



# Northern Ireland Assembly

## AD HOC COMMITTEE FOR A BILL OF RIGHTS

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday 5 March 2020**  
**Room 21 Parliament Buildings**

Present: Ms Emma Sheerin MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA  
Mr Mark Durkan MLA  
Ms Michelle McIlveen MLA  
Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA  
Mr Christopher Stalford MLA

In Attendance: Caroline Perry (Assembly Clerk)  
Paul Gill (Clerk Assistant)  
Claire Milliken (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Neil Sedgewick (Clerical Supervisor)

**2.00p.m** The meeting commenced in open session – the Clerk in the Chair.

#### **1. Apologies**

None.

#### **2. Election of the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson**

The Clerk called for nominations for the position of Ad Hoc Committee Chairperson.

Ms Ní Chuilín proposed that Ms Sheerin be elected as Ad Hoc Chairperson of the Committee. Mr Durkan seconded this and the nomination was accepted.

*Agreed:* There being no further nominations, the Clerk put the question without debate. The Committee elected Ms Sheerin as Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee by a simple majority.

**2.03pm** The Chairperson took the Chair and the meeting was suspended in order for the Clerk to brief the Chairperson.

**2.07pm** The meeting resumed.

The Chairperson called for nominations for the position of Deputy Chairperson. Mr Durkan proposed that Mr Nesbitt be elected as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee. Ms Ní Chuilín seconded this and the nomination was accepted.

*Agreed:* There being no further nominations, the Chairperson put the question without debate. The Committee elected Mr Nesbitt as Deputy Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee by a simple majority.

### **3. Declaration of Interests**

The Ad Hoc Committee considered the Clerk's memo in relation to the declaration of registerable interests, including an extract from the Register of Members' Interests. The Chairperson reminded Members of their obligation to declare any relevant financial or other interests before any Ad Hoc Committee meetings relating to that matter.

Mr Stalford and Ms Bradshaw declared an interest as former Members of the Bill of Rights Forum, which reported in 2008.

### **4. Arrangements for Committee Meetings**

The Ad Hoc Committee considered the proposed arrangements for Ad Hoc Committee meetings.

*Agreed:* The Ad Hoc Committee is content to meet bi-weekly on Thursdays at 2pm, usually in public session.

### **5. Committee Membership**

Members noted the details of the Ad Hoc Committee's membership.

### **6. Staff Contact Details**

Members noted the contact details for the Secretariat staff supporting the Ad Hoc Committee.

**2.12pm** The Ad Hoc Committee moved into closed session.

## **7. Protocol on conduct and courtesy at Committee Meetings**

Members considered a briefing note which set out a sample protocol on conduct and courtesy at committee meetings.

Members considered a briefing note that outlined different approaches to progressing the Ad Hoc Committee's work.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to defer the consideration of appointing substitute members to the next Ad Hoc Committee meeting.

*Agreed:* Members are content with the sample protocol.

## **8. Committee Procedures**

The Ad Hoc Committee noted the following papers:

- The role of the Chairperson
- A guide for Members on the Role and Functions of the Committee Office
- A guide to the Powers and Operation of Standing and Ad Hoc Committees for Chairpersons and Members

The Chairperson reminded Members of the rules relating to privilege and matters sub-judice.

Members noted the guidance.

## **9. Committee approach to meeting preparation and witness questioning**

The Clerk briefed the Ad Hoc Committee on a list of options regarding preparation and witness questioning.

Members noted these options.

## **10. Background to the Bill of Rights and Terms of Reference**

Members considered a briefing note on the background of the Bill of Rights. They discussed the benefits of witness diversity. Mr Stalford recounted his previous experience working for the four Policing Board members where a principle was established that independent members appointed to the Policing Board were required to declare whether or not they were a member of a political party and the period in

which they were a member of a political party. He suggested that it would be helpful if experts coming before the Committee to give evidence were required to do the same to inform Members' understanding of their perspective. Members noted his suggestion.

*Agreed:* Members are content to proceed with the briefings outlined in the work programme.

*Agreed:* Members are content for the Clerk to draw up some options for training on issues likely to come before the Committee.

*Agreed:* Members are content with the initial list of suggested witnesses which will be left open and maintained as a rolling list.

*Agreed:* Members are content to include a short statement on committee communications noting that the Ad Hoc Committee values diversity and asks organisations to bear this in mind when choosing a representative.

*Agreed:* Members are content that the Ad Hoc Committee asks witnesses to complete a voluntary, anonymous survey to monitor the diversity of witnesses before the committee.

## **11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting will be on Thursday 19 March at 2.00p.m. in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting adjourned at 2.46 p.m.*

**Ms Emma Sheerin MLA**  
**Chairperson, Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights**