

COMMITTEE FOR AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**THURSDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2021
VIRTUAL MEETING, STARLEAF**

Present: Mr Declan McAleer MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Philip McGuigan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Clare Bailey MLA
Mrs Rosemary Barton MLA
Mr John Blair MLA
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mr Harry Harvey MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA
Mr Patsy McGlone MLA

In attendance: Ms Stella McArdle, Committee Clerk
Ms Barbara Love, Committee Clerk
Ms Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk
Ms Angela McParland, Assistant Clerk
Ms Marion Johnson, Clerical Supervisor
Ms Kate Duffy, Clerical Officer

The Committee commenced at 9.36 a.m. in Open Session

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised the Committee that he attended a conference in his capacity as Chairperson on 9 February 2021 hosted by the Belfast Food Network.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that he will be attending a meeting on 23 February 2021 alongside the Chairpersons from the Economy, Finance, Infrastructure and the Executive Office Committees with the House of Lords EU Committee to discuss retrospective work and observations since the Protocol came into operation.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2021

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2021.

4. Matters arising

Agreed: The Committee agreed the list of stakeholders to invite to provide written evidence on Northern Ireland's contribution to net zero, in advance of the meeting with the Climate Change Committee on 4 March 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the Department's response, to the Climate Change Committee on the contribution to net zero, on the Committee webpage.

The Committee discussed the recent events where staff had been withdrawn from ports due to security issues and the proposal from the Deputy Chairperson that the Committee undertakes an investigation into the decision to withdraw staff.

The Committee divided:

<i>Ayes:</i>	<i>Noes:</i>
<i>Clare Bailey</i>	<i>Rosemary Barton</i>
<i>John Blair</i>	<i>Maurice Bradley</i>
<i>Declan McAleer</i>	<i>Harry Harvey</i>
<i>Patsy McGlone</i>	<i>William Irwin</i>
<i>Philip McGuigan</i>	

The proposal was carried.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into Closed Session.

The meeting moved into Closed Session at 9.59 a.m.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry at the meeting on 18 February 2021.

The meeting moved into Open Session at 10.02 a.m.

5. Oral Evidence Session DAERA: Budget 2021-2022

The following officials joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 10.04 a.m.

David Reid, Finance Director
Roger Downey, Deputy Finance Director
Lynda Lowe, Head of Financial Planning

The officials briefed the Committee and this 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 write to the Department to request information on the date of the proposed Rural Policy consultation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request information on the budget allocation for SPS checks.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification is the budget allocation for additional staff at ports includes council staff.

6. Oral Evidence Session DAERA: Supplementary Legislative Consent Memorandum for the Environment Bill

The following officials joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 10.38 a.m.

John Mills, Head of Environmental Policy Division
Karl Beattie, Environment Bill Team
Stuart Morwood, Divisional Officer

The officials briefed the Committee and this 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 write to the Department to seek clarification on the issue of the Minister having the power to

reclassify Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas.

7. Oral Evidence Session: Independent Panel for Review of Decisions

The following individuals joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 11.18 a.m.

Brian Little, Voluntary Advisor
James O'Brien, Barrister at Law

The individuals briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the individuals for their attendance.

8. Written Briefing DAERA: Covid-19 Update

Agreed: The Committee noted the departmental written briefing on the Covid-19 update and agreed to forward any questions to the clerk by close of play.

9. Written Briefing DAERA: EU Transition Fortnightly Update

Agreed: The Committee noted the departmental written briefing on the EU Transition Fortnightly Update and agreed to forward any questions to the clerk by close of play.

10. Written Briefing DAERA: Review of the cost of fee for an external independent panel assessment under the Department's review of decisions procedure.

Noted: The Committee noted the departmental written briefing on Review of the cost of fee for an external independent panel assessment under the Department's review of decisions procedure.

11. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following:

- i. Correspondence from the Department on issues raised at the Committee meeting on 14 January 2021;
- ii. Correspondence from the Department on issues raised at the Committee meeting on 21 January 2021;

- iii. Correspondence from the Department on the UK-wide consultation on contractual relationships in the UK dairy industry;
- iv. Correspondence from the trade unions on the security issues at ports;
- v. The Ministerial Statement dated 10 February 2021 on the Rural Needs Annual Monitoring Report April 2019-2020;
- vi. Correspondence from the Minister for Infrastructure on the Committee's request to consider adding Lough Agency as a Statutory Consultees within Schedule 3 of the Planning Order (NI) 2015.
- vii. Correspondence from the Justice Committee on the Damages (Return on Investment) Bill.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department on issues raised at the meeting on 7 January 2021 on operational issues arising from EU Exit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request that the issues referred to in their correspondence are included in the fortnightly written briefing on EU Exit Updates.

The Committee considered correspondence from a business owner on the financial hardship caused by the RHI scheme, Brexit and Covid-19 and the issue of the revised RHI tariff.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to contact the correspondent to ask permission to forward the letter to the Department for the Economy for comment.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Trade Unions which issued to the Mayor of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council alongside a request to brief the Committee regarding the withdrawal of staff at Larne Port.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hear from the Trade Unions in due course.

The Committee considered correspondence from Horticulture Forum NI on the impact and implications of EU Exit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write a letter of support to Ministers Gove and Eustace on the issues as outlined by Horticulture Forum NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the letter from Horticulture Forum NI and the letter to Ministers Gove and Eustace on the Committee's webpage.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish all previous and future items of correspondence relating to EU Exit matters on its webpage.

12. Forward Work Programme

Noted: The Committee noted that the briefing on the Educational Provision at CAFRE scheduled for 18 February 2021 is being deferred to a later date.

Noted: The Committee noted that the briefing on NIFAIS scheduled for 18 February 2021 is being deferred to a later date.

Noted: The Committee noted that a departmental oral briefing on the Programme for Government has been scheduled for 25 March 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to the Department's request to reschedule the oral briefing on Waste Crime and an update on Mobouy from 18 February to 18 March 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek written submissions from the National Beef Association (UK), NI Livestock Auctioneers Association, Farmers for Action and the Livestock Meat Commission for the work on the Independent Panel for Review of Decisions.

Noted: The Committee noted that the arrangements for the joint meeting with the committees for the Economy, Infrastructure and HMRC is now underway. The Committee further noted the issues that HMRC has now advised do not fall within its remit.

Agreed: The Committee noted that a written briefing has been received from Shared Environmental Services (SES) and will be considered at the meeting on 18 February 2021. The Committee further noted that despite several attempts to contact SES both by phone and email, this has not been successful. The Committee agreed to write to the Chief Executive and Director of Development in Mid and East Antrim Council to request that they provide a suitable date to brief the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee noted that the Office of Environmental Protection has forwarded a request to meet with the Committee. The Committee agreed to suggest that an informal meeting takes place on 11 March 2021 at 2.30 p.m.

13.AOB

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask that consider is given to the allocation of available Covid-19 support funding to the Northern Ireland Show Association.

Mr McGuigan left the meeting at 12.26 a.m.

14.Date and time of the next meeting

The next virtual meeting virtual of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural affairs will take place on Thursday 18 February 2021 at 10.00 a.m. and will be streamed from Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting moved into Closed Session at 12.37 p.m.

Agreed: The Committee discussed and agreed the issues it wishes to highlight in its report to the Finance Committee on the Department's budget 2021-2022 which will be signed off at the meeting on 18 February 2021.

The meeting adjourned at 12.17 p.m.

Declan McAleer, Chairperson, Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

Date