

### Document 3

**From:** McNabb, Chris [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Sent:** 22 March 2025 13:34  
**To:** Harding, Leander [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Cc:** Stewart, Chris (TEO) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Malcolm, David (TEO) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Brady, Jayne [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Byrne, Jayne [Redacted Section 40(2)]; HOCS OFFICE (JB) <HOCSOFFICE@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>; McNabb, Chris [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Gibson, Neil [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Subject:** C McNabb to L Harding - For clearance - LTT/ Belfast Pride latest to ban political parties from parade

Leander

See line below which I have suggested to HOCS and which she has cleared. Can you share with Neil and Jill and once they are content, share with the Minister for clearance.

I've said to HOCS that before NICS reaches a position re this year's Belfast Pride, there needs to be ministerial engagement and the line reflects that position. This holding line hopefully provides the time for those discussions to be had.

Thanks for everything on this and keeping me in the loop. Keep me copied in on the emails.

Chris

Draft line as cleared by HOCS

A NICS spokesperson said: "The NI Civil Service notes the decision by Belfast Pride and will discuss it internally before coming to any decision on attending this year's parade."

**From:** Brady, Jayne [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Sent:** 22 March 2025 11:00  
**To:** McNabb, Chris [Redacted Section 40(2)]; HOCS OFFICE (JB) <HOCSOFFICE@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>  
**Cc:** Byrne, Jayne [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Stewart, Chris (TEO) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Malcolm, David (TEO) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; McNabb, Chris [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Subject:** Re: For clearance - LTT/ Belfast Pride latest to ban political parties from parade

Thanks Chris, I am content with the line you have suggested and to have that cleared through ministers.

We should have a call early next week to discuss the various strands that need to be progressed before confirming a position. I will ask my office to set up.

Jayne

Sent from [Outlook for iOS](#)

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**From:** McNabb, Chris [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Sent:** Saturday, March 22, 2025 10:10:48 AM  
**To:** Brady, Jayne [Redacted Section 40(2)]; HOCS OFFICE (JB) <[HOCSOFFICE@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:HOCSOFFICE@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)>  
**Cc:** Byrne, Jayne [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Stewart, Chris (TEO) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Malcolm, David (TEO) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; McNabb, Chris [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Subject:** RE: For clearance - LTT/ Belfast Pride latest to ban political parties from parade

Jayne et al

Sorry to come back again but I would have thought a more appropriate line against enquiry would be:

A NICS spokesperson said: "The NI Civil Services notes the decision by Belfast Pride and will discuss it internally before coming to any decision on attending this year's parade."

Again, this would need cleared by ministers.  
Chris

**From:** McNabb, Chris [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Sent:** 22 March 2025 09:19  
**To:** Brady, Jayne [Redacted Section 40(2)]; HOCS OFFICE (JB) <[HOCSOFFICE@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:HOCSOFFICE@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)>  
**Cc:** Byrne, Jayne [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Stewart, Chris (TEO) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Malcolm, David (TEO) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; McNabb, Chris [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Subject:** RE: For clearance - LTT/ Belfast Pride latest to ban political parties from parade

Jayne

Thanks – I can pass your query on to Jill but I would suggest that before we reach out to Pride or finalise a line on this issue that there is a conversation with FMdFM and the Finance minister.

As you are aware the decision to ban ministers from attending is because of the Executive decision to ban puberty blockers. If the NICS attends, it could be viewed/perceived/portrayed that the NICS is siding with groups critical of the Executive's decision.

Whatever the final decision is, I would suggest the need for ministerial engagement before rushing to a position which finance seem to be suggesting before any engagement has taken place.

Chris

**From:** Brady, Jayne [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Sent:** 21 March 2025 23:28  
**To:** McNabb, Chris [Redacted Section 40(2)]; HOCS OFFICE (JB)

<[HOCSOFFICE@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:HOCSOFFICE@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)>

**Cc:** Byrne, Jayne [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Stewart, Chris (TEO) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Malcolm, David (TEO) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; McNabb, Chris [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Subject:** Re: For clearance - LTT/ Belfast Pride latest to ban political parties from parade

Thanks Chris, I am content for the lines to be forwarded to the Finance Minister.

Can I also confirm that we have had engagement with the Belfast Pride organisation and they have advised their position on NICS attending as an employer would not be challenged?

Jayne

Sent from [Outlook for iOS](#)

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**From:** McNabb, Chris [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Sent:** Friday, March 21, 2025 5:58:50 PM  
**To:** Brady, Jayne [Redacted Section 40(2)]; HOCS OFFICE (JB) <[HOCSOFFICE@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:HOCSOFFICE@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)>  
**Cc:** Byrne, Jayne [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Stewart, Chris (TEO) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; Malcolm, David (TEO) [Redacted Section 40(2)]; McNabb, Chris [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Subject:** FW: For clearance - LTT/ Belfast Pride latest to ban political parties from parade

Jayne

See below from DoF following the announcement today by Belfast Pride to ban political parties from this year's parade. The line has been prepared against enquiry and has been cleared by Neil and Jill. Before it goes to the Finance Minister are you content with it, in particular confirming that the NICS will take part in this year's parade even before there has been a discussion with Ministers.

Thanks

Chris

**From:** Harding, Leander [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Sent:** 21 March 2025 17:53  
**To:** McNabb, Chris [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Cc:** TEO Press Office <[press.office@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:press.office@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)>; DOF PressOffice <[dof.pressooffice@finance-ni.gov.uk](mailto:dof.pressooffice@finance-ni.gov.uk)>; Conlan, Ciarraí [Redacted Section 40(2)]  
**Subject:** For clearance - LTT/ Belfast Pride latest to ban political parties from parade

Hi Chris,

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

Belfast Pride has announced they are banning political parties attending their parade this year. The line below has been cleared by Neil Gibson, Jill Minne and the co-chairs of the LGBTQ+ Staff Network to be used against any potential media queries. Given this is a NICS wide issue can I

check if HOCS would be content with the statement as well before I seek clearance from the Minister.

Best wishes  
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.