

PARTY VIEWS ON CIVIC FORUM PAPER
*AS EXPRESSED IN SUBMISSIONS TO THE FIRST AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTERS AND
 DURING THE 14 SEPTEMBER 1998 MEETING OF THE ASSEMBLY*

- UUP**
- Keen on the business community being represented, but conscious that however worthy, bodies such as the Institute of Directors do not fully represent the business community. Keen on Chambers of Commerce and Chambers of Trade having a nominating role.
- SDLP**
- Needs to achieve a gender balance.
 - Needs to achieve representation from the most vulnerable eg the elderly, the disabled, the unemployed and young people.
- DUP**
- Local Government should be represented through the National Association of Councillors.
 - Should not have a "House of Lords role" and should not sit in Parliament Buildings.
 - The final list of appointees should be brought before the Assembly for approval, it should have the 'imprimatur' of the Assembly.
 - It will be the great monster quango.
 - An outside body with a wider remit than the Assembly is certainly not going to lead to good government in Northern Ireland.
- Sinn Féin**
(written submission)
- It will be the opposite to the undemocratic quangos.
 - There should be open and public debate to ensure transparency, inclusively, broad representation, democratic participation.
 - The Assembly should move to set up a Civic Forum Committee with a remit to examine available models and set in place terms of reference for roles, remit composition, selection and location.
 - The Forum should be complementary to the Assembly.
 - Should not become an establishment of professional elites who are already well placed within current government structures.
 - Should be structural on a bottom-up basis, consulting of marginalised groups (victims, prisoners, ethnic minorities etc).
 - The South African model of "issue forms" should be consulted.
 - Membership should not be restricted; initially it should be an evolving body with membership co-opted as needed.

PUP

- Have engaged a consultant to develop a positional paper in discussion with a number of key people in the community sector (due mid-October).
- Should be a manifestation of the whole of civic society and not just professionals.
- Those working with children should be represented.
- Should be a standing conference, with its membership changing to reflect the issues under discussion.

**Northern
Ireland
Women's
Coalition**

(written
submission)

- Opposed to representation from local government.
- The process of nomination etc should be consultative and transparent.
- We propose that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister initiate a full public debate and consultation exercise on the nature of the Civic Forum before any binding decision is taken on its future shape.
- All activities of the Forum should be based on openness, transparency, accessibility and accountability.
- Suggested mission statement:

“The Civic Forum will work alongside the Assembly to implement the Belfast Agreement in its entirety. It will seek to promote reconciliation and dedicates itself to ensuring that the voices of those most disadvantaged and marginalised are heard. The Civic Forum will work through participative democratic processes and strive to create a more inclusive, socially just society by harnessing the creative energy of our communities.”

- Favour election via electoral panels to maximise the representative nature of the Forum and to guard against any suggestion of a self-selected elite. We favour the involvement of more than the 3 sectors cited in the Agreement. We suggest the following panels:
 - Cultural and educational panel
 - Youth Affairs panel
 - Industrial and commercial panel
 - Labour panel
 - Community representation panel
 - Administrative and social concern panel.
- Would be opposed to the creation of a ‘giant quango’ with members selected by Government.
- Term of office should mirror the Assembly with no more than one third of the membership continuing for a second term.

- The members of the Forum will elect a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson. The Chair should rotate between the sectors every 2 years to spread responsibility and consensus decision-making.
- The Forum should develop its own rules and standing orders.
- Every effort should be made to reach consensus, but where this is not possible a threshold of 66% of those present and voting must be achieved.
- Should have its main facilities at Stormont to encourage mutual interchange with the Assembly. A regular cycle of seminars/meetings must be held throughout NI to ensure geographical equality.
- Should actively develop the proposal to establish a North-South Consultative Forum, and develop relationships with equivalent bodies under the British-Irish dimension.
- Should review its own functioning annually.
- Important that it reflects all of society and not just the great and the good.

