



28 July 2008

Mr Tony Canavan
Civic Forum Review Team
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civicforumreview@ofmdfmi.gov.uk

Dear Mr Canavan

Review of the Civic Forum

The Institute of Directors was one of the business organisations that interviewed and selected representatives from the business sector to sit on the Civic Forum when it was originally formed. We received feedback from the business representatives both during its time in operation and since the launch of the review, and this information has informed our response to the review.

In our view, it is inappropriate to discuss how the Civic Forum or any alternative model of social partnership might operate until there is a clear, and agreed, understanding of the unique role of such a forum, and how it would add value. It is imperative that there is wholehearted support from the main political parties; such support was not evident during the Civic Forum's period of operation.

Since the restoration of the devolved Assembly, local Ministers and MLAs have been very open to engagement with the business bodies, other sectors of the community and individuals. Business has also been working closely with Ministers, civil servants and other relevant parties on economic and business issues through the Economic Development Forum. This engagement has covered the business agenda and not simply a government or civil service agenda, allowing the development of new policies that are much more focused on outcomes for the benefit of the economy and the whole community.

The production of the Programme for Government was an extremely valuable exercise that has set out the Executive's priorities going forward. This document was the result of extensive consultation with civic society and we would assume that the Executive's willingness to engage will not diminish over time. The Programme also sets goals for Northern Ireland to achieve; we have no doubt that sectoral bodies will be vociferous in challenging the Executive on their achievement of these goals and in raising new issues that require attention in subsequent Programmes for Government.

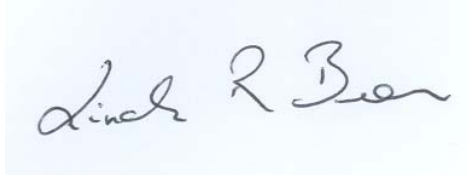
A plethora of Commissions have been created through which civic society can challenge government and it is unclear to us what distinctive role is left for the Civic Forum that would add value to the citizen and avoid duplication with activity that is already happening. In these straitened financial times, it will be important to be able to justify the cost of running any new Forum.

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The Institute remains to be convinced that there is anything to be gained from resurrecting the Civic Forum or creating any new Forum. Should, however, the democratic decision be to reinstate the Forum, then the Institute would welcome the opportunity to give our views on such issues as membership, representation, constitution, remuneration, etc.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue background. The signature reads "Linda R Brown" in a cursive, flowing script.

Linda R Brown
Divisional Director

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