



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 23 June 2021

Meeting Location: Virtual Meeting via StarLeaf

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Declan McAleer MLA (Chairperson)
Philip McGuigan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Clare Bailey MLA
John Blair MLA
William Irwin MLA
Patsy McGlone MLA

Apologies:

Rosemary Barton, MLA
Maurice Bradley MLA
Harry Harvey MLA

In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Nick Henry, Clerk
Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk
Neal Flanagan, Assistant Clerk



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Marion Johnson, Clerical Supervisor

Kate Duffy, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2.33 p.m. in Closed Session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson drew Members' attention to an article published in the Belfast Telegraph on Tuesday 22 June, which referenced the Committee's draft report and quoted heavily from the document.

The Chairperson reminded Members that documents circulated amongst Members should not be disclosed and/or published without the prior approval of the Committee, particularly when the document is in draft and not yet finalised.

3. Draft Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 16 June were agreed.

4. Matters Arising

None.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

5. Written Briefing: Consideration of Draft Report – Withdrawal of DAERA and Local Authority staff from Ports

The Chairperson set out that the purpose of this item of business was to seek comment and agreement on the Committee's report on its investigation into the withdrawal of DAERA and local authority staff from ports.

Mr Irwin raised concerns about holding a meeting in closed session in connection with a document that was in the public domain and added that DUP members of the Committee were not in favour of proceeding any further until the source of the press leak could be established.

Mr Irwin proposed an immediate pause to the Committee proceedings.

The Committee divided: Ayes 3; Noes 4.

AYES

Mr Maurice Bradley (in absentia under Temporary Standing Order 115(6))

Mr Harry Harvey (in absentia under Temporary Standing Order 115(6))

Mr William Irwin

NOES

Ms Clare Bailey

Mr Declan McAleer

Mr Patsy McGlone

Mr Philip McGuigan (in absentia under Temporary Standing Order 115(6))

The proposal was not carried.

Philip McGuigan joined the meeting at 2.41 p.m.

The Chairperson passed to the Committee Clerk, who directed Members' attention to the content and structure of the draft report in the meeting pack.

John Blair joined the meeting at 2.47 p.m.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Powers and Membership

Agreed: The Committee agreed the section on Powers and Membership at page 1 of the draft report.

Table of Abbreviations

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Table of Abbreviations at page 2 of the draft report.

Contents

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Table of Contents at page 3 of the draft report.

Executive Summary

Members considered paragraphs 1 to 9 of the Executive Summary at pages 4 to 6 of the draft report. After an exchange of views, Members agreed that amendments should be made.

Agreed: The Committee was content with the Executive Summary, pending further agreement on amendments to be drafted by the Committee Clerk.

Recommendations

Members considered the recommendations 1 to 6 at page 6 of the draft report.

Mr Irwin proposed that recommendation 3 be deleted.

The Committee divided: Ayes 3; Noes 5.

AYES

Mr Maurice Bradley (in absentia under Temporary Standing Order 115(6))

Mr Harry Harvey (in absentia under Temporary Standing Order 115(6))

Mr William Irwin



Northern Ireland
Assembly

NOES

Ms Clare Bailey
Mr John Blair
Mr Declan McAleer
Mr Patsy McGlone
Mr Philip McGuigan

The proposal was not carried.

After further discussion, Members agreed that certain amendments and deletions should be made.

Agreed: The Committee was content with the recommendations of the report, pending further agreement on amendments to be drafted by the Committee Clerk.

Terms of Reference

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Terms of Reference at page 7 of the draft report.

Methodology

Agreed: The Committee agreed paragraphs 1 and 2 of the section on Methodology at page 8 of the draft report.

Background and Context

Agreed: The Committee agreed paragraphs 1 to 7 of the section on Background and Context at pages 9 and 10 of the draft report.

Timeline of Events



Northern Ireland Assembly

Members discussed the content of the Timeline of Events at pages 11 to 30 of the draft report. After an exchange of views, Members agreed that amendments should be made.

Agreed: The Committee was content with the Timeline of Events, pending further agreement on amendments to be drafted by the Committee Clerk.

Committee's Consideration of Evidence

Members considered paragraphs 1 to 110 of the section on the Committee's Consideration of Evidence at pages 31 to 60 of the draft report. After an exchange of views, Members agreed that amendments should be made.

Agreed: The Committee was content with the Committee's Consideration of Evidence, pending further agreement on amendments to be drafted by the Committee Clerk.

Return of Staff to Duties

Agreed: The Committee agreed paragraphs 1 and 2 of the section on Return of Staff to Duties at page 61 of the draft report.

Impact of Suspension of SPS Checks

Agreed: The Committee agreed paragraphs 1 to 3 of the section on Impact of Suspension of SPS Checks at page 62 of the draft report.

Recommendations

Members noted their earlier consideration of the recommendations of the draft report.

Agreed: The Committee was content with the Recommendations at page 63 of the draft report, pending further agreement on amendments to be drafted by the Committee Clerk.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Appendix 1: Points of Issue with MEABC Evidence about Cabinet Office Letter

Members considered paragraphs 1 to 6 of Appendix 1 on Points of Issue with MEABC Evidence about Cabinet Office Letter at pages 65 to 68 of the draft report. After an exchange of views, Members agreed that amendments should be made.

Agreed: The Committee was content with the section on Points of Issue with MEABC Evidence about Cabinet Office Letter, pending further agreement on amendments to be drafted by the Committee Clerk.

Next Steps

The Committee Clerk outlined the timeline that would be required for the final report to be published before the summer recess and undertook to send a revised draft of the Committee report to Members by end of business on Friday 25 June.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold a further meeting to seek agreement on the revised draft of the report at 3.30 p.m. on Monday 27 June.

Mr Irwin stated that the DUP Committee Members reserved the right to vote against adoption of the final report.

6. Correspondence

The Committee considered correspondence from the PSNI in response to a number of outstanding issues raised by the Committee at the meeting on 3 June 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the PSNI response and add it to the draft report.



Northern Ireland Assembly

The Committee discussed correspondence from Mr John Blair MLA to the Committee Clerk concerning the outcome of a media Freedom of Information request related to the Committee investigation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the issues raised in the correspondence should be reflected in the draft report.

The Committee considered tabled correspondence from the Minister in response to the Committee's request for sight of the emails referred to during his attendance at the meeting on 3 June.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the redacted emails should be added to the draft report.

7. AOB

None.

8. Date, Time and Place of the next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs will take place on Thursday 24 June 2021 at 10.00 a.m. and will be a hybrid meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.49 p.m.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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