



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL
AFFAIRS**

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY, 16 JUNE 2016

ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Ms Linda Dillon MLA (Chairperson)
Mr David Ford MLA
Mr Patsy McGlone MLA
Mr Harold McKee MLA
Mr Oliver McMullan MLA
Mr Robin Swann MLA

In Attendance: Mrs Stella McArdle (Assembly Clerk)
Miss Ciara McKay (Assistant Clerk)
Ms Marion Johnson (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Andrienne Magee (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Ms Caoimhe Archibald MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sydney Anderson MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA
Mr Edwin Poots MLA

10.03 a.m. The meeting opened in public session.

1. Apologies.

The apologies are noted above.

10.04 a.m. Mr Patsy McGlone joined the meeting.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson provided an update to the Committee of her and the Deputy Chair's meeting with the Rural Development Council on Monday 13th June.

The Chairperson suggested seeking additional information from the Department in relation to the Programme for Government process and targets.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request from the Department a written briefing paper on the Programme for Government, including: the process and timescale; what outcomes the Department will be responsible for; and a timescale for when the Committee will see a draft of the Department's PfG action plan.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of 9th June 2016 were agreed.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Departmental briefing – Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group Overview

10.07 a.m. The following officials from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs joined the meeting:

Mr David Small, Deputy Secretary;

Mr Chris Mills, Director of Resource Efficiency Division;

Mr John Mills, Director of Environmental Policy Division;

Dr John Speers, Director of Marine and Fisheries Division;

Ms Helen Anderson, Director of Natural Environment Division; and

Mr Dave Foster, Director of Regulatory and Natural Resources Policy Division.

The officials provided the Committee with an overview of the Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group.

Agreed: Officials agreed to provide to the Committee: a summary of the infraction risks and ongoing cases, breaking down those that apply to the UK and to Northern Ireland only; written information on (i) a breakdown of the resource and capital budget for the Group, (ii) the budget for the functions which were not part of DARD in the last financial year and (iii) the current budget; details on how close the oil drilling at Woodburn Forest is to the ASSI; details on the monies collected and its distribution under the Aggregate Credit Levy Scheme; a written update on the outcome of the Dilapidated and Neglected Sites and Marine Conservation Zone consultations; the Departmental position, and the position elsewhere, on Japanese knotweed and hogweed; and the Departmental position on the proper disposal of the plastic waste on hay bales on farms.

11.16 a.m. Officials left the meeting.

6. Departmental briefing – Food and Farming Group

11.16 a.m. The following officials from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs joined the meeting:

Mr Norman Fulton, Deputy Secretary;

Ms Pauline Rooney, Acting Director of EU Area Based Schemes;

Mrs Colette McMaster, Director of Food and Farming Policy Division; and

Mr Martin McKendry, Director of CAFRE.

The officials provided the Committee with an overview of the Food and Farming Group.

Agreed: Officials agreed to provide to the Committee: the budget for the RDP and its split by EU and national monies and how much of this crosses over into Growing for Growth; information on those participating in qualifications for the Young Farmers Payment Scheme, including the number of those that moved onto Level 3; update on what informal procedures are used before a case enters the formal Review of Decisions Appeal system; the process for the Review of Decisions and the number of successful and unsuccessful applicants at each stage; confirmation of whether the Department makes publically available a list of Agents who will complete the SAF for farmers; whether staged payments will be possible under the LEADER element of the 2014-2020 RDP; updates on the Department's plans on achieving 100% communication with farmers online; and a written update from the Agri-food Strategy Board on the work it has done on fairness in the food supply chain.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request an oral briefing from the Agri-food Strategy Board, to be scheduled at a later stage.

12.15 p.m. Officials left the meeting.

12.15 p.m. Mr Oliver McMullan left the meeting.

7. Written Departmental briefing – Equality Impact Assessment on the Proposal to Use Online as the Primary Channel for Communicating and Transacting with Customers.

The Committee considered the Equality Impact Assessment on the Proposal to Use Online as the Primary Channel for Communicating and Transacting with Customers.

Agreed: The Committee has agreed to request an oral briefing from the Department to cover: the issue of availability of rural broadband and the impacts of this policy on certain groups of farmers and the mitigating policies. The Committee has also requested up to date statistics on broadband availability in rural areas; how DAERA will work with the Department for the

Economy on this issue; and an update on where Northern Ireland is in relation to meeting targets set by the EU Commission regarding online communication and what happens elsewhere.

12.18 p.m. Mr Oliver McMullan rejoined the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed: to commission research on: the provision of rural broadband; the use of online as a primary means of communication; the roll out of the 100% target across the other jurisdictions; how many farmers used agents to fill out forms; and background on the rural broadband projects previously undertaken by DAERA.

8. SL1 The Seed Marketing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016

The Committee considered the proposed Statutory Rule The Seed Marketing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Department's proposal to make the Statutory Rule.

9. SL1 The Plant Health (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016

The Committee considered the proposed Statutory Rule The Plant Health (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Department's proposal to make the Statutory Rule.

10. Written Departmental briefing – Outcome of Consultation on the Implementation of an EU Regulation on an Invasive Alien Species in Northern Ireland

The Committee noted the outcome to the Consultation on the Implementation of an EU Regulation on an Invasive Alien Species in Northern Ireland.

11. Correspondence

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for The Executive Office providing a copy of the Annual Report on Public Bodies and Public Appointments 2014-15.

The Committee considered a request from Northern Ireland Environment Link requesting to brief.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this item under Agenda Item 12: Forward Work Programme.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, notifying the Committee of its appointment of a new Commissioner.

The Committee noted an invitation from the Royal Society and the NI Science Festival to a roundtable discussion “Growing tomorrow’s dinner – should GM be on the table”.

12. Forward Work Plan

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work programme to summer recess, including arrangements for the Committee’s strategic planning day on 29th September and briefings from the following groups on 30th June: UFU and NIAPA; NIEL; and Rural Community Network, Rural Development Council and Local Rural Support Networks.

13. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed the restrictions for online applications for firearms licences on farmers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Chief Constable expressing its concerns of the impact on proposed online applications for firearms licences on farmers; and to ascertain what measures the PSNI intend to take to address these concerns. The Committee also agreed to forward a copy of this letter to the Committee for Justice.

The Committee discussed the Minister of Finance’s statement on 14th June on June Monitoring.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking a written briefing on June Monitoring for consideration at its meeting on 30th June; and to ascertain why the Committee had not been informed of the detail prior to the Minister of Finance’s statement.

14. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The Committee noted that its next meeting will be held at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 30th June 2016 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

12.47 p.m. The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

Linda Dillon MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

30th June 2016