



# Northern Ireland Assembly

## AD HOC COMMITTEE FOR A BILL OF RIGHTS

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday 19 March 2020  
Room 29 Parliament Buildings**

- Present: Emma Sheerin MLA (Chairperson)  
Paula Bradshaw MLA  
Michelle McIlveen MLA  
Carál Ní Chuilín MLA  
Christopher Stalford MLA
- Apologies: Mike Nesbitt MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mark Durkan MLA
- In Attendance: Caroline Perry, Assembly Clerk  
Claire Milliken, Assistant Assembly Clerk  
Oliver Bellew, Clerical Officer  
Michael Potter, Research Officer (Agenda item 6)

*The meeting commenced in open session at 2:05 p.m.*

#### **1. Apologies**

As above.

## **2. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson advised members that she would like to pass on the Ad Hoc Committee's condolences to Mike Nesbitt on the passing of his mother, Brenda Nesbitt.

*Agreed:* The Ad Hoc Committee agreed to pass on its condolences to Mike Nesbitt.

The Chairperson referred Members to a letter from the Speaker to Committee Chairs in their tabled papers (Agenda item 5). The letter states that from 9pm on Wednesday 18 March 2020, the Assembly Commission has restricted access to Parliament Buildings to essential business users only, given the public health crisis. This means that the general public will not be permitted access to the building and to the public galleries in Committees. Members noted the letter.

## **3. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Ad Hoc Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 5 March 2020.

## **4. Matters Arising**

The Chairperson raised the opportunity to appoint deputies or substitute members to attend meetings in their place if they are unable to attend. This can help to ensure that there is a quorum.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to permit each committee member to appoint one substitute member to attend in their place. Members were asked to advise the Ad Hoc Committee staff of the name of the deputy they wish to appoint. They should inform Committee staff prior to each meeting if the deputy will be attending in their place.

## **5. Correspondence Matters Arising**

Correspondence was dealt with in Chairperson's Business.

## **6. Oral Briefing by RaISe on Key Issues for a Bill of Rights**

Members noted the RaISe research paper in their meeting packs.

Michael Potter, Research Officer, from the Research and Information Service (RaISe) joined the meeting at 2:08p.m.

He provided the Ad Hoc Committee with an overview of the key issues for a Bill of Rights.

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

The Chairperson thanked the Research Officer for his attendance.

## **7. Oral Briefing from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission**

Members noted the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission papers in their meeting packs.

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission representatives joined the meeting at 2:21p.m.

Members received a briefing from:

Les Allamby, Chief Commissioner, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; and Dr David Russell, Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

They set out the first principles for a Bill of Rights; the Commission's advice and work to date and outlined their views on the value of a Bill of Rights.

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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

## **8. Training options for the Ad Hoc Committee**

Members noted the Clerk's paper setting out options for training.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to defer this matter until a time when future plans could be made with more certainty.

## **9. Forward work programme**

Members noted the forward work programme.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to keep this under review as the COVID-19 situation progressed.

*Agreed:* Members agreed that it would be useful to have briefings from Welsh and Scottish officials to learn about their continuing work on ways to apply international human rights treaties standards more readily into law within their devolved responsibilities.

*Agreed:* The Ad Hoc Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office to secure an update about its appointment process for the Panel of Experts.

*Agreed:* The Ad Hoc Committee agreed that Meeting Packs should be made available to them each Thursday prior to the meeting (one week in advance) to allow for sufficient preparation.

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

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

*The meeting adjourned at 3:18p.m.*

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