

## CONSULTATIVE CIVIC FORUM

An extract from the 15 February 1999 Report by the First Minister (Designate) and Deputy First Minister (Designate) to the New Northern Ireland Assembly.

### 5. Consultative Civic Forum

5.1 Arising from the round-table consultations with six of the Assembly Parties (UUP, SDLP, SF, All, NIWC and PUP) last November a study group was established to produce a report that would offer advice on steps we should take to establish the consultative Civic Forum. We received the study group's report on 3 February 1999 and have since placed a copy of the Report in the Assembly Library.

5.2 We wish to record our appreciation for the work of the study group. We also wish to place on record our appreciation of the contribution of a wide range of individuals and organisations who have made written submissions on the possible role and functions of the Civic Forum. The study group's report formed the basis of a further round of consultations which we had with Parties over the past 10 days.

5.3 We have carefully considered the various written submissions, the study group's report and the views expressed to us by Assembly Parties; and, having done so, we outline below a set of proposals for the establishment of the Civic Forum.

5.4 Paragraph 34 of Strand One of the Agreement provides that the Civic Forum will act as a consultative mechanism on social, economic and cultural issues. We will make arrangements for obtaining from the Civic Forum its views on such matters. These

arrangements will not take effect until after they have been approved by the Assembly.

5.5 Arising from paragraph 19 of the Strand Two section of the Agreement, the Civic Forum may be asked to offer its views on any independent consultative forum established by the two Administrations.

5.6 The Civic Forum should comprise 60 members plus a chairperson, with nominations processed under the following headings:

- business 7
- agriculture/fisheries 3
- trade union 7
- voluntary/community 18
- churches 5
- culture 4
- arts and sport 4
- victims 2
- community relations 2
- education 2
- First and Deputy First Ministers 6

5.7 The approval of the First and Deputy First Ministers will be required as to the arrangements for securing the nominations from the consortia and the other sectors specified below. Specifically, all nominating bodies should adhere to the following guidelines:

- a. a gender balance;
- b. a community background balance;
- c. a geographic spread across Northern Ireland; and

d. a balanced age profile to include young people and older people.

5.8 Business: The Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce, the Institute of Directors, the Confederation of British Industry and the Federation of Small Businesses should be invited to form a consortium for the purpose of nominating 7 individuals reflecting the interests across the business community (including tourism).

5.9 Agriculture/Fisheries: The Ulster Farmers' Union, the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association and representative organisations from the fishing sector should be invited to form a consortium for the purpose of nominating 3 individuals.

5.10 Trade Union: The Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions should be invited to nominate 7 individuals representative of the widest possible spectrum of the trade union movement, including representation from the unemployed affiliated to the trade union movement.

5.11 Voluntary/Community: A number of umbrella voluntary organisations, including the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, the Rural Community Network, Disability Action and the Women's Resource Development Agency, should be invited to assist in bringing forward a set of proposals on how 18 nominations from the voluntary/community sector can be achieved. The process should ensure in particular that:

a. a range of sub-sectoral groups (see below) are able through the formation of consortia to put forward nominations from within their own sub-sectoral groupings;

- b. the sub-sectoral groups are representative groups of older people, youth, people with disabilities, women's groups, ethnic minorities, carers, families and children, and community development, community health, community education and environmental groups;
- c. nominations are sought through a public advertisement campaign to maximise the transparency of the process;
- d. non-affiliation to/association with any of the umbrella bodies does not prevent sub-sectoral groups from making nominations.

5.12 Churches: The churches should be invited to form a consortium for the purpose of nominating 5 individuals representing a broad spread of religious belief within the community.

5.13 Culture: The Cultural Traditions Group of the Community Relations Council and major cultural organisations should be invited to form a consortium for the purpose of nominating 4 individuals.

5.14 Arts & Sports: The Northern Ireland Arts Council and the Northern Ireland Sports Council should be invited to nominate 2 individuals each.

5.15 Victims: Organisations working with victims should be invited to assist in ensuring that the concerns of victims are represented on the Civic Forum through 2 nominations.

5.16 Community Relations: The Community Relations Council should be invited to nominate 2 individuals who have made a significant---

contribution to working across the community divide in Northern Ireland.

- 5.17 Education: The Queen's University of Belfast and the University of Ulster should be invited to form a consortium across the broad education sector for the purpose of nominating 2 individuals who have a thorough knowledge and direct experience of the educational challenges confronting the Northern Ireland community.
- 5.18 Nominations by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister: The First and Deputy First Ministers should appoint 6 individuals who, in their assessment, have a range of insights, expertise and experiences that will inform the deliberations of the Civic Forum.
- 5.19 All nominations to the Civic Forum should adhere to the principles of public appointments being based on equality of opportunity, merit, openness and transparency of process.
- 5.20 Members should normally serve for 3 years. The initial membership should retire on a staggered basis and casual vacancies should be filled by the nominating bodies or other nominating processes agreed upon.
- 5.21 The chairperson of the Civic Forum should be appointed by the First and Deputy First Ministers following a process of consultation and public advertisement. The chairperson should receive an appropriate honorarium and normally serve for a 3- year term.
- 5.22 Up to two vice-chairpersons should be appointed by the membership of the Civic Forum.
- 5.23 The Civic Forum should operate under the aegis of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, which will provide

administrative support consisting of a secretariat and operating expenses, including members' expenses and consultancy fees.

5.24 The initial membership, assisted by the secretariat, should draw up procedural guidance for the operation of the Civic Forum for approval by the Assembly.

5.25 We have agreed that the arrangements outlined above should be completed and that the Civic Forum should be fully operational no later than 6 months after the appointed day for devolution.

5.26 The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister shall arrange a formal review, to be carried out in close consultation with the membership of the Civic Forum, with a view to reporting within 12 months of the Forum becoming operational. The review should consider all matters relating to the structure and effective operation of the Civic Forum.