



Northern Ireland Assembly

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON A BILL OF RIGHTS

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday 11 March 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: None

In Attendance: Caroline Perry (Assembly Clerk)
Gavin Ervine (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Gareth Cross (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in open session at 2:04pm.

1. Apologies

As noted above.

2. Briefing by the Northern Ireland Youth Forum: Children and Young People's Rights

Mr Chris Quinn, Transitional Director of the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 2:05pm. Chris was joined by Natalie Corbett, Participation Development Worker, Northern Ireland Youth Forum; Jack Dalzell, Northern Ireland Youth Forum Member, Ards and North Down Youth Council; Ciara Hesketh, Northern Ireland Youth Forum, Translink Youth Forum; Saira Khan, Northern Ireland Youth Forum Member, Northern Ireland Housing Executive Youth Forum; and Naomi Salon, Executive Member, Northern Ireland Youth Forum.

Their briefing provided background to the Northern Ireland Youth Forum and highlighted the extensive work and engagement it has carried out in relation to children and young people's rights.

There were discussions around the rights of those seeking asylum, the rights of those living with a disability, how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted children and young people and how the right to education has been affected by remote learning. There were also wide-ranging discussions on how the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child could be enshrined in law and ensuring a bill of rights was enforceable.

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

Mark Durkan joined the meeting at 2:28pm.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Chris Quinn and the Northern Ireland Youth Forum representatives for their evidence.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to each of the representatives from the Northern Ireland Youth Forum to thank them for their briefing – including a letter in Irish and a letter in Braille.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

3. Briefing by Professor Monica McWilliams: Perspective on a Bill of Rights

Professor Monica McWilliams, former Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 3:23pm.

Her briefing provided the context of a bill of rights, highlighting that the Belfast Agreement created provision for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to consult and advise on the scope for defining, in Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the European Convention on Human Rights to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland.

Professor McWilliams said that, having taken such a large volume of evidence and heard a range of views, it was important that the Committee takes the appropriate amount of time for deliberations and utilises whatever expert assistance is available to

it. Professor McWilliams also highlighted that the Committee had a useful bank of material in the 2008 document *A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland: Advice to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland* and the Human Rights Act, and these should be built on for a bill of rights.

Mark Durkan left the meeting at 3:40pm.

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

Mike Nesbitt left the meeting at 4:25pm.

The Chairperson thanked Professor McWilliams for her evidence.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

4. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson proposed to rescind the Committee's decision to conclude taking evidence on 29 April and instead to conclude on 6 May 2021.

Agreed: Members agreed to conclude taking evidence on 6 May 2021.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the stakeholder sessions would begin on Tuesday 16 March and requested that Members indicate what sessions they would be available to attend.

Agreed: Members agreed to confirm their attendance at stakeholder sessions via email.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Ad Hoc Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 4 March 2021.

6. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

7. Correspondence

Members noted correspondence from the Executive Office, Mr John Williamson and the UK Supreme Court.

Agreed: Members agreed to confirm any specific matters for discussion for the UK Supreme Court briefing on 22 April.

Paula Bradshaw left the meeting at 4:33pm.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson referred Members to the draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: Members agreed the Forward Work Programme.

9. Any Other Business

Michelle McIlveen raised the issue of the potential Committee motion for plenary debate scheduled for late June 2021 on the Forward Work Programme, especially in light of the evidence received from Professor Monica McWilliams at today's meeting. Members discussed whether this item should remain on the Forward Work Programme.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be on Thursday 18 March 2021 at 2:00pm when the Committee will hear from the Equality Commission, the Women's Policy Group and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

The meeting adjourned at 4:39pm.

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