.3 million. The budget was constructed to provide the resources necessary to deliver the activities and work programme described in this business plan.

A robust method for identifying, evaluating and managing risks has been established with oversight by the Audit and Risk Committee. This includes comprehensive risk registers, effective mitigation plans, accountable owners and clear escalation/cascade processes.

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Media

If you work in the media and wish to speak to our press office, please call 020 3117 0251 or 020 3117 0242 (out of hours mobile 07767 272 818).