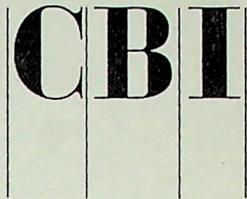


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CBI Northern Ireland

Director
Nigel Smyth



Mr Seamus Mallon
Deputy First Minister
New Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
BELFAST BT4 1SH

13 October 1998

Dear Seamus

CIVIC FORUM

Over the last few months we have been consulting our members on the issue of the Civic Forum. I enclose a short paper summarising the key points arising from this consultation. At the same time we have been contributing to the proposals being developed by New Agenda.

I hope you find this helpful. If you feel it would be of value to meet to discuss the issue my Chairman Chris Gibson, and I would be delighted to respond.

Rachel

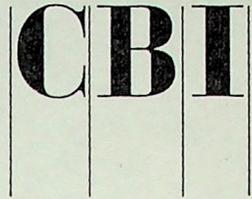
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Paper NI 14 98 The Civic Forum

Following extensive consultations with members, the CBI Northern Ireland position on the Civic Forum can be summarised as shown below.

Role – this needs to be clear from the start

CBI Northern Ireland suggests the following:

- To initiate new strategic thinking, ideas and policy creativity
- To assist the Assembly in addressing the divisions within our society
- To help inform and educate wider civil society
- To respond to key social, economic and cultural matters raised by the Assembly including all new legislative proposals

A number of people suggest that the Forum should adopt a “think the unthinkable” approach and nurture a change mentality. Important to ensure that issues referred to the Forum are depoliticised before referral.

Composition and size

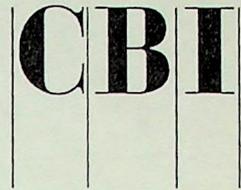
- A core of no more than 50 but bringing in expertise and other groups as required for working groups etc – this will help to ensure an inclusive approach.
- Limit core to social partners but ensuring a good balance of representation across all key sectors
- Capacity and capability to contribute are the key factors – real need for innovative thinkers
- Ensure broad representation ie sector, age, gender, geographic etc

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”*.

Selection

- Preference for nomination by recognised bodies, perhaps by putting forward a panel of nominees. Selection on merit by composite panel made up of social partners.
- It should definitely not be elected
- Term of office should not exceed four years with one quarter of members retiring each year – phasing in period obviously needed. There is a fairly strong view that three years





The Civic Forum
(October 1998)

may be best, with the option of serving a second term (with limit on number who can have second term)

Leadership and administration

- There will need to be a full-time chairman with two vice-chairmen (an incoming and an outgoing)
- Period of chair should be for two years
- There is a strong view that the Civic Forum should be located close to the Assembly
- The Forum should have a set number of meetings in various locations around Northern Ireland

Other points

- We recognise that it must not turn into a talking shop
- It should work along side existing bodies and duplication must be avoided eg the Northern Ireland Economic Council
- A proactive role is needed for the Civic Forum – it should not just be consultative
- It should be a consensus building forum bringing new thinking and ideas
- Emphasise that the Forum must be used to assist the political representatives – and it could act as a valuable stabilising force
- It mustn't second guess the Assembly
- Extensive activities to interface with, and ensure accessibility for, the wider public will be essential
- Political manipulation must be avoided – otherwise great danger of undermining the Forum
- Clearly needs close relationship with Assembly

Nigel P. E. Smyth
Director, CBI Northern Ireland

9 October 1998