BRIEFING FOR ULSTER BANK DIVERSITY EVENT

Purpose: Ulster Bank Rainbow Network and RBS Women NI are organising an event entitled 'Striving for Diversity and Inclusion: Past and Present' in Ulster Bank's headquarters in Belfast's Donegall Street at 6pm on September 19, 2017. It will be held in the restaurant on the ground floor and will feature a keynote speech by Baroness Sheila Noakes, a series of workshops on four relevant issues and a panel discussion featuring Baroness Noakes, Stormont MLAs Mairtin O Mulleioir of Sinn Fein and Paula Bradshaw of Alliance, Belfast City Councillor Jeff Dudgeon of the Ulster Unionists and Ulster Bank's Head of Legal, Rachel Curran.

The event comes at a critical juncture in Northern Ireland politics, as talks take place to break the deadlock that has prevented a devolved government from operating at Stormont since January.

The talks have been focussing on calls from Sinn Fein, the SDLP, Alliance, the Greens and People Before Profit for an Irish Language Act and the introduction of Equal Marriage. The DUP has been vocal in its opposition to equal marriage and reluctant to agree to an Irish Language Act. The Ulster Unionists have also been unconvinced about the need for an Irish Language Act. The talks have also focussed on a mechanism for dealing with the legacy of the Troubles and there has been discussion around the possibility of changes to the Assembly's petition of concern as a mechanism for protecting minority rights. The petition of concern has been invoked on a range of issues including equal marriage. We have also seen this year two snap elections in Northern Ireland - an Assembly contest in March and a General Election in June - and Brexit has also dominated political debate in Britain, Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic and in Brussels with the movement of people and goods along the Irish border, the rights of EU citizens in the U.K. post Brexit and the cost of the UK's divorce settlement the initial focus of talks.

After a keynote speech by Baroness Sheila Noakes at the Ulster Bank event, guests will address some of these issues in four working groups with a view to generating questions for the panel discussion that you will be participating in (see the agenda below). These will cover the following topics:

How does Gender, Sexuality or Disability impact on your career potential?: Paula will participate in this discussion on how public and private sector organisations are becoming more reflective of the diverse range of backgrounds within their workforce and what they can do to promote more diversity.

How can our previous experiences in Northern Ireland help us in the current diverse environment?: Jeff will participate in this discussion on how the experiences of the past 40 years can help us shape a more diverse and accepting society. What have we learned from the conflicts of the past and the efforts since the 1994 ceasefires to create a more tolerant and rights based society?

Petition of concern: the Assembly's petition of concern was intended in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement as a mechanism to protect minority rights but some people believe it has also been used as a barrier to shaping a more diverse and tolerant society. Does the mechanism need reform and how would you reform it?

Brexit - Mairtin will participate in this discussion which focuses on the impact of Brexit on rights and diversity. With Northern Ireland no longer set to be part of the EU post Brexit while the Irish Republic remains, what will the impact be? How do we ensure rights are protected or even enhanced in a post Brexit Northern Ireland?

***Agenda***

17:30 - Doors Open, Guests arrive & Drinks reception

**18:00 - Intro and Welcome - Mark Crimmins**

a. Including Outline agenda

b. Guests

c. Format

d. Safety stuff

**18.10 - Main Speaker – Baroness Sheila Noakes**

a. Sheila and possibly 1 or 2 questions at that point

**18:30 - Break out session**

a. How does Gender, sexuality and/or disability impact on your career potential?

b. How can our previous experiences in Northern Ireland help us in the current diverse environment?

c. What impact has the Assembly's petition of concern had on the impacted diversity and inclusion in Northern Ireland

d. BREXIT – how will any north/south border impact on the views around diversity

**19:10 Panel discussion**

o MC - Sandra Wright

o Baroness Noakes

o Rachel Curren

o Mairtin O Muilleoir MLA (SF)

o Paula Bradshaw MLA (Alliance)

o Jeff Dudgeon (UUP)

o IOD? - Dan to confirm

**19.50 Closing statement - Mark Crimmins**

**20:00 Baroness Noakes to leave (20.30 at the latest)**

**21:00 Thank you and safe home**

Baroness Sheila Noakes

Baroness Noakes is a Conservative peer and independent RBS Non Executive Director. An accountant, she served at various stages as the Opposition spokesperson for the Treasury, for Work and Pensions and Health and has also been a Co-Director of the Reuters Founders Share Company and CarpetRight. She was a prominent advocate of equal marriage in the House of Lords.

Mairtin O Muilleoir MLA

Mairtin is a Sinn Fein member of the Assembly, an author, publisher and businessman who served as the Finance Minister in the last Stormont Executive. A fluent Irish speaker, he represents South Belfast in the Assembly and is a former Lord Mayor of Belfast. He has extensive contacts in business, politics and community activism on both sides of the Atlantic and is a keen runner and cyclist.

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Paula is an Alliance Party member of the Assembly and also represents South Belfast. A former community worker, her main areas of interest have been health, community regeneration and transport and she also served on Belfast City Council.

Councillor Jeff Dudgeon

Jeff is an Ulster Unionist Belfast city councillor and historian who first came to prominence when he successfully challenged in the European Court of Human Rights the criminalisation of consensual sexual acts between men in Northern Ireland. In 2012, he received an MBE in the New Year Honours for "services to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community in Northern Ireland". As well as contesting local government and Westminster elections in various guises (he once campaigned as a Labour Integrationist), he once stood for the Seanad (Upper House) in the Irish Republic in 2011.

Rachel Curran

Rachel is the General Counsel and Head of Group Legal for Ulster Bank in the Irish Republic. She is one of the senior executive sponsors of the Rainbow Network within the bank and last October hosted the future Taoiseach Leo Varadkar at a diversity celebration in the bank's Dublin headquarters.

Mark Crimmins

Mark is the head of Business Banking at Ulster Bank and a senior member of the Northern Ireland Management Board. From Newry, he was initially an accountant with PwC and is very active on Newry's Chamber of Commerce and Trade.