

TITLE/ORGANISATION	Racial Equality Subgroup
VENUE:	Castle Buildings, D2 Lecture Theatre
DATE/TIME:	1 April 2026, 14:00-17:00
List of Attendees:	<p><u>Attendees</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ann Marie White (British Red Cross - Chair) • Stephen Atkinson (GEMSNI) • Nisha Tandon (ArtsEkta) • Ivy Goddard (Inter Ethnic Forum) • Judith Searle (Barnardo's NI) • Paul Noonan (Equality Commission NI) • Takura Donald Makoni (ACSONI) • Paul Yam (Wah Hep) • Melody Kozah (NI Human Rights Commission) • Martin McDonagh – Guest (Chair of the Traveller Thematic Group) • Deirdre McAliskey (STEPNI) • Jill Robinson (Flourish NI) • Fidelma Fearon – Guest (Chair of the Roma Thematic Group) • John Cieslik (POLCA) <p><u>TEO</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul Naylor (Head of RRI Development & Delivery) • Peter McCusker (Head of RRI Legislation Branch) • TEO Officials
Apologies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julie Cuming (TEO) • Lili Wu (Chinese Welfare Association) • Fernanda Hermosilla (NI Human Rights Commission) • Suleiman Abdulahi (HAPANI) • Shannon Doherty (North West Migrants Forum) • Fergal Quinn (BCRC) • Monika Ciok-Giertuga (North Down YMCA)

Welcome and Opening Remarks

- Chair welcomed attendees, including guests Martin McDonagh, Chair of Traveller Thematic Group, and Fidelma Fearon, Chair of the Roma Thematic Group. Chair

also welcomed Melody Kozah who will be joining the Subgroup as representative for NIHRC going forward.

- Chair requested attendees declare any conflicts of interest, informing attendees that at its most basic, a conflict of interest arises when an individual has two different interests that overlap. Examples of different circumstances where conflicts of interest can arise include, but is not limited to, direct financial gain or benefit, and using information gained in capacity as a member to further private interests. No conflicts of interest were raised.
- Chair made members aware of apologies received.
- Chair made attendees aware that the Belfast Jewish Community has resigned membership from the Subgroup due to current resourcing and capacity matters as Dr Katy Radford has taken up her position as Director of the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression.
- Chair reminded attendees that during meetings, the recording of audio and/or video by any attendee is not permitted.
- Chair reminded attendees that minutes of meetings are published, including the names of attendees and organisations.
- Chair reminded attendees that given the nature of some of the issues that might be discussed, including policy in development, members should be sensitive about sharing details of the content of discussion at meetings and any papers or presentations must remain confidential and not shared beyond the Subgroup, without the prior consent of the author(s) of the paper(s). Such consent should be requested through the TEO Secretariat at race.equality@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk.
- Chair reminded attendees that members can be reimbursed for allowable travel costs attending required meetings. Travel claims guidance and form has previously been issued to members; any queries please contact race.equality@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk.

Minutes and Action Points from last meeting

- Members were content to approve the minutes of 11 December 2025.
- Paul Noonan (ECNI) proposed to agree the minutes of 11 December 2025, and Nisha Tandon (ArtsEkta) seconded.
- Outstanding Action Points from December 2025 meeting:
- AP1 – *TEO Secretariat to arrange a one-off meeting with Home Office on the Windrush Compensation Scheme in the New Year for those interested.* No members of the subgroup were in attendance, but Takura Donald Makoni (ACSONI) was made aware of positive feedback and noted that progress was being made towards Windrush compensation. The Chair noted that it may be considered best practice to arrange meetings with external organisations outside of Racial Equality Subgroup meetings [AP1].
- AP2 - *Chair/Secretariat to confirm a date for the meeting with Minister of Justice*

in the New Year. The Chair suggested postponing the meeting with the Minister of Justice due to lack of progress on legislation being observed by the Subgroup. Members agreed to further briefing from the Equality Commission and Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, and meeting to discuss briefing, as further understanding is required before meeting with the Minister of Justice again [AP2].

- *AP3 - Incoming Chair to follow up on a response from the First Minister and deputy First Minister on letter sent on 22 September 2025.* Chair drew attendees' attention to the response received from the First and deputy First Minister on 31 March 2026. Members raised their concern at the length of time elapsed before receiving a response. After discussion on reference to the Subgroup within the draft Framework for Race Relations (18 references) and uncertain funding and budgetary positions, members agreed to respond noting the Subgroup's key role in the implementation of the Framework and Fair Funding principles [AP3].
- *AP4 - TEO Secretariat; Hate Crime, Legislation & Access to Justice Working Group will be having a one-off meeting with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the New Year, and the invite is to be extended to the Racist Bullying Working Group.* As no members who attended the meeting with NIHE were in attendance today, Chair let members know the meeting focused on intimidation points removal and the Primary Social Needs Points Review. Chair also updated members on her attendance at Peace Summit meetings where she also raised these issues. Chair let members know she followed up with the Director of Housing Services of the Housing Executive via email on 22 January and, as of 1 April, no response has been received. Members agreed to write to DfC Permanent Secretary to request a meeting and for the letter to highlight the role of the Subgroup, to stress the importance of information streams and continued engagement, and to query how the Housing Executive will implement a "level playing field" as per Minister for Communities letter of 7 February 2025 [AP4].
- *AP5 - Members to raise issue of hate speech & constitution of sufficient evidence of a hate crime prosecution, and social media abuse at the next meeting with the Minister of Justice.* Chair made members aware of a recent meeting PSNI held regarding PSNI Service Instruction changes related to flags and emblems. Chair then made members aware that TEO Secretariat are working to arrange meetings between the Subgroup and Deputy Chief Constable Singleton before the summer and Chief Constable Boutcher for after the summer. Members agreed to meeting with DCC Singleton before the summer to understand existing measures, followed by a meeting with CC Boutcher in September to review outcomes. Members also agreed to request the meeting with Boutcher take place annually [AP5]. It was noted that responsibility should not rest solely with the PSNI, and that political rhetoric often exacerbates tensions and needs to be addressed. Members agreed that hate crime should not be viewed solely as a policing issue, but as a wider

societal issue. Reference was made to a CAJ workshop on far-right online activity, which provided useful insights. Concerns were raised that hate incidents are no longer routinely recorded in England and it was suggested that hate crimes, which are initially being recorded as such by the PSNI, are not being recorded as hate crimes later in the justice process by the courts, and the potential impact this has on data accuracy was noted.

- *AP6 - Members to raise issue of hate speech & constitution of sufficient evidence of a hate crime prosecution, and social media abuse at the meeting with the Zoe McKee.* Chair reminded attendees that a meeting has been arranged for 29 April to discuss the PSNI Race and Ethnicity Action Plan. Members agreed to maintain focus of this meeting to the Race and Ethnicity Action Plan and for a pre-brief to take place prior [AP6]. STEP representative noted that there was no pro-active communication with them from any authority regarding the Moygashel bonfire incident. When STEP contacted Mid Ulster Council to see what information was available and could be shared with the Subgroup, who were due to meet on the issue, the official confirmed they had been in touch with PSNI on the issue but were not 'at liberty' to divulge anything from that conversation. STEP representative asked that Subgroup discussions with PSNI and with the Community Cohesion Group seek to clarify information sharing, decision making and communication procedures or protocols in relation to these types of incidents, including 'intelligence' which exists prior to events, noting that these are currently not transparent to or inclusive of ground level community groups. The need for greater transparency in decision-making processes was highlighted. ECNI representative queried why Subgroup representation is not included in the Community Cohesion Group, noting that it is regarded as the expert body. TEO responded that the Community Cohesion Group is not intended as a long-term structure and that updates are provided through the Race Relations & Integration Update Report. Members felt that this approach places the Subgroup in a reactive rather than proactive position. TEO stated that the Community Cohesion Group discusses confidential matters. STEPNI representative concluded by emphasising the importance of understanding the impact of the Subgroup's work, particularly in the context of departmental structures, and the need to be able to clearly communicate to communities what work is being undertaken. Members agreed to formally request Chair sits on the Community Cohesion Group [AP7].
- *AP7- TEO Secretariat to invite Chief Constable Jon Boutcher to attend the meeting being organise with Zoe McKee.* As mentioned under AP5, members agreed to request a meeting with Jon Boutcher in September.
- *AP8 - TEO Secretariat to go back to Policy Branch regarding pausing of family reunions to ask what scenario planning has been done; what provisions has TEO made regarding the impact of this policy; what will be done to protect people from*

exploitation resulting from this policy; and what the devolved responsibilities are regarding this policy in regard to integration, health, housing, education. Members raised their concern that representation from Migration Integration Policy branch were absent and stressed the important of their attendance at subsequent meetings to speak to matters relating to their area of work.

- *AP9 - TEO Legislation Branch to consider members proposal for mapping data that already exists; what is happening with this data; how this data is being utilised; and for a standing agenda item for a 'living document' to be included in each meetings' papers.* Members discussed the usefulness of mapping particularly with regard to departmental monitoring of racial equality data to provide a baseline and evidence gaps for the Subgroup to take a view of priority actions under the draft Framework for Race Relations. Further discussion took place on appropriateness of the term "Race Relations", the change from Race Equality and the need for ME representation in the Race Relations & Integration division.
- *AP10 - TEO Secretariat to write directly to the member with responses to the questions before onward sharing to the Subgroup.* It was noted that Migration Integration Policy representation was due to attend today. Members agreed to arranging a separate meeting with Migration Integration Policy branch to discuss question responses [AP8].
- *AP12 - Working Group Chairs to share Action Plans with TEO Secretariat for consideration at the next Subgroup meeting in March.* There was agreement amongst attendees that it is important for working groups to agree their action plans and provide them to the Subgroup for input into their action plan. Chair made members aware that she is yet to receive action plans from the working groups, but that she is aware that some exist in draft form and will follow up [AP9].
- *AP14 - Chair to write to the Curriculum Review Taskforce to request a meeting to discuss priorities that will reflect the lived experience of minority ethnic children and young people.* Chair drew attendees' attention to the letter from Racist Bullying Working Group Chair to DE Curriculum Review Taskforce. Members highlighted the presence of books containing racist language within the current English Literature curriculum, such as *Of Mice and Men*. It was agreed this is an area of work the Racist Bullying Working Group could take forward [AP10].
- *AP15 - TEO Secretariat to request an update from DE on Widening Participation in Education for Traveller children and young people, for sharing with the Subgroup.* Members raised concerns that the Department of Education meeting with members of the Traveller Thematic Group was not included in their list of consulted groups. Paul Noonan stated that the widening participation review requires clearer prioritisation of groups and that these should be named within the strategy. Melody

Kozah emphasised the strength of a collective voice while recognising the need to address individual concerns. Paul Noonan also noted that Traveller and Roma communities are target groups in the Republic of Ireland, resulting in clearer access routes to higher education. Members felt it important that DE receive their advice as Travellers, Roma, and refugees are hard to reach groups that may not respond individually. After discussion on the best approach, members agreed to write to DE citing previous correspondence from the Thematic groups and expert advice [AP11].

Race Relations & Integration Update Paper

- Member raised the absence of meaningful updates from the Groups in the RRI Update Paper, including relevant issues discussed, and it is not clear where delivery is taking place within departments following recommendations from Groups. Member highlighted the role of the TTG in its advisory function and asked that minutes from SPG meetings are made available to Groups.

Racial Equality Subgroup Role and Priority Actions

- Discussion took place on the implementation of the Framework, and the Groups' role in this as members raise their concerns around funding to carry this out. Concerns were also raised around the definitiveness of "implement" in the Framework, while TEO can only coordinate and liaise with other departments.
- Concern was raised at the lack of reference to children and young people in the Framework, with no mention of the impact of racism on childhood development or children as rights holders. ACSONI representative reiterated the need for ME representation within TEO RRI to ensure these issues are considered in the development of policy, however, this was countered by STEPNI representative who stated policy makers should not need to have experienced racism in order to care about these issues.
- It was proposed to members that the Voluntary & Community Sector Forum become a working group of the Subgroup, still retaining its focus on refugees and asylum seekers. Chair reminded TEO, and members, of the purpose of the VCSF in its advisory capacity on the Refugee Integration Strategy, but that as a working group there will be clearer mechanisms to report back to the Subgroup and to inform the overarching Action Plan. Potential for a member of the charity and voluntary sector to sit as Chair was also discussed.
- Chair informed members she will be contacting each working group chair with the suggestion of meeting to discuss working group action plans for feeding into the Subgroup Action Plan [AP12]. Chair asked that members afford some patience to the process of reviewing group structures, as it will take some time, and it is hoped the role of the Subgroup will be clearer and following this Ministers can be advised of the Subgroup's feasibility.
- TEO reiterated that the Framework provides high-level sign off of Outcomes and the detail, through lived experience, should come from the Subgroup. ACSONI

