



Northern Ireland Assembly

AD HOC COMMITTEE FOR A BILL OF RIGHTS

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday 18 June 2020

Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present, Room 29:

Emma Sheerin MLA (Chairperson)
Mike Nesbitt MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Paula Bradshaw MLA
Michelle McIlveen MLA

Present, via StarLeaf:

John O'Dowd MLA (deputising for Carál Ní Chuilín MLA)

Apologies:

Mark Durkan MLA
Christopher Stalford MLA

In Attendance:

Caroline Perry (Assembly Clerk)
Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Supervisor)
Gareth Cross (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in open session at 2.05 p.m.

1. Apologies

As noted above.

Agreed: The Ad Hoc Committee agreed to send a get well card to Christopher Stalford.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson asked Members for their views on meeting over the summer recess period. Other Committees have agreed to continue to meet throughout this time due to the urgency of their business. The Chairperson commented she did not feel it necessary for the Ad Hoc Committee to meet during this time and highlighted by not meeting, this would enable the relevant Assembly staff to take their leave.

Agreed: The Ad Hoc Committee agreed to break for summer and resume business in September.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Ad Hoc Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 4 June 2020.

4. Matters arising

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee had written to the Executive Office to convey a number of concerns about its expert panel and to request further information. She stated it is for the Committee to determine how and when it hears from the panel. The Chairperson highlighted that the panel is a commitment in the *New Decade, New Approach* (NDNA) document and is within the remit of the Executive Office.

Mike Nesbitt made the following points:

- One proposal from NDNA has already been overturned (the Brexit sub-committee) so a precedent has been set for amending parts of the NDNA.
- What was the logic of saying there would be a panel of five, particularly when they would be paid £500 per day? Amounting to a significant amount per month if it is two days per month for five people.
- Experts are already agreeing to give their views without expecting remuneration.
- The process for appointing the panel is active so the matter of whether or not the Committee writes to the Executive Office is time sensitive.
- He did not share the concerns of the Chairperson that this would delay the appointment of the panel.

He proposed that the Committee write to the Executive Office noting the Committee's experience since it was established and the number of experts willing to provide evidence as witnesses, highlighting concerns around value for money. The letter would ask the Executive Office to review the need for a panel of five, given the going rate and value for money, and question the rationale for this number.

Paula Bradshaw seconded Mike Nesbitt's proposal.

Three members voted for the proposal: Mike Nesbitt; Paula Bradshaw and Michelle McIlveen.

Two members voted against the proposal: Emma Sheerin and John O'Dowd.

Agreed: The Ad Hoc Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office to convey its concerns regarding the expert panel.

5. Correspondence

Members noted guidance from the Chairpersons' Liaison Group for Assembly Committees during the public health crisis and a written submission on Human Rights and Peacebuilding from Dr Amanda Cahill-Ripley, Senior Lecturer in Law at the School of Law and Social Justice, University of Liverpool, who will brief the Committee in September.

6. Briefing on Human Rights in Wales by Professor Simon Hoffman

Simon Hoffman, a professor of Law at the Hillary Rodham Clinton School of Law, Swansea University joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 2:28 p.m.

His briefing included the consideration of Wales' implementation of children's rights by incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law and noted that the 'due regard' model has provided a model for other human rights legislation in Wales.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The meeting was adjourned to deal with technical difficulties at 2:39pm.

The meeting resumed at 2:50pm.

The Chairperson thanked Simon for his attendance and apologised for the technical challenges.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

7. Briefing on the implementation of international treaty standards into devolved law: the example of Scotland by Professor Tobias Lock

Tobias Lock, Professor of Law at Maynooth University, joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 15:14 pm.

His briefing included consideration of actions taken to better protect human rights in Scotland. He talked about the work of the Scottish First Minister's Advisory Group on Human Rights Leadership and its participatory approach, specifically aimed at involving those not close to power and influence in Scottish society.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Tobias for his time and patience.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson referred Members to the draft Forward Work Programme.

Members noted the Forward Work Programme.

9. Any other business

The Deputy Chairperson suggested that witnesses should appear at the start of the meeting. Committee business could be carried out following presentations.

Agreed: The Ad Hoc Committee agreed to schedule oral evidence at the start of each meeting to avoid long delays for witnesses.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be on Thursday 2 July at 2.00p.m. in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 3.52 p.m.

Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

Chairperson, Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights