



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 22 April 2020

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Colin McGrath MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Martina Anderson MLA
Mr Trevor Clarke*
Mr Trevor Lunn MLA
Mr George Robinson MLA*
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA*
Ms Emma Sheerin MLA*
Mr Christopher Stalford MLA

Apologies: None.

In Attendance: Ms Marie Austin (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Craig Mealey (Assistant Clerk)

** Members who attended the meeting via telephone conferencing.*

The meeting commenced at 15.03pm.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 25 March 2020.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Budget 2020-21 – Departmental Oral Evidence

The following officials joined the meeting via telephone conferencing at 15.04pm:

Mark Browne, Director of Strategic Policy, Equality and Good Relations, The Executive Office

Peter Toogood, Director, Finance and Corporate Services, The Executive Office.

Christopher Stalford joined the meeting at 15.07pm

The officials briefed the Committee on The Executive Office Budget 2020-21.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider its response to Budget 2020-21 at its meeting on 29 April 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service Briefing Paper: *'Assembly Committee's Co-ordinated Budget Scrutiny'* to the Department for a response on the scrutiny points identified that are within remit of the Executive Office.

During discussions on Budget 2020-21, issues around the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board and exit from the EU were raised.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request further information on a number of issues in relation to the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that officials should address the issues raised in relation to preparations for exit from the EU, including preparations for a no deal, when they brief the Committee at its meeting on 29 April 2020.

Christopher Stalford left the meeting at 15.56pm

5. S.R. 2020/50 - The Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board (Applications and Appeals) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered S.R. 2020/50: The Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board (Applications and Appeals) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2020, which sets out the procedures to be followed by the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board.

The Committee noted the issues raised under the Budget 2020-21 evidence session regarding the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/50: The Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board (Applications and Appeals) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2020, and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, had no objection to the Rule.

6. Draft S.R. - The Census Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 – Departmental Written Briefing

Christopher Stalford joined the meeting at 16.05pm

The Committee considered Draft Statutory Rule - The Census Order (Northern Ireland) 2020, which directs that a census should be taken in 2021 and outlines in broad terms the content and coverage of the census.

Agreed: The Committee considered Draft Statutory Rule: The Census Order (Northern Ireland) 2020, and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

7. S.R. 2020/55 - The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 - Departmental Written Briefing

The Committee considered information provided by The Executive Office in relation to S.R. 2020/55 - The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, outlining the aspects and consequences of the Regulations which relate to the Executive Office.

The Committee noted that the Regulations, which were made by the Department of Health and scrutinised by the Committee for Health at its meeting on 2 April 2020, were laid under the emergency procedure and came into operation on 28 March 2020. The Committee also noted that although The Executive Office did not have responsibility for making the Regulations, the First Minister and deputy First Minister made the Direction to compel the closure of certain premises, and to prohibit mass gatherings etc. and therefore it was of the view that it should have received a draft of the Regulations for consideration as soon as they were available.

Members acknowledged the impact of the current Covid-19 pandemic on committee scrutiny but raised concerns that the Regulations came into operation before they were considered by the Committee for Health or the Committee for the Executive Office.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to The Executive Office to advise that it is willing to meet outside of its normal meeting day/time to consider matters of such importance and highlight the need for better communication between The Executive Office and the Committee for the Executive Office on such issues.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme for April 2020 and the list of briefings still to be scheduled. The Committee acknowledged the use of telephone conferencing in facilitating the continuation of meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that briefing sessions should be scheduled in the Forward Work Programme.

9. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a response from The Executive Office providing details of cases involving regulations being made by Westminster to introduce a scheme to be administered by an Executive department, and indicating its willingness to update the Committee on engagement with Institutions regarding Historical Institutional Abuse.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add an oral evidence on Historical Institutional Abuse to the list of briefings to be scheduled in the Forward Work Programme.

- ii. The Committee considered a response from The Executive Office setting out the references in the New Decade, New Approach document that fall within the remit of the Executive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to all Standing and Statutory Committees, and the Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights.

- iii. The Committee noted a memo from the Clerk to the Committee for Finance providing a copy of written evidence from Dr Esmond Birnie, Senior Economist, Ulster University Business School to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee regarding the New Decade, New Approach document.

- iv. The Committee noted a memo from the Clerk to the Committee for Finance on Committee on scrutiny of Budget for 2020-21 during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- v. The Committee considered correspondence from the Clerk to the Committee for Finance on the 2020-21 In-Year Monitoring Process and the revised arrangements that have been put in place to help manage uncertainty relating to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward details of any reallocation of funding within the Executive Office, either to or from Covid-19 related work and/or funding which exceeds the normal £1 million de minimis limit, to the Committee for Finance.

- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Clerk to the Committee for Finance inviting the Committee to provide a written evidence on the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

The Committee noted that the Committee for Finance, which has responsibility for the Committee Stage of the Bill, will focus on those clauses of the Bill that relate to Special Advisers and Civil Servants.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office for its view on the clauses of the Bill that relate to Executive Ministers and Special Advisers in

the Executive Office and to consider whether oral evidence is required once received.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to advise the Committee for Finance that a response from the Committee for the Executive is unlikely to be provided by 1 June 2020 deadline but will be sent as soon as possible thereafter.

- vii. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence to David Sterling, Head of Civil Service, from the Clerk to the Committee for Finance, inviting him to give oral evidence on the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill to the Committee for Finance.
- viii. The Committee noted a memo from the Clerk to the Committee for Justice on SR 2020/55 - The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020
- ix. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence to the Executive Office from the Clerk to the Committee for Health, suggesting that consideration be given to sub-titling press conferences on Covid-19.
- x. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence to the First Minister and deputy First Minister from the Clerk to the Committee for Health on access to abortion services during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- xi. The Committee noted: *The Investment Strategy Northern Ireland – Investing Activity Report*.

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 29 April 2020 at 2.00 pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 16.23pm.

Mr Colin McGrath MLA
Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office