representative stated the perfunctory nature of references to the Subgroup in the Framework and the repetition of reviewing issues the Subgroup has previously looked at and advised on.

Working Group Updates

- Chair asked members to consider volunteering to sit on relevant groups, and updated members on Jolena Flett, Chair of the Hate Crime, Legislation and Access to Justice working group, leaving her position with Victim Support NI rendering the working group without a chair.
- It was agreed that working group structures will be on the agenda for the next full Subgroup meeting, including consideration of membership and purpose, and for members to consider potential for guest members with relevant expertise.
- Chair asked that Secretariat circulate membership lists of the working groups to members for their consideration [**AP13**].

Any Other Business

- Members agreed to discuss the right to vote at a future meeting before considering inviting the Electoral Commission to meet with the Subgroup. It was agreed that such invitations could be held in separate meetings for members to join outside of the main quarterly meeting.
- Regarding the UN resolution on Chattel Slavery, ACSONI representative asked what response the Executive will be issuing, including acknowledgement, information dissemination, and programmes, regarding the UK's abstinence of the last decade. TEO asked that the Subgroup feedback their ideas for this decade for Ministers/the Executive then to make a decision on actions the department/s can carry out and reminded members of some of the work carried out under a previous Chair. Members reiterated need for wider communities to understand the impact of racism, and for the principles of the resolution to be mainstreamed in public policy for a systematic approach in addressing social cohesion and legacy of slavery.
- Finally, Chair asked that details of the meeting with the DE Curriculum Review on 23 April be shared with her [**AP14**].

Next Meeting Date and Location

- After discussion regarding the style of the next meeting the group agreed that the following meeting will be a workshop on the Action Plan and will take place on 3 June 2026 at ArtsEkta.

Action Points

- **AP1 – Secretariat** to note practice of holding meetings with external organisations outside of regular Subgroup meetings going forward.
- **AP2 – ECNI & NIHRC** to provide further briefing for Subgroup consideration prior to arranging a follow up meeting with the Minister of Justice.
- **AP3 – Chair** to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister in response to their letter of 31 March 2026.

- **AP4 – Chair** to write to DfC Permanent Secretary following meeting with NIHE and Chair’s attendance at Peace Summit meetings and subsequent email to NIHE Director of Housing Services.
- **AP5 – Secretariat** to arrange with PSNI Executive Support a meeting with DCC Singleton for June, and a meeting with CC Boutcher for September and this this meeting to recur annually.
- **AP6 – Secretariat** to work with the Chair to arrange a pre-brief meeting prior to Subgroup meeting with DCS Zoe McKee.
- **AP7 – Chair** to request, through relevant TEO channels, for their membership on the Community Cohesion Group as representative of the Racial Equality Subgroup.
- **AP8 – Migration Integration Policy Branch** to arrange to meet with the Subgroup to discuss responses to questions under AP10 of December 2025 meeting.
- **AP9 – Chair** to follow up with Working Group Chairs regarding Action Plans.
- **AP10 – Racist Bullying Working Group** members to take back the issue of racist language contained within books on the English Literature Curriculum to the Working Group for forward work.
- **AP11 – Chair** to write to DE regarding the review of Widening Participation in Higher Education.
- **AP12 – Chair** to meet with Working Group Chairs.
- **AP13 – Secretariat** to circulate Working Group membership lists to Subgroup members.
- **AP14 - Secretariat** to share details of the DE Curriculum Review meeting with Chair.

Minutes written by:
TEO Secretariat

Date: 08/04/2026