



Office for
Equality and
Opportunity

Rt Hon Baroness Smith of Malvern
Minister for Women and Equalities
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

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Lord Alton
Chair, Joint Committee on Human Rights
jchr@parliament.uk

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter of 5 January 2026 regarding the two interim appointments to the EHRC board, made without competition. My apologies for the delay in the reply.

It is vitally important that the EHRC can continue upholding and promoting equality and human rights and safeguarding and enforcing the laws that protect people's rights to fairness, dignity and respect. The issue of Commissioner numbers, quoracy and impact on operational effectiveness was raised by both the outgoing and incoming Chair of the EHRC as a primary concern. The decision was therefore taken to support the EHRC to operate effectively by appointing interim Commissioners whilst the campaign for permanent Commissioners is conducted.

I note the point you have raised regarding the legal authority to make the appointments for a 12-month period. The decision for this timeframe was taken to limit the time that interim Commissioners who had not been subject to a full, open recruitment process were in post, recognising that a full, open recruitment campaign was in process. I have however raised your point with my officials and asked them to consider any adjustments to the terms if required.

You also asked about the delay to the wider campaigns. The Secretary of State has been clear that appointing the Chair was her first priority and that appointing Commissioners would follow. Dr Mary-Ann Stephenson was announced as the government's preferred candidate for Chair on 5 June 2025, and you led a pre-appointment hearing with Dr Stephenson on 1 July 2025. It was our intention to launch Commissioner campaigns soon after we announced Dr Stephenson's appointment as Chair, however further scrutiny meant we were unable to make the announcement before summer. We could not announce during summer recess and with conference recess soon after, the next opportunity to secure relevant clearance and launch the campaign was November.

I hope you found this reply helpful.

Kind regards,

Rt Hon Baroness Smith of Malvern
Minister for Women and Equalities