



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR THE ECONOMY**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

**20 MAY 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 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  
Mr Christopher Stalford

*The meeting began at 10:05am in open session.*

**1. Apologies**

As noted above.

## 2. Minutes

*Agreed:* the Committee agreed the Minutes from 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

The Committee agreed the Record of Decisions taken by correspondence on items pertaining to the meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> May:

*Agreed:* Members considered correspondence from the Justice Committee informing the Committee it has written to the Minister requesting an update on the progress of the working group established to examine the financial and practical consequences of the issues associated with the ruling in the case ‘Bear Scotland v Fulton and others’, as well as an explanation for legislation not having been introduced to limit the impact of retrospection in Northern Ireland. The Committee agreed to respond to the Justice Committee thanking it for the correspondence and ask that it forward a copy of the Minister’s response, when received.

*Agreed:* Members considered correspondence from the Committee for Education informing the Committee that it has written to the Education and Health Ministers on reported ‘inexplicable and unwelcome’ differences between childcare support packages available in Northern Ireland and that apparently offered in other jurisdictions. The Committee agreed to respond to the Education Committee, noting the economic and social importance of the childcare sector to Northern Ireland and ask that it shares the Ministers’ responses with this Committee, when received.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to write to the Minister to request that her Department look at extending the £25K grants to the strategically important child care sector, given the reliance that families who work will have on childcare providers, to be able return to work.

*Agreed:* Members considered correspondence from a self-employed community pharmacist highlighting that community pharmacists do not appear to be taking any annual leave during the COVID-19 current situation and this is resulting in locum community pharmacy work being diminished currently. The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department to ask what relief packages are available for locum community pharmacists currently facing financial uncertainty and ask the Department for comment on community pharmacists seemingly not taking annual leave during the current COVID-19 situation.

*Agreed:* Members considered correspondence from the National Union of Students – Union of Students in Ireland (NUS-USI), giving detail of the financial and practical uncertainties third level students are currently facing. The Chair raised the issues detailed in the paper with the Minister on Monday during the weekly discussion. The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking that it engage with NUS-USI and inform the Union that the Committee has taken this action, as well as relay to the Union the Chair’s discussion with the Minister on the issue.

*Noted:* Members noted the ninth report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

*Agreed:* Members considered a copy of correspondence sent to the Minister from a group of local estate agents outlining their concerns of being unable to access support schemes put in place by the Minister to assist businesses in response to Covid-19. The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to investigate the concerns raised in the letter, asking that the Department looks at this issue urgently, given the imminent closure of the schemes.

### **3. Chairpersons Business**

There were no items of business.

### **4. Ministerial Briefing: Economic Impact of COVID-19 (Coronavirus)**

*The Minister joined the meeting at 10.12am*

Members received a briefing from:

**Mrs Diane Dodds MLA**                      Minister, Department for the Economy

Key issues discussed included: the status of the roll out of COVID-19 crisis funding packages for businesses, business restart strategy including a relaunch of the Economic Advisory Group, the Labour Relations Agency (LRA) Engagement Forum, businesses ‘falling through the gaps’ in crisis funding packages, Magee medical college, support for young people during the crisis and the phased restart period, and Departmental priorities for EU exit.

*The Minister left the meeting at 11.34am*

### **5. Oral Briefing by Teleconference from Labour Relations Agency**

*The representatives joined the meeting at 11.45am*

Members received a briefing from:

**Mr Tom Evans**                                      Chief Executive, LRA; and  
**Ms Marie Mallon**                                      Chair, LRA

Key issues discussed included: an overview of the work of LRA including a stark rise in demand of certain services during the COVID-19 situation, the work of the Engagement Forum, indicative dates for a return to business for sectors, issues around mental health of employees, and managing risk throughout the business restart.

*Agreed:* the Committee to consider the Treasury Select Committee report on the Covid-19 Job Retention Scheme.

*Agreed:* the Committee to liaise directly with LRA to ensure evidence gathered by the Committee is rapidly disseminated to the Forum, and the Committee is informed of the work of the Forum in a timely manner.

*The representatives left the meeting at 12.36pm*

## **6. Oral Briefing by Teleconference from the Department for the Economy EU Exit Preparation and Transition Group:**

*The officials joined the meeting at 12.37pm*

Members received a briefing from:

**Mr Paul Grocott;**  
**Ms Giulia Ní Dhulchaointigh;**  
**Mr Victor Dukelow; and**  
**Dr Mary McIvor.**

Key issues discussed included: an overview of the challenges the Department is working on with the UK Government, an overview of the number of Assembly and House of Commons' legislation to be processed on clarification of Protocol and the future relationship with the EU, an overview of current global trade negotiations by the UK Government, the UK points based immigration policy, and current Freeports Consultation.

*Agreed:* to write to the Minister for the Cabinet Office regarding details of Protocol being shared with devolved Ministers in a timely manner.

*Agreed:* to write to the Committee for Finance on the extension to the Treasury Committee Freeports Consultation.

*The officials left the meeting at 13.19pm*

## **7. Matters Arising**

*Noted:* Members noted a Ministerial letter on amendments to “Exit day” references in Northern Ireland Societas Europaea (SE) Employee Involvement Regulations. The Minister has agreed that the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) undertake an amendment to two SI’s affecting the European Public Limited-Liability Company (Employee Involvement) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2009 on behalf of the Department.

*Noted:* a Departmental response on adequate provision of protective equipment for employees and customers in its business recovery guidance.

*Noted:* a summary of outstanding Departmental issues arising from Meetings