

Communications Office
2020

2 February 2021

Room B4
Parliament Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3XX

To whom it may concern:

Re: Consultation on the Creation of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland

Mid Ulster District Council would like to take this opportunity to put forward its views and opinions in relation to the creation of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. The Council understands that this current consultation is as a result of the implementation of the New Decade New Approach Agreement. However, the creation and delivery of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland is also, a so far undelivered, aspect of the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement. As such, while the Council welcomes progress in relation to progressing this aspect of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, the Council would hope that the process of developing and implementing a Bill of Rights is completed within the current term of the Assembly's mandate.

Views on Human Rights

In relation as to whether or not everyone in Northern Ireland enjoys the same human rights, it is clear from documented research, that this is currently not the case. Evidence shows that there are varying levels of access to services across society. In addition, there are specific human rights issues in relation to members of the BME (Black Minority Ethnic) community, the elderly, and people who are living in poverty.

While it may not be the intention to discriminate against people in these social groupings, nevertheless representatives of people in these social groupings report that, in practice, people can find it difficult to access the same rights as everyone and this can be for various reasons.

Protections

Regarding the groupings of people who may require more protection for their human rights, some groups of people are disproportionately impacted upon by deprivation, access to services, access to healthcare and secure employment. This issue has been highlighted recently by the Covid-19 pandemic, with the highest death rates being linked to areas of social deprivation. Therefore there is an argument to suggest that some people in Northern Ireland may need more protection of their human rights than others for an abundance of reasons; possibly including age, whether or not a person has a disability, their ethnic grouping and gender. However any protections should be rights based and equitable and provide a balanced approach.

Values

The Council would support the inclusion of values as stated within the consultation documentation. However, an emphasis should be placed on the actual rights provision itself, rather than focusing on values that can be hard to measure, support and implement. Overall the values of any Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland should embed fairness and equality deliver via a documented rights based agenda.

Bill of Rights Contents

The Council would class the development and implementation of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland as very important. Whilst the concept of developing an 'aspirational vision' may be useful for the development of a Bill of Rights, Mid Ulster District Council would promote the development of concrete rights, which seem real and can be used and more readily implemented, this should include civil and political rights that are based on fairness, equality and respect.

In relation to the inclusion of social, economic and cultural rights and the right to a healthy environment the Council takes the view that the inclusion of these rights are important and a must for any society, and should also be fully included in a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

There are numerous examples of good practice of internal standards which should be considered and replicated, where appropriate, for Northern Ireland. This includes the EU Charter of Human Rights which provides twelve civil and political rights including the right to life; the prohibition of torture; the right to liberty and security; the right to a fair trial; the right to respect for private and family life; freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; and freedom of expression.

The Council welcomes the chance to provide into as part of this consultation process and awaits the outcome, bringing the finalisation of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland a step closer.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'C. Mallaghan', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Cathal Mallaghan
Chair