

CONVENTION RIGHTS MEMORANDUM

Regional Balance Bill

INTRODUCTION

1. This memorandum has been prepared for the Committee for the Economy ('the Committee') to assist with its scrutiny of the Regional Balance Bill ('the Bill')¹.
2. The Bill was introduced on 8 June 2026. This memorandum addresses issues arising under the European Convention on Human Rights ('the Convention') and Article 2(1) of the Windsor Framework ('Article 2(1)'), in relation to the Bill. It has been prepared by the Legal Services Office.
3. This memorandum does not constitute legal advice but sets out whether this Bill engages Convention rights. Where a clause of the Bill may occasion interference with one or more Convention rights, that clause may merit further scrutiny by the Committee and discussion with the member in charge of the Bill.
4. Where a clause of the Bill may engage rights which fall within the scope of Article 2(1), the rights issues in that clause are set out and may merit further scrutiny and discussion with the member in charge of the Bill.
5. The Convention rights given effect in domestic law are set out at Annex A to this memorandum. The text of Article 2(1) and its associated annex is at Annex B to this memorandum.

SUMMARY OF THE BILL

6. The Bill consists of 8 clauses and no schedules. The long title describes it as a Bill to *'Make provision for a statutory framework to improve regional balance in Northern Ireland; to impose a duty on the Executive to develop, adopt, maintain and implement a framework setting out how disparities in regional economic performance and living standards are to be addressed across government; to confer functions on the Department for the Economy in relation to the preparation of the framework, its reporting to the Assembly and providing guidance and research; and for connected purposes'*.
7. Part 1 of the Bill makes provision for the Executive Committee of the Assembly ('the Executive') to develop, adopt, maintain and implement a Regional Balance Strategic Framework ('the Framework') which sets out how the Executive proposes to reduce regional disparities in Northern Ireland. Part 2 of the Bill imposes an annual reporting obligation on the Department for the Economy with regards to the

¹ References to 'the Bill' in this memorandum are references to the Bill as introduced on 8 June 2026.

operation of the Framework. Part 2 of the Bill also imposes obligations on Northern Ireland departments in connection with the Framework and requires the Executive to review the operation and effectiveness of the Framework. Part 3 of the Bill makes provision for interpretation, commencement and the short title of the Bill.

8. The Explanatory and Financial Memorandum ('EFM') notes that the Bill '*seeks to improve the Northern Ireland Executive's response to regional imbalances in economic performance and living standards by creating a statutory duty on the Executive to deliver and renew a strategic framework to address these imbalances*'.
9. The EFM further notes that the Bill '*gives statutory recognition to regional balance (i.e. the difference in economic performance and living standards between geographic regions) as an Executive-wide priority, requires the Executive to adopt and maintain a Regional Balance Strategic Framework, imposes a duty on departments to pay due regard to the Framework when developing policies, strategies and plans, and requires annual reporting to, and scrutiny by, the Assembly*'.

SECTION 1: CONVENTION RIGHTS

10. This section sets out the Convention rights² which the Legal Services Office considers may be engaged by the Bill. These Convention rights are marked in the table below.

Part I	The Convention Rights and Freedoms	Engaged?
Article 2	Right to life	No
Article 3	Prohibition of Torture	No
Article 4	Prohibition of slavery and forced labour	No
Article 5	Right to liberty and security	No
Article 6	Right to a fair trial	No
Article 7	No punishment without law	No
Article 8	Right to respect for private and family life	No
Article 9	Freedom of thought, conscience and religion	No
Article 10	Freedom of expression	No
Article 11	Freedom of assembly and association	No
Article 12	Right to marry	No
Article 14	Prohibition of discrimination	No
Part II	The First Protocol	
Article 1	Protection of Property	No
Article 2	Right to Education	No
Article 3	Right to free elections	No

² As set out in section 1(1) and Schedule 1 to the Human Rights Act 1998 - see Annex A for further guidance.

CLAUSES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

11. The Convention is intended to provide practical and effective remedies for individuals. The purpose of the Bill is to impose a statutory duty on the Executive to deliver the Framework for the purpose of reducing regional disparities in Northern Ireland. The Bill imposes obligations on the Executive and other Northern Ireland departments and does not deal with the rights of individuals.
12. No clauses of the Bill require further consideration.

SECTION 2: ARTICLE 2(1) OF THE WINDSOR FRAMEWORK

13. It is not considered that any clause in the Bill falls within the scope of Article 2(1).

SECTION 3: SUMMARY

14. No clauses of the Bill call for particular scrutiny by the Committee.

Legal Services Office

05 October 2026

ANNEX A: THE CONVENTION RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Article 2: Right to life

- (1) Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law. No one shall be deprived of his life intentionally save in the execution of a sentence of a court following his conviction of a crime for which this penalty is provided by law.
- (2) Deprivation of life shall not be regarded as inflicted in contravention of this Article when it results from the use of force which is no more than absolutely necessary:
 - (a) in defence of any person from unlawful violence;
 - (b) in order to effect a lawful arrest or to prevent the escape of a person lawfully detained;
 - (c) in action lawfully taken for the purpose of quelling a riot or insurrection.

Article 3: Prohibition of torture

No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 4: Prohibition of slavery and forced labour

- (1) No one shall be held in slavery or servitude.
- (2) No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour.
- (3) For the purpose of this Article the term "forced or compulsory labour" shall not include:
 - (a) any work required to be done in the ordinary course of detention imposed according to the provisions of Article 5 of this Convention or during conditional release from such detention;
 - (b) any service of a military character or, in case of conscientious objectors in countries where they are recognised, service exacted instead of compulsory military service;
 - (c) any service exacted in case of an emergency or calamity threatening the life or well-being of the community;
 - (d) any work or service which forms part of normal civic obligations.

