



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE**

**Minutes of Proceedings**

Wednesday 27 May 2020

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:** Mr Colin McGrath MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Doug Beattie MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Martina Anderson MLA  
Mr Trevor Clarke MLA\*  
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)  
Ms Andrienne Magee (Clerical Officer)

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

*The meeting commenced at 2.03pm.*

**1. Apologies**

There were no apologies.

**2. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 20 May 2020.

### **3. Matters Arising**

The Committee noted a response from The Executive Office confirming that officials will give oral evidence on 10 June 2020, on the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

### **4. Brexit – Departmental Oral Evidence on Brexit Issues**

The following officials joined the meeting via telephone conferencing at 2.06pm:

Andrew McCormick, Director General, International Relations, The Executive Office  
Lorraine Lynas, Deputy Director, EU Future Relations, The Executive Office  
Lynsey Moore, Director of European Division and Head of the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels, The Executive Office.

*Christopher Stalford joined the meeting at 2.11pm*

The officials briefed the Committee on Brexit issues.

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

The officials agreed to provide further information/clarification on a range of issues.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

*Agreed:* In relation to meetings of the Joint Ministerial Committee [EN], Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee and the Specialised Committee on the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol, the Committee agreed to request a copy of the agendas and details of issues Ministers/officials plan to raise, as soon as meetings are confirmed.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to The Executive Office requesting details of the range of work that needs to be carried out by the Executive, as detailed in the Command Paper: *UK's Approach to the Northern Ireland Protocol*, and progress to date.

### **5. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme for May to July 2020.

The Committee noted that Junior Ministers Gordon Lyons, MLA, and Declan Kearney, MLA, would attend the Committee meeting on 24 June 2020, to brief Members on Brexit issues.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request that any future Brexit briefings be delivered by the Junior Ministers.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request oral evidence from departmental officials on the Shared Future Funding due to end in March 2021.

*George Robinson left the meeting at 3.31pm*

## **6. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee considered a response from David Sterling, Permanent Secretary and Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, on the perceived conflict of interest regarding the Interim Advocate for Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse and the appointment process for the Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to David Sterling asking for clarification on an issue around the perceived conflict of interest.

- ii. The Committee noted a response from The Executive Office advising that it is not subject to any active legal proceedings regarding the appointment of the Interim Advocate for Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse.
- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from Saint Patrick Survivors on the perceived conflict of interest regarding the Interim Advocate for Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence from Saint Patrick Survivors to the First Minister and deputy First Minister asking them to respond directly to the author, and copy the Committee into the response.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual on the perceived conflict of interest regarding the Interim Advocate for Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence from the individual to the First Minister and deputy First Minister asking them to respond directly to the author, and copy the Committee into the response.

- v. The Committee considered correspondence from Survivors (North West), Rosetta Trust (Belfast) and Survivors Together (Belfast), on the discussions that took place at the Committee meeting on 29 April 2020, around the perceived conflict of interest regarding the Interim Advocate for Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to Survivors (North West), Rosetta Trust (Belfast), Survivors Together (Belfast), advising that the discussions were intended to establish the circumstances around the

perceived conflict of interest and that the Committee does not hold a view on the matter.

- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Campaign by Survivors of Abuse on the discussions that took place at the Committee meeting on 29 April 2020, around the perceived conflict of interest regarding the Interim Advocate for Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to Campaign by Survivors of Abuse, advising that the discussions were intended to establish circumstances around the perceived conflict of interest and that the Committee does not hold a view on the matter.

- vii. The Committee considered further correspondence from an individual regarding Historical Institutional Abuse and the appointment of Mr Justice Colton as President of the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the individual advising that the Judiciary of Northern Ireland is independent of Government and, in recognising the paramount importance of that independence, the Committee does not get involved in such matters.

- viii. The Committee noted a copy of a briefing paper from the Department of Finance, provided to the Committee for Finance, on the accelerated passage of the Budget (No.2) Bill 2020 and the 2020-21 Further Vote on Account.

- ix. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence to the First Minister and deputy First Minister from the Committee for the Economy regarding support for sole traders and other single person businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister expressing its view that the Hardship Fund must be expanded to cover sole traders and those recently self-employed. The Committee also agreed to urge the First Minister and deputy First Minister to work with other relevant Ministers to ensure that the Hardship Fund criteria is expanded to capture those mentioned.

- x. The Committee noted a copy of a report by researchers from Queen's University Belfast: *Anticipating and Meeting the Challenges of Post-Brexit Governance for Northern Ireland*.

- xi. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from an individual to The Executive Office regarding the recent data breach at the office of the Interim Advocate for Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse.

The Committee discussed the response from the First Minister and deputy First Minister to the Urgent Oral Question on the data breach which was tabled on Tuesday 26 May 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to send the individual a copy of the Official Report on the proceedings relating to the Urgent Oral Question which details the actions being taken following the data breach.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to The Executive Office requesting details of the outcome of the fact-finding investigation being undertaken by the Department of Finance in relation to the data breach and any related developments; a copy of the data breach protocols in place; and, a copy of any other documentation relating to compliance with General Data Protection Regulation.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to The Executive Office asking for a written update on the outcome of the meeting between the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the relevant institutions, with a view to scheduling an oral briefing once more substantial discussions have taken place. The Committee also agreed to reiterate its view that all the institutions should share the cost of redress with the public sector.

## **7. Chairperson's Business**

There was no Chairperson's Business.

## **8. Any Other Business**

The issue of a Programme for Government for 2020/21 was raised. Members noted that a Programme for Government for 2020/21 should have been prepared for April 2020, but acknowledged that the response to the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the timescale.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request a written update on a Programme for Government for 2020/21.

## **9. Date, Time and Place of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 3 June 2020 at 2.00 pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 3.42pm.*

**Mr Colin McGrath MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office**