

## Document 2

**From:** [Redacted Section 40(2)] **On Behalf Of** Gibson, Neil  
**Sent:** 21 March 2025 17:42  
**To:** Harding, Leander [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Cc:** DOF PressOffice <dof.pressoffice@finance-ni.gov.uk>; McLaughlin, Mark (DOF) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Conlan, Ciarrai [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Minne, Jill [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Quinn, Aisling (P&OD) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Casey, Cathy [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Subject:** FW: SGM-0330-2025 For clearance - BBC News - Belfast Pride latest to ban political parties from parade

Leander

Neil is content.

Regards

[Redacted Section 40(2)]  
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**Please note I do not work on Wednesdays**

**From:** Harding, Leander [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Sent:** 21 March 2025 17:23  
**To:** Gibson, Neil [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Cc:** DOF PressOffice <dof.pressoffice@finance-ni.gov.uk>; McLaughlin, Mark (DOF) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; [Redacted Section 40(2)]; [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Conlan, Ciarrai [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Minne, Jill [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Quinn, Aisling (P&OD) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Casey, Cathy [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Subject:** SGM-0330-2025 For clearance - BBC News - Belfast Pride latest to ban political parties from parade

Hi Neil,

**Issue – Belfast Pride**  
**Media – All outlets**

Belfast Pride have announced they are banning political parties attending their parade this year. Given the potential for media interest the line below which has been cleared by Jill Minne and the co-chairs of the LGBTQ+ Staff Network to be used against potential media queries.

Grateful if you can advise if you are also content with the statement, if you are given this is a NICS wide issue I will share with TEO Press Office to ensure HOCS is content too before seeking Ministerial clearance.

Many thanks  
Leander

### **Draft line**

“As one of the largest employers here with over 24,000 staff the NI Civil Service is committed to being an inclusive employer.

“Alongside supportive family, friends and colleagues, the Civil Service LGBTQ+ Staff Network has participated in the Belfast Pride parade since 2018. The Network plans to participate in the Pride parade as it has done since then.”

### **BBC story**

[Belfast Pride latest to ban political parties from parade](#)

Last year's Belfast Pride theme was 'Love Your Mind', with the parade led by the city's Lord Mayor Micky Murray

### **Belfast Pride have become the latest organisers to ban political parties who supported a ban on the sale or supply of puberty blockers to under-18s from taking part in its parade.**

In December, the four parties in the executive - Sinn Féin, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Alliance and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) - voted to introduce an indefinite permanent ban. Puberty blockers are drugs used to delay or prevent puberty happening and had sometimes been prescribed to children questioning their gender.

Last month, organisers of Foyle Pride, Causeway Pride and Mid and East Antrim Pride **told political parties not to attend their Pride events** over the ban.

Belfast Pride Festival is one of the biggest festivals in the city, with hundreds taking part in the parade which marches through the city centre.

### **'Anger and frustration'**

In a statement on Friday, Belfast Pride said following a community consultation, the organisation would not be accepting applications from those executive parties to take part in the parade.

"Belfast Pride is deeply concerned about the impact this decision has had, and will have, on trans young people," it said.

Organisers said what was universal in responses to its consultation was the "anger and frustration expressed at the decision to ban puberty blockers in Northern Ireland".

Image source,PA Media

Image caption,

Hundreds normally take part in the annual pride parade in Belfast

"For at least a decade concerns about the failures in trans healthcare have been expressed to political panels at Belfast Pride and by our partners in the LGBTQIA+ sector," it added.

"Despite this, no meaningful action to improve these services has been undertaken or plan developed - other than to remove one of the limited services available."

Belfast Pride also said the failure to include LGBTQIA+ people in the Programme for Government was "extremely disappointing".

"We are living in unprecedented times where our hard-won rights are once again under threat," the statement said.

"We call on all political parties to take meaningful action to address the inequalities still experienced by our community."

Sinn Féin's equality spokesperson, Carál Ní Chuilín, said the decision to exclude executive parties was "deeply disappointing" and a "backwards step".

"Pride has always been an inclusive event welcoming people from all backgrounds to participate and celebrate LGBTQIA+ people," she said.

"While we fully respect the right of the organisers to take this decision, we believe this is a missed opportunity to once again stand together to confront those whose agenda has been, and continues to be, to marginalise, undermine and divide supporters of LGBTQIA+ rights."

### **Puberty blockers in Northern Ireland**

Until the ban in Northern Ireland, puberty blockers were only available on NHS prescription for under-18s, for those young people who were accepted onto the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Gender Identity Service endocrine pathway prior to March 2020.

It is understood children already on this medical pathway will continue to receive treatment.

Hormone suppressors also remain available for patients receiving the drugs for other uses, such as early-onset puberty.

The move to ban puberty blockers came after a report into children's gender services - [the Cass Review](#) - said there were "gaps in evidence" around the drugs.

The review was led by leading paediatrician Dr Hilary Cass and prompted the last government to ban the use of puberty blockers for under-18s questioning their gender – a move which was then supported by Labour when they won the election.