



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR THE ECONOMY

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

22 APRIL 2020

ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

10:00am

Present: Dr Caoímhe Archibald (Chairperson)
Ms Sinéad McLaughlin (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Gordon Dunne MBE
Mr Gary Middleton
Mr John O'Dowd
Mr Christopher Stalford
Mr John Stewart
Ms Claire Sugden

In Attendance: Mr Peter Hall (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Sinead Kelly (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Angela McParland (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Michael Greer (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Thomas Manning (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Stewart Dickson

The meeting began at 10:04am in open session.

1. Apologies

As noted above.

2. Record of Decision

Agreed: the Committee agreed the Record of Decisions from the 31st March 2020 and 7th April 2020.

3. Chairpersons Business

There were no items of business.

4. Oral Briefing by Manufacturing NI – Update on Economic Impact of Covid-19

The representative joined the meeting at 10.05am

Members received a briefing from:

Mr. Stephen Kelly, Manufacturing NI.

Key issues discussed included positive growth pre COVID-19, essential manufacturing facilities remaining open, access to grant schemes for businesses, a restart and rebuild strategy to ensure a strong comeback by the industry including businesses meeting standards for safe working environments.

Agreed: the Committee will raise the issues discussed with the Department.

The representative left the meeting at 10.42am

5. Oral Briefing by Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance – Update on Economic Impact of Covid-19

The representative joined the meeting at 10.44am

Members received a briefing from:

Dr. Joanne Stuart, Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance.

Key issues discussed included the roll out of grant packages to the tourism industry and hotel sector, factors currently needed in place to ensure tourism recovery, a marketing strategy that will encourage the Northern Ireland population to support local tourism.

Agreed: the Committee will raise the issues discussed with the Department.

The representative left the meeting at 11.22am

6. Oral Briefing by Social Enterprise NI – Update on Economic Impact of Covid-19

The representative joined the meeting at 11.24am

Members received a briefing from:

Mr. Colin Jess, Social Enterprise NI.

Key issues discussed included the success of social enterprises in building successful and innovative businesses pre COVID-19, the need for clarity around Business Support Grants for the sector, extra challenges faced by a workforce which includes people with learning disabilities having to deal with social distancing and major changes to their routines.

Agreed: the Committee will raise the issues discussed with the Department.

The representative left the meeting at 11.56am

7. Matters Arising

Agreed: Members agreed to address a Departmental response detailing the level of Government engagement with businesses affected by the collapse of Viewble Media UK Ltd at a future oral briefing with the Small Business Commissioner and to also forward the response to Trade NI.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence to the UK Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets from the House of Lords EU Internal Market Sub-Committee regarding its Inquiry into UK-EU negotiations on the level playing field and state aid and agreed to consider further at the Committee's next informal meeting, with a view to ascertaining from the Department how this intersects with the Protocol.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Ulster University (UU) to the Committee's request for clarification on the planned location for UU Health Sciences provision.

Agreed: Members agreed to discuss the responses received from Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce Ltd and Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade regarding grant schemes for Covid-19 with the Minister at next week's oral briefing and to arrange for an oral briefing with some of the Chambers on 6th May 2020.

8. Written Briefing – Federation of Small Businesses NI

Members considered a written brief from the Federation of Small Businesses NI providing an update on the economic impact of COVID-19.

Agreed: that the Committee will consider the issues raised at next week's oral briefing by the Federation.

9. Written Briefing – Enterprise NI

Members noted a written brief from Enterprise NI providing an update on the economic impact of COVID-19, ahead of rescheduling an oral briefing from the body.

10. Written Briefing – InterTradeIreland

Members noted a written brief from InterTradeIreland providing an update on the economic impact of COVID-19.

Agreed: to reschedule an oral briefing from InterTradeIreland.

11. Correspondence

Agreed: Members considered Ministerial correspondence regarding technical amendments to legislation dealing with the Guarantees of Origin of Electricity Produced from High Efficiency Co-Generation and agreed with the approach to be taken by the Minister.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from the Department's Director of Finance on Excess Vote caused by the payments of the Small Business Grant and agreed that the Department is left with no viable alternative than to accept this Excess Vote.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance and agreed to further consider business items around budget process and reallocating of monies, that it is currently liaising with that Committee on, at its next informal meeting. Members further agreed that the Committee, ahead of its scrutiny of monitoring rounds, forward details of any reallocation of funding within the Department either to or from COVID-19 work and/or which exceeds the normal £1 million de minimis limit.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on written evidence from a senior Ulster University economist to the House of Commons NI Affairs Committee Inquiry on the New Decade New Approach Agreement.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure regarding financial pressures on the logistics sector and agreed to forward onto the Department for comment.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from the Committee for Justice regarding the Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) Private International Law (Implementation of Agreements) Bill and agreed to forward to the Department for confirmation of the responsibilities that the Bill will place on the Department. Members

further agreed that, now that the Bill has been published, the Clerk will forward further information to Members.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from NIRIG providing a copy of its response to the Energy Strategy Call for Evidence and agreed to seek confirmation from the Department on whether the timetable for the Strategy has changed.

Noted: Members noted a press release from the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry and BDO regarding a survey: first insight into major economic impact of COVID-19.

Noted: Members noted a survey summary from the Chamber of Commerce.

12. Any Other Business

Agreed: Members agreed to seek confirmation of points of contact within the Department for MLA queries on £10k and £20k grants.

Agreed: Members agreed to seek confirmation from the Department that golf clubs qualify for the Hospitality Fund announced by the Minister.

Agreed: Members discussed the issues around grants in regards to multiple premises and agreed to seek further information on the Scottish Government's model.

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on Wednesday 29th March 2020 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings at 10am.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12:15pm

Dr Caoímhe Archibald
Chairperson
Committee for the Economy

29th April 2020