Article 5: Right to liberty and security

- (1) Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be deprived of his liberty save in the following cases and in accordance with a procedure prescribed by law:
 - (a) the lawful detention of a person after conviction by a competent court;

- (b) the lawful arrest or detention of a person for non-compliance with the lawful order of a court or in order to secure the fulfilment of any obligation prescribed by law;
 - (c) the lawful arrest or detention of a person effected for the purpose of bringing him before the competent legal authority on reasonable suspicion of having committed an offence or when it is reasonably considered necessary to prevent his committing an offence or fleeing after having done so;
 - (d) the detention of a minor by lawful order for the purpose of educational supervision or his lawful detention for the purpose of bringing him before the competent legal authority;
 - (e) the lawful detention of persons for the prevention of the spreading of infectious diseases, of persons of unsound mind, alcoholics or drug addicts or vagrants;
 - (f) the lawful arrest or detention of a person to prevent his effecting an unauthorised entry into the country or of a person against whom action is being taken with a view to deportation or extradition.
- (2) Everyone who is arrested shall be informed promptly, in a language which he understands, of the reasons for his arrest and of any charge against him.
- (3) Everyone arrested or detained in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 1(c) of this Article shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorised by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release pending trial. Release may be conditioned by guarantees to appear for trial.
- (4) Everyone who is deprived of his liberty by arrest or detention shall be entitled to take proceedings by which the lawfulness of his detention shall be decided speedily by a court and his release ordered if the detention is not lawful.
- (5) Everyone who has been the victim of arrest or detention in contravention of the provisions of this Article shall have an enforceable right to compensation.

Article 6: Right to a fair trial

- (1) In the determination of his civil rights and obligations or of any criminal charge against him, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law. Judgment shall be pronounced publicly but the press and public may be excluded from all or part of the trial in the interest of morals, public order or national security in a democratic society, where the interests of juveniles or the protection of the private life of the parties so require, or to the extent strictly necessary in the opinion of the court in special circumstances where publicity would prejudice the interests of justice.
- (2) Everyone charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law.

- (3) Everyone charged with a criminal offence has the following minimum rights:
- (a) to be informed promptly, in a language which he understands and in detail, of the nature and cause of the accusation against him;
 - (b) to have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defence;
 - (c) to defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing or, if he has not sufficient means to pay for legal assistance, to be given it free when the interests of justice so require;
 - (d) to examine or have examined witnesses against him and to obtain the attendance and examination of witnesses on his behalf under the same conditions as witnesses against him;
 - (e) to have the free assistance of an interpreter if he cannot understand or speak the language used in court.

Article 7: No punishment without law

- (1) No one shall be held guilty of any criminal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a criminal offence under national or international law at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the criminal offence was committed.
- (2) This Article shall not prejudice the trial and punishment of any person for any act or omission which, at the time when it was committed, was criminal according to the general principles of law recognised by civilised nations.

Article 8: Right to respect for private and family life

- (1) Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
- (2) There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Article 9: Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
- (2) Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in

the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Article 10: Freedom of expression

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.
- (2) The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

Article 11: Freedom of assembly and association

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.
- (2) No restrictions shall be placed on the exercise of these rights other than such as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. This Article shall not prevent the imposition of lawful restrictions on the exercise of these rights by members of the armed forces, of the police or of the administration of the State.

Article 12: Right to marry

Men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and to found a family, according to the national laws governing the exercise of this right.

Article 14: Prohibition of discrimination

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

Article 16: Restrictions on political activity of aliens

Nothing in Articles 10, 11 and 14 shall be regarded as preventing the High Contracting Parties from imposing restrictions on the political activity of aliens.

Article 17: Prohibition of abuse of rights

Nothing in this Convention may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein or at their limitation to a greater extent than is provided for in the Convention.

Article 18: Limitation on use of restrictions on rights

The restrictions permitted under this Convention to the said rights and freedoms shall not be applied for any purpose other than those for which they have been prescribed.

Article 1 of the First Protocol: Protection of property

- (1) Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions. No one shall be deprived of his possessions except in the public interest and subject to the conditions provided for by law and by the general principles of international law.
- (2) The preceding provisions shall not, however, in any way impair the right of a State to enforce such laws as it deems necessary to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest or to secure the payment of taxes or other contributions or penalties.

Article 2 of the First Protocol: Right to education

No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.

Article 3 of the First Protocol: Right to free elections

The High Contracting Parties undertake to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature.

ANNEX B: ARTICLE 2 OF THE WINDSOR FRAMEWORK

Article 2: Rights of individuals

- (1) The United Kingdom shall ensure that no diminution of rights, safeguards or equality of opportunity, as set out in that part of the 1998 Agreement entitled Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity results from its withdrawal from the Union, including in the area of protection against discrimination, as enshrined in the provisions of Union law listed in Annex 1 to this Protocol, and shall implement this paragraph through dedicated mechanisms.
- (2) The United Kingdom shall continue to facilitate the related work of the institutions and bodies set up pursuant to the 1998 Agreement, including the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Joint Committee of representatives of the Human Rights Commissions of Northern Ireland and Ireland, in upholding human rights and equality standards.

Annex 1: provisions of Union law referred to in Article 2(1)

- Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services³
- Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation⁴
- Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin⁵
- Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation⁶
- Directive 2010/41/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2010 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC⁷
- Council Directive 79/7/EEC of 19 December 1978 on the progressive implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security⁸

³OJ L 373, 21.12.2004, p. 37.

⁴OJ L 204, 26.7.2006, p. 23.

⁵OJ L 180, 19.7.2000, p. 22

⁶OJ L 303, 2.12.2000, p. 16.

⁷OJ L 180, 15.7.2010, p. 1.

⁸OJ L 6, 10.1.1979, p. 24.

