



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 6 May 2021

Meeting Location: Virtual Meeting, StarLeaf

Present: 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 at 2:06pm in open session.



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1. Apologies

As above.

2. Briefing by Northern Ireland Assembly Engagement: Overview of the Committee's Stakeholder Engagement

Mrs Louise Close, Outreach Manager, Northern Ireland Assembly Engagement, joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 2:08pm.

The briefing provided an overview of the stakeholder events held by the Committee and a synopsis of feedback.

Stakeholder views were discussed around support for a bill of rights among the majority of participants, including majority support for the inclusion of values within a preamble, the need for an education programme to accompany a bill of rights, the importance of accessibility, including language, and rights associated with healthcare, mental health, disability and minority communities.

Christopher Stalford joined the meeting at 2:16pm

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

The Chairperson thanked Mrs Louise Close for her evidence.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

3. Briefing by the Northern Ireland Assembly Education Service: Results of Focus Groups with Schools

Ms Anne-Marie Fleming, Education Officer, Northern Ireland Assembly Education Service, joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 2:21pm.



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The briefing provided an overview of the discussions that took place during the focus groups with schools, highlighting the numbers involved and the range of sectors that participated.

There were discussions on the issues raised by focus group participants, including support for a bill of rights containing values, perceptions of inequality around education, the need to address racist and homophobic discrimination, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and the protection of minority groups.

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

Paula Bradshaw left the meeting at 2:30pm

The Chairperson thanked Ms Anne-Marie Fleming for her evidence.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

4. Briefing by the Church Representatives: Perspective on a Bill of Rights

Very Rev Timothy Bartlett, Administrator of St Mary's Catholic Church, Belfast, Rev David Clements, Minister of Cullybackey Methodist Church, Very Rev Shane Forster, Dean of Armagh Cathedral, Rev Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Miss Karen Jardine, Public Affairs Officer, Presbyterian Church in Ireland and Mrs Danielle McElhinney, Public Policy Officer, Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland, joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 2:34pm.

The briefing provided background on the engagement by the Churches in the Bill of Rights Forum and highlighted their view that rights, responsibilities and relationships are interlinked.

There were discussions around the transposition of international treaties, the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, the role of the legislature in human rights and the importance of socio-economic rights.

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

Paula Bradshaw rejoined the meeting at 3:09pm

Michelle McIlveen left the meeting at 3:11pm



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Christopher Stalford left the meeting at 3:27pm

Michelle McIlveen rejoined the meeting at 3:34pm

Christopher Stalford rejoined the meeting at 3:36pm

The Chairperson thanked the church representatives for their evidence.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

5. Chairperson's Business

No Chairperson's business

6. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 29 April 2021.

7. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

8. Correspondence

Members noted correspondence from Lord Reed in relation to the Committee's recent engagement with the Supreme Court; and Mr Paul O'Neill with a submission on his perspective on a bill of rights.



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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

Members were reminded that the Committee will meet informally with the Supreme Court of Ireland at 4:30pm this afternoon.

The next meeting will be a reporting strategy afternoon on Thursday 27 May 2021 at 2:00pm – the Committee will be supported by Dr David Kenny, Trinity College Dublin, at this session.

The Committee moved to closed session at 3.45pm.

The Committee discussed the format of its upcoming reporting stage.

Agreed: Members agreed a hybrid approach to the Committee's reporting stage, meaning that Members have the option of attending the meeting in person or via StarLeaf .

The meeting adjourned at 3:47pm.



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