



# Northern Ireland Assembly

## AD HOC COMMITTEE ON A BILL OF RIGHTS

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday 11 February 2021**  
**Virtual Meeting, StarLeaf**

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

Apologies: No apologies

In Attendance: Caroline Perry (Assembly Clerk)  
Gareth Cross (Clerical Officer)  
David McClure (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

*The meeting commenced in open session at 2.04 p.m.*

#### **1. Apologies**

As noted above.

#### **2. Briefing by Jeffrey Dudgeon MBE: Perspective on a Bill of Rights**

Jeffrey Dudgeon MBE, former European Court of Human Rights plaintiff and member of the Bill of Rights Forum, joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 2:07p.m.

He said that key questions in relation to a bill of rights include the appointment of judges to interpret the legislation; the role of elected representatives and the courts in relation to socio-economic rights; and the issue of read-across with the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Jeffrey Dudgeon noted that, in his opinion, there are some issues such as housing rights which should be resolved politically rather than through a bill of rights. Furthermore, he questioned the willingness of Westminster to enact a bill of rights for Northern Ireland.

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

The Chairperson thanked Jeffrey Dudgeon for his evidence.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

*Michelle McIlveen joined the meeting at 2:15pm.*

### **3. Briefing by Lady Trimble: Perspective on a Bill of Rights**

Lady Trimble, a former member of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 3:09 p.m.

Lady Trimble discussed the 2008 advice of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, saying that in her view, the Commission exceeded its remit, suggesting that socio-economic rights were not connected to Northern Ireland's '*particular circumstances*'. She expressed concerns around the justiciability and enforcement of rights, including the potential politicisation of judges, implications in relation to legal aid and workload for the legal system and the potential for 'judicial activism'. The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Lady Trimble for her evidence.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

*Paula Bradshaw left the meeting at 3:11pm.*

### **4. Chairperson's Business**

The Chair thanked everyone who took part in the Committee's call for evidence, which closed on Friday 5 February 2021. The Committee received over 2,400 responses from individuals, community groups and organisations through responses to the survey and written submissions. The Committee will review and consider these

over the course of its work. Furthermore, the Committee is looking forward to its forthcoming stakeholder events and focus groups.

## **5. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Ad Hoc Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 28 January 2021.

## **6. Matters Arising**

*Agreed:* The Ad Hoc Committee agreed the minutes from its strategy afternoon on Thursday 4 February 2021.

## **7. Correspondence**

Members noted correspondence and submissions from individuals, Friends of the Earth NI, the Children's Law Centre, the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, A New Ireland-New Union-A New Society, the Women's Resource and Development Agency, UNISON, the NIHRC, La Dolce Vita Project and Community Dialogue and North West Community Network. Furthermore, Members noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People reiterating her position on a bill of rights and noting the Committee's plans to engage children and young people.

## **8. Forward Work Programme**

The Chairperson referred Members to the draft Forward Work Programme.

Members agreed the Forward Work Programme.

## **9. Any other business**

There was no other business.

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

The next meeting will be on Thursday 18 February 2021 at 2.00 pm where the Committee will hear from the Northwest Forum of People with Disabilities and Transgender NI.

*The meeting adjourned at 3.59 p.m.*

**Ms Emma Sheerin MLA**  
**Chairperson, Ad Hoc Committee**