Alliance

*John Woods, Acting Director,
New Agenda (a network of
organisations and individuals
drawn from 'civil society';
business; trade unions;
churches; universities and
colleges; voluntary
organisations and community
groups)*

New Agenda issued 2,000 copies of a substantive consultation paper on the Civic Forum as part of a consultation exercise they facilitated during August and September 1998. A submission has been made outlining the key issues raised during the consultation exercise; a meeting has been requested with the First and Deputy First Ministers and New Agenda are willing to undertake a more extensive consultation exercise under the auspices of the First and Deputy First Ministers if this was considered useful. The key points in the submissions are:

- The Forum must avoid becoming a self-perpetuating elite. It must become widely owned by the society which it serves.
- It should address the so called "wicked" problems, ie the complex policy challenges which cut across departmental boundaries. Such an approach would complement the more departmentally focussed work of the Assembly committees while avoiding unnecessary duplication.
- Could be particularly useful in dealing with divisive issues, which elected representatives are often, understandably, reluctant to tackle.
- Regional economies succeed through innovation, hence the Forum should nurture innovation by 'thinking the unthinkable' and by using its ability to act on its own initiative to good effect.
- It can be a body which exists to complement the work of elected representatives; to reinforce the democratic legitimacy of the Assembly; and to bring other experience and expertise to bear in tackling the many and complex social and economic challenges which face all modern governments.
- The primary route for individual citizens to influence Government must be through their elected representatives.
- The Civic Forum will seek to complement the work of the Assembly, requiring a close working relationship with the Assembly and the Executive.
- The Forum should receive formal responses from ministries to its recommendations including reasons for rejecting any aspects of an opinion which are not accepted.
- The Agreement states that the Civic Forum ' will comprise representatives of the business, trade union and voluntary sectors, and such other sectors

as agreed by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister'. Clearly the intention is that the Forum should be non-party political.

- The aim should be cross-sectoral unity rather than inter-sectoral rivalry.
- The interests of those traditionally excluded from decision-making, should be safeguarded.
- Two sectors, rural and religious interests, not named in the Agreement need to be included. The main farming organisations should be represented in the business sector while other rural interests should be reflected through the voluntary sector. Representation from the 'faith communities' should be on a rather smaller scale than that of the 3 sectors names in the Agreement.
- A proportion of Forum members should be aged under 25. It has been suggested that a parallel Youth Forum be established.
- Co-option onto Forum committees or working groups should be considered. Co-options should include skilled individuals and representatives of appropriate interest groups.
- A Forum with a core of around 50, drawing membership from a limited number of sectors, is likely to be the optimum size – small enough to meet effectively in plenary and large enough to be able to form sub-committees or working groups.
- Members should be free to operate as individuals chosen for their broader qualities and capacities to articulate the 'interests of the greater good', rather than just their respective sectors.
- Selection must ensure the highest quality of member is recruited to the Forum. The Forum should seek to field the 'first division' in representation from civil society who are able to bring energy and ability to the task in hand. The use of personal specifications could assist this.
- Each sector should nominate its own representatives based on merit using common guidelines to achieve a balance of religious belief, gender (at least 40% of either gender), age, socio-economic background and geographical spread across NI. This could be achieved by:
 - a. each sector being required to achieve the above balances from their set of

nominations;

- b. each sector nominating more individuals than there are places available, who would then be interviewed by a selection panel. This panel could be made up of two representatives of each sector nominated in the Agreement;
 - c. each sector nominates as (a) above while a number of places are reserved for an overarching selection panel to recruit individuals to fill 'gaps'. This could be done by public advertisement.
- The position of chair should be full-time while that of the vice-chairs is likely to require a commitment of at least 2 days a week.
 - To facilitate participation a daily allowance, compensation for loss of earnings or compensation to employers should be made available as appropriate.
 - Training should be provided to Forum members to enable them to fulfil their role to the highest standards.
 - The secretariat should be a mixed group of knowledgeable civil servants, individuals with experience in one or other sector and others who are simply 'policy innovators'. A secretariat of 10 should be appointed, and this should be sanctioned by the Assembly.
 - It would be better for the Forum to be located close to the Assembly on the Stormont Estate.
 - A clear communications, public relations and media strategy should be pursued in order to keep the public informed of the work of the Forum and to provide information on how to influence its work.
 - Public hearings and accessible meetings of the Forum and its committees and working groups could be held in different parts of NI.
 - Citizens' Juries could be convened on particular issues and specific mechanisms for dialogue with schools could be established.
 - The Civic Forum should link into the proposed North-South consultative forum, the North-South Ministerial Council, the British-Irish Council and

Denis Rooney, Institute of Directors

equivalent bodies which fall within the British-Irish dimension.

- A continuous process of monitoring and review will be critical to the successful functioning of the Forum.
- Can assist the Assembly particularly in its difficult formative years and could provide a bank of expertise to assist the Assembly in various policy areas.
- Should assist rather than confuse the policy formulation and legislative process. The key to effectiveness lies in its structure, terms of reference and in particular membership.
- It is important that the body is genuinely complementary to the Assembly and does not overlap functionally with it.
- Papers prepared by the Forum should be debated by the Assembly as a matter of procedure.
- Members of the Forum should be determined by the selection of representative organisations who would be invited by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to provide nominees. Any proposed nominee should only be rejected by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on very exceptional grounds.
- Nominees appointed for 3 years and serve a maximum of two consecutive terms.
- Wealth creation is a vital task to the new Northern Ireland and thus the Forum needs a strong business representation. It is equally important that our society addresses the problems of economic marginalisation.
- Use 'umbrella' organisations to guarantee the widest representation. As a failsafe, however, we would propose that some additional seats are set aside for direct nominations by the First and Deputy First Ministers.
- It is important to have a direct link to the Assembly by having one representative from each political Party in the Assembly also nominated to the Forum. Ideally there should be elected Assembly members but political party nominees would be acceptable.

•	Membership		
	Business	CBI	4
		IOD	4
		Chamber of Commerce	4
	Trade Unions	NIC/ICTU	4
	Community	NICVA	4
	Youth	Youth Forum	2
	Education		2
	Health		2
	Political Parties		8
	Central Government and Local Authorities (Assessors with no voting powers)		8
	Unspecified		<u>4</u>
			46

- The Forum should elect its own Executive Committee.
- The primary function would be to provide an effective and expert support structure for the Assembly. A key aspect of its work will be the preparation of reports on selected subjects which when completed must be debated by the Assembly.
- Legislation drafted by the Assembly should be circulated to the Forum for comment at an appropriate stage.
- Should be reviewed after a period of 3-6 years.

*Seamus McAleavey, Director,
Northern Ireland Council for
Voluntary Action (NICVA)*

NICVA conducted a major consultation exercise with the voluntary/community sector throughout the summer. This included the mailing of a discussion paper to 5,000 organisations, 14 seminars across NI and a conference in Belfast on 7 September.

- The Civic Forum should be a complementary and consultative body to the Assembly but it should not be viewed as either a second chamber nor a rubber stamp.
- Farmers should be represented within the business sector and rural interests should be represented in the voluntary/community sector.

- The Civic Forum should place issues on the agenda and be truly cross-cutting in its way of doing business.
- Should deal with themes rather than issues.
- Important to have an effective secretariat, which could include members from a business, trade union and voluntary/community sector background.
- Should comprise of around 50-60 members.
- Would support selection (as opposed to election or appointment) as the optimum method of establishing the Forum:
 - clear guidelines for the role of members
 - clear guidelines for selection
 - a selection process that is transparent
 - a job description.
- The NICVA experience of nominating over 200 people to the EU District Partnership is highlighted as is the Nolan principles and PAFT guidelines.
- Four year tenure, rotating on the alternate 2-year cycle.
- Training for Forum members and potential Forum members.
- Need to examine ways in which young people can be involved.
- Should be a proximity between the Forum, its secretariat and the Assembly, however, the Forum should use meeting facilities throughout Northern Ireland.
- The Forum should be seen as something which is growing and developing and should be reviewed in order that new experiences and learning can be built on.

*Mr Tom Gillen, Northern
Ireland Committee, Irish
Congress of Trade Unions
(NIC/ACTU)*

Wrote in October enclosing a short paper outlining the key principles in relation to the establishment of the Civic Forum based upon an extensive consultation exercise through its affiliated organisations representing some 200,000 trade union members in NI. Suggested a follow-up meeting and cross referenced their paper to the joint paper submitted by the Concordia Group (see below).

- The Civic Forum should be purely advisory, hold no executive powers, and should function as a

mechanism to support the work of the Assembly.

- Should not only respond to requests from the Assembly but should also have the opportunity to raise and research issues of its own volition.
- The business, trade unions and voluntary sectors should be the main pillars in the Civic Forum and have equal representation. Each of these groups should be allowed to nominate their own representatives. The trade union representation should be sought through the Northern Ireland Committee of ICTU only.
- Additional sectors should include the farming community, rural interests and the most marginalised.
- The overall membership of the Forum should take account of the Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment (PAFT) guidelines.
- The Forum should not include elected representatives.

*Nigel Smyth, Director,
Confederation of British
Industry Northern Ireland*

Conducted an extensive consultation exercise with CBI membership.

- The Forum should adopt a “think the unthinkable” approach and nurture a change mentality.
- Issues referred to the Forum should be depoliticised before referral.
- A core of no more than 50 but bringing in expertise and other groups are required.
- Limit the core to social partners.
- Capacity and capability to contribute are the key factors – real need for innovative thinkers.
- There is a danger that excessive efforts to ensure broad representation may fail to attract the right calibre of individual. Those that participate should be “servants of wider society rather than guardians of sectional interests”.
- Nomination by recognised bodies putting forward a panel of nominees. Selection on merit.
- It should definitely not be elected.
- Tenure should not exceed 4 years with a quarter retiring each year.

*Avila Kilmurray, Director,
Northern Ireland Voluntary
Trust (NIVT)*

- Need a full-time chairman with two vice-chairmen. Period of chair should last 2 years.
- The Forum should be located close to the Forum but have a number of meetings throughout NI.
- Should work alongside existing bodies and duplication must be avoided eg the Northern Ireland Economic Council.
- A proactive role is needed – it should not just be consultative.
- Clearly needs a close relationship with the Assembly. It must not second guess the Assembly.
- Should be complementary to the Assembly and has the potential to broaden and deepen the sense of ownership of the spirit and ethos of the Agreement.
- Can identify long-term social, economic and cultural issues and draw out strategic policy options for consideration by the Assembly.
- An all-Party Sub-Committee of the Assembly might be set up to liaise with the Civic Forum.
- The Forum should receive formal responses to its consultative reports from Ministers, including reasons for the rejection of any recommendations not accepted.
- Should consist of 54 members.
- The NIVT supports the non-party political nature of the Civic Forum.
- The following sectors should be included:
 - Community Groups
 - Women's Groups
 - Youth Groups
 - Ethnic Minority Groups
 - Groups representing the elderly
 - Groups representing people with disabilities
 - Environmental Groups
 - Agricultural Industry Groups
- Its composition must be informed by the ability to bring to bear sectoral expertise on relevant social, economic and cultural issues.

*Mr Desi Murray, Secretary,
Belfast and District Trades'
Union Council*

- There should be an open nomination system for membership of the Civic Forum, with nominations being made by groups/organisations within each of the designated sectors. Agreed criteria for selection should be established, with a Selection Panel being made up of two representatives from the Trade Unions, Business and Voluntary Sectors.
- Proceedings of the Forum should be public and transparent. This will require a clear communications strategy.
- The secretariat should be drawn from the civil service, but with a proactive policy of secondment from all sectors that comprise the Forum.
- Should be sufficiently resourced to undertake broader consultation around specific issues or to undertake relevant research.
- The Forum should be committed to Targeting Social Need, tackling social exclusion and dealing with cultural and equality issues.
- It should not be a rubber stamp for the Assembly, it should initiate debate, consider issues and come to its own conclusions.
- Should have power to establish Citizens Juries to examine issues and prepare reports on all issues of importance to the Forum.
- Should be properly resourced and staffed. It should have its own secretariat and administration, a research department and press and public relations office.
- Should have the authority to commission expertise in relevant fields. It should provide training for members.
- The socially excluded must be included.
- The trade union movement must ensure that its Civic Forum representation is a balance of the movement as a whole (officials, lay officials and members).
- The membership should be elected by way of each nominating sector organising elections.
- Membership should be for a 4-year period, with one quarter of the membership retiring each year.
- The Forum should comprise of 90+ members.

*Neill Johnston, Assembly
Liaison Officer of the Royal
Society for the Protection of
Birds (RSPB)*

- Should have its main facilities at Castle Buildings, thus providing greater public awareness and credibility.
- It should meet regularly outside Belfast and be open to the public.
- Should be reviewed within 2 years.
- Should have the powers to summon Ministers.

Wrote in September enclosing a set of proposals.

- The RSPB has over 10,000 members in NI.
- Views the Forum as a vehicle for making the process of government more accessible, transparent and accountable. It will only achieve this and it will only be credible if it does not seek to rival the Assembly in any fashion.
- Must be influential and effective so that it attracts high calibre members who are prepared to devote time and energy to its affairs, however, the absolute primacy of the Assembly in the exercise of power must be unchallenged.
- Tenure of office must be long enough for individuals to play an effective part without mirroring the tenure of elected Assembly members.
- A membership of about 50 is compatible with the need to be effective.
- Bodies of all sizes and descriptions could apply to be 'recognised' by the Assembly. The Assembly could sift through these and agree which it wishes to recognise using the usual formulas (ie cross community support). It would then be up to the bodies to decide how to select their representatives.
- Suggests the establishment of a Central Forum from which people could be selected at random. The Forum would have the right to co-opt up to 25 members on an issue by issue basis. For example, an enquiry into education matters would consist of the 50 'Central' members and 25 'General' members with a specific interest.
- The Forum would elect its own chair and chairs of committees.
- The Forum should examine matters on a cross-

*Mike McKimm, Regional
Manager, The Institute of
Management, NI Region*

departmental fashion. This would contribute greatly to the good governance of NI. The overriding remit of the Forum should be the consideration of 'the bigger picture' in a way that ignores political and electoral cycles.

- The Institute has more than 1300 members in the region representing private and public sector.
- I would urge you to ensure that the Institute is represented on the Forum. We have important views on training, management standards and skills that will be required. We also bring considerable practical experience and cross county representation.
- The Institute is a charitable foundation. Many of its members are regularly active in the community.
- We have four branches, two in Belfast, one in Craigavon and one in Derry.

*Church Initiative Group
Mr David Porter, Director of
Evangelical Contribution in
Northern Ireland (ECONI)*

Wrote on 10 September on behalf of the Church Initiative Group. This is an ad hoc group of individuals in the main church and parachurch structures with responsibility for comment on social and political affairs. It seeks to reflect perspectives from both Protestant and Catholic traditions and Ecumenical and Evangelical streams. A paper, titled "The Civic Forum: Involving the Churches" was attached.

- All religious traditions in Northern Ireland should have the opportunity to participate in the Forum, and not just the Christian churches.
- Any process of appointment should involve consultation with the main churches, interchurch bodies (eg the Irish Council of Churches and the Evangelical Alliance) and with representatives of smaller Protestant denominations who do not consider themselves represented by such bodies.

*Dr David Stevens, Joint
Secretary of the Irish Inter-
Church Meeting*

Wrote in September. This body has representation from 11 churches, and is strongly of the view that the Churches should seek participation in the Civic Forum. The letter included an offer to facilitate a consultation process on the process of selection from Churches.

*The Standing Committee of the
General Synod of the Church
of Ireland*

"We would value the opportunity to be involved in your consultation for the setting up of the Forum. Also, if representation on the Forum is sought from 'the religious community' as part of the voluntary sector, we would wish consideration to be given to Church of Ireland participation."