

## OUTREACH WORKERS' ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### THE FORUM

The Northern Ireland Bill of Rights Forum was established in December 2006 by the Hon David Hanson MP, then Minister for Human Rights in the United Kingdom Government, in accordance with the St Andrews Agreement. It is a multi-party, multi-sectoral body broadly representative of the people of Northern Ireland.

The Forum has 29 members: 14 representatives of the political parties, 14 representatives of civic society and an independent chair, appointed by the Minister in March 2007. The civic representatives come from the human rights sector, trade unions, business, the churches, the voluntary or community sector and organisations of or for children and young people, ethnic minorities, older people, people of different sexual orientation, people with disabilities and women.

The Forum's mandate is

to produce agreed recommendations to inform the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's advice to Government on the scope for defining, in Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the European Convention on Human Rights, to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, drawing as appropriate on international human rights instruments and experience. These additional rights to reflect the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem, and – taken together with the ECHR – to constitute a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

The Forum must provide its recommendations by 31 March 2008.

### OUTREACH STRATEGY

The Forum has adopted a strategy paper on its outreach programme and work (BORF 17, which is posted on its website: [www.billofrightsforum.org](http://www.billofrightsforum.org)). The Forum's outreach strategy aims to

- raise awareness about a Bill of Rights
- provide information about the Forum and its work
- conduct consultations to assist the Forum in developing its advice to the NIHRC, prioritising consultations with identified groups not previously or sufficiently involved in previous Bill of Rights discussions and
- build support for the Forum's proposals.

Although different outreach activities will be directed primarily towards one or other of these four elements, all the Forum's outreach activities will have all the components built into them. Activities that focus most on awareness raising, for example, will also invite submissions and comment. Activities that are principally directed towards obtaining views will also have a dimension of building support for the Forum's proposals.

The strategy consists of

- targeted focused outreach to identified sectors
- more general outreach to identified communities or parts of communities and
- a media strategy with components for each segment of the media.

The outreach programme aims in particular to reach those sectors of the community that were unable to engage adequately in the previous processes relating to a Bill of Rights. The Forum has identified thirteen of these groups:

- carers
- children and young people
- LGBT people
- low socio-economic groups and areas (new TSN)
- new immigrant communities
- older people
- people with disability
- rural and remote communities
- Travellers
- unionist communities (including Loyal Orders, evangelical churches)
- users of languages other than English
- victims of the Troubles
- women.

The Forum's first priority in outreach is awareness raising. It has agreed that the most effective way for it to approach this task is to target these specific groups. In addition, a strategy of engaging with the print and broadcast media through news and features stories and interviews is part of the engagement programme's awareness raising component.

In providing information, the Forum has produced an introductory brochure about itself and its work, has established a website with a large and increasing quantity of relevant resources and links and will produce other resources as required and possible.

The Forum is strongly supportive of a targeted approach to consultation that again focuses on these 13 groups.

Additionally, the Forum is convinced of the need to secure community support for its recommendations, the third component of its engagement programme. To that end it is committed to engaging particularly with those whom the Bill of Rights should be seeking to assist.

These three elements of outreach go together, making the engagement programme as effective as possible by integrating its component parts.

## OUTREACH APPROACH

Four half time outreach workers have been engaged to lead the Forum's outreach work. There are two broad components to their task:

1. general outreach to the broad population sectors assigned to them
2. engagement with relevant community organisations and political parties to facilitate contact with those they represent, building on existing relationships.

To undertake these broad tasks, the outreach workers will

- liaise with representatives of the sectors and political parties represented at the Forum and listed by the Forum as priority target groups to develop and implement outreach initiatives that are appropriate to the sectors and constituencies, consistent with the Forum's agreed outreach policy, and undertaken in an accountable manner
- develop networks within the targeted groups assigned to them

- identify appropriate contacts in groups that have previously not engaged with the Bill of Rights process
- work with organisations in designing and delivering outreach programmes as appropriate
- oversee expenditure on the programmes
- ensure that the outcome of each of the outreach initiatives is reported back to the Forum.

Outreach workers, as all members of the Forum and its Secretariat, will adhere at all times to the Forum's child protection policy.

## OUTREACH TIMETABLE

Difficulties in the recruitment of the four half time outreach workers have caused the outreach programme to be compressed. As a result, the timetable for their work will now incorporate the following:

December 2007 –January 2008

Principal objectives

- awareness raising and
- information provision

Principal activities

- identification and initial contact with key organisations relating to the target group or groups assigned to each worker
- discussion with relevant individuals in those organisations in relation to the Forum and its work
- discussion with groups of people convened by those organisations in relation to the Forum and its work
- identification and establishment of focus groups or other processes to engage during the February-March period
- planning and preparation for discussion with cross cutting sectoral organisations

Resources

- the Forum brochure
- website
- policy and process papers
- working group progress reports

February 2008 –March 2008

Principal objectives

- encouraging contribution to the Forum's discussion of key issues and
- building support for the Forum's proposals

#### Principal activities

- further discussions with key organisations and individuals to explain the draft proposals being developed by the Forum
- meetings with discussion with cross cutting sectoral organisations
- focus groups or other processes to enable discussion of and comment on the Forum's draft proposals
- encourage or obtain feedback on specific issue on which the Forum requires comment

#### Resources

- website
- working group final reports
- specific issue papers on which opinion or feedback is sought
- interim papers and proposals adopted by the Forum during the negotiation process

### OUTREACH FEEDBACK

Outreach workers should ensure that the Forum receives regular feedback on information provided to them in their course of their work. In particular,

- any written submissions or other written materials should be forwarded to the Secretariat as soon as possible after receipt, to be brought to the attention of relevant working groups or Forum members generally as appropriate
- any particular concerns or issues of immediate relevance should be referred to the Secretariat and/or to relevant working groups as soon as possible after receipt
- at the end of each month, outreach workers should provide the Secretariat with a written report of their activities and reflections, summarising what they had been told or learnt of relevance to the Forum's work, for the Secretariat to forward to all Forum members and to the members of relevant working groups.