



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 10 June 2021

Meeting Location: Virtual Meeting via StarLeaf

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Declan McAleer MLA (Chairperson)
Clare Bailey MLA
Rosemary Barton MLA
John Blair MLA
Maurice Bradley MLA
Harry Harvey MLA
William Irwin MLA
Patsy McGlone MLA

Apologies: Philip McGuigan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Nick Henry, Clerk
Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk
Neal Flanagan, Assistant Clerk
Marion Johnson, Clerical Supervisor
Kate Duffy, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2.34 p.m. in Closed Session



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1. Apologies

As above.

2. Written Briefing: Committee consideration of evidence – Withdrawal of DAERA and Local Authority staff from Ports

The Chairperson set out that the purpose of the meeting was to take stock of evidence received so far during the Committee's investigation into the withdrawal of staff from ports, and to consider the key points and structure of the Committee's report on the matter.

The Chairperson passed to the Committee Clerk to brief the Committee, who drew Members' attention to a memo summarising the current position.

Outstanding evidence

The Clerk outlined that the Committee is awaiting a written response from Mrs Anne Donaghy to outstanding questions, and disclosure of emails referenced by Minister Poots when giving oral evidence before the Committee on 3 June 2021.

The Clerk further outlined that the Committee was awaiting a response from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) about any reported incidents of PSNI officers operating "on the ground" highlighting concerns about staff welfare and the details of any calls that the PSNI was notified of via CrimeStoppers.

Potential Report Structure and Key Points

The Committee Clerk outlined the potential structure for the Committee report and the key points, beginning with: Executive Summary; Terms of Reference; Methodology; and Background and Context.

The Clerk outlined that the report would continue with a detailed, factual timeline of events from the appearance of graffiti in Larne on 21 January 2021 until the return of port staff on 10 February 2021.



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The report would then move to the Committee's Consideration of Evidence, under several headings: Rationale for Withdrawal of Staff; Correspondence to the Cabinet Office on 30 January 2021; Differing Organisational Responses; Development of Organisation-Specific Risk Assessments; and Return of Staff to Duties. The Clerk outlined potential report content for these sections.

Mr Maurice Bradley left the meeting at 3.00 pm.

There were some suggestions from Members for amendments to the key points in the draft report outline, as well as some debate among Members on certain matters.

Mr John Blair left the meeting at 3.38 pm.

The Clerk outlined that the draft report would then move to Impact of the Suspension of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Checks.

Mindful of time, it was decided to suspend consideration of the draft report structure at this point, before moving to the next section on Recommendations.

Next Steps

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk work to produce a draft report, based on discussions at the meeting, with the aim of distributing it to Members on Tuesday 15 June 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to meet to resume consideration of its draft report during a virtual meeting on the afternoon of Wednesday 23 June.

Mr William Irwin left the meeting at 3.52 pm.

Correspondence from Cllr Peter Johnston

The Clerk drew Members' attention to a piece of correspondence received from Cllr Peter Johnston of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, regarding information received by the Committee from the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE).

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would reply to Cllr Johnston, addressing the matter.



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3. AOB

None.

4. Date, time and place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs will take place on Wednesday 16 June 2021 at 2.30 p.m. and will be a virtual meeting via StarLeaf.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.59 p.m.

Declan McAleer MLA
Chairperson, Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee