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The
Community Foundation
for Northern Ireland

9 September 2008



Mr T Canavan
Civic Forum Review Team
5th Floor
Lesley House
25 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6GD

Dear Tony

I enclose some comments with regard to the Civic Forum Review. My Board of Trustees had their first meeting last weekend since the Review Team's questions were circulated. Hence, it was impossible to meet the 29th August 2008 deadline.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Avila'.

AVILA KILMURRAY
Director



**Review of Civic Forum –
Response from the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland**

1. The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland is concerned to express its disappointment at the nature of the review process adopted with regard to the Civic Forum – the establishment of which was a key feature of the structures laid out in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. In particular the Foundation notes the fact that much of the consultation period fell over the summer months.
2. Notwithstanding the above the Board of Trustees considered the questions posed by the Civic Forum Review Team at their recent meeting. They felt strongly that space for participative democracy should be safeguarded, albeit that the operation of the Civic Forum could be usefully re-modelled. The Community Foundation continues to be supportive of a social partnership approach as can be seen to be operating both within the EU (the Social and Economic Council) and within Ireland.
3. The Community Foundation is also acutely aware of the provision for an all-island structure of participative democracy in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement that the Civic Forum was to be an essential pillar of.
4. The Foundation believes that the Civic Forum requires a clearer remit and focus, but that it is particularly beneficial to have a structure where participation is based on sectoral interest rather than on designated political allegiance. To this end the Foundation would stress the importance of a membership drawn from clear socio-economic and related sectors rather than political appointees.
5. The Community Foundation feels that at this stage a number of principles should be adopted with regard to any recommendations that might emerge from the review of the Civic Forum.
 - a) The Civic Forum should be recognised as an important structure for the engagement between representative political institutions and the active citizenship of participative democracy.
 - b) The selection of the membership of the Civic Forum should be carried out in a transparent and equitable manner.
 - c) The remit of the Civic Forum should be agreed in advance, and should be clearly focused on subjects prioritized to coincide with the life of the Assembly.

- d) Members of the Civic Forum should have the support of an independent secretariat (i.e. not seconded civil servants) to ensure appropriate briefing and communication.
 - e) The membership of the Civic Forum should be non party political in nature and drawn from designated sectors within civil society.
 - f) The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland would encourage the Civic Forum Review Team to recommend the setting up of a small inter-sectoral Review Team, which would be tasked to undertake a study of comparable structures in European countries, which could offer models of good practice in structured participative democracy. In the absence of this informed discussion the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland does not feel that it should respond to the detailed questions set by the Review Team at this point in time.
6. As part of that wider review the Community Foundation would be keen to discuss how the Civic Forum might interact with other consultative fora in both Northern Ireland, and beyond. The Foundation would also be keen to consider how the Civic Forum might relate to options and potential for participative democracy at the level of the proposed Local Authorities under the Review of Public Administration.

Avila Kilmurray