



# Northern Ireland Assembly

## AD HOC COMMITTEE ON A BILL OF RIGHTS

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday 18 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 2:05pm.*

#### **1. Apologies**

As noted above.

## **2. Briefing by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland: Rights and Equality**

Ms Geraldine McGahey OBE, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI), Dr Evelyn Collins CBE, Chief Executive of the ECNI, and Ms Roisin Mallon, Director of the ECNI, joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 2:06pm.

Their briefing provided background to the Equality Commission's work, highlighting that it supports the adoption of a strong and inclusive bill of rights, reflecting the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland.

There were discussions around the principle of equality and the impact of Brexit, including the loss of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the limitations of Article 2 of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland. There were also wide-ranging discussions on how a bill of rights would sit alongside any single equality legislation.

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

*Christopher Stalford joined the meeting at 2:20pm.*

The Chairperson thanked Ms Geraldine McGahey, Dr Evelyn Collins and Ms Roisin Mallon for their evidence.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

## **3. Briefing by the Women's Policy Group: Women's Rights**

Ms Rachel Powell, Sector Lobbyist, Women's Resource and Development Agency, and Ms Louise Coyle, Director, Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network, joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 2:41pm.

Their briefing provided background to the work of the Women's Policy Group, highlighting that a bill of rights has the potential to build confidence within communities and provide stability in light of Brexit, austerity and COVID-19.

There were discussions on how the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women, the lack of paid childcare provision in Northern Ireland and their recommendations on what should be included in a bill of rights. There were also wide-ranging discussions on gender-budgeting.

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

*Christopher Stalford left the meeting at 3:47pm.*

The Chairperson thanked Ms Rachel Powell and Ms Louise Coyle for their evidence.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

#### **4. Briefing by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions: Perspective on a Bill of Rights**

Ms Patricia McKeown, Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), Ms Clare Moore, Equality Officer, ICTU, and Mr John Patrick Clayton, Northern Ireland Committee, ICTU, joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 3:50pm.

Their briefing provided background to the work of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, highlighting their support for the full implementation of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, including a bill of rights.

There were discussions on the protection of workers' rights, especially in the context of Brexit and the new Gender Pay Transparency Directive.

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

*Paula Bradshaw left the meeting at 4:05pm.*

The Chairperson thanked Ms Patricia McKeown, Ms Clare Moore and Mr John Patrick Clayton for their evidence.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

#### **5. Chairperson's Business**

No Chairperson's business

#### **6. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Ad Hoc Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 11 March 2021.

#### **7. Matters Arising**

Mike Nesbitt raised the issue of the potential Committee motion for plenary debate scheduled at the end of June 2021 on the Forward Work Programme. Whilst not against a plenary debate, Mike Nesbitt stated that, given the Committee was still in its evidence-gathering phase, it would be prudent to schedule any debate post-summer recess.

The Chairperson, therefore, gave formal notice of a proposal to rescind the Committee's decision to report to the Assembly by summer recess 2021 and, instead, to report following summer recess. This proposal will be considered at next week's meeting.

*Christopher Stalford re-joined the meeting at 4:34pm.*

## **8. Correspondence**

Members noted correspondence from the Chairperson's Liaison Group and Professor Monica McWilliams.

## **9. Forward Work Programme**

The Chairperson referred Members to the draft Forward Work Programme.

*Agreed:* Members agreed the Forward Work Programme.

## **10. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

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

The next meeting will be on Thursday 25 March 2021 at 2:00pm when the Committee will receive the survey results from its call for evidence. The Committee will also hear from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People Youth Panel and Mr Niall Murphy from KRW Law.

*The meeting adjourned at 4:34pm.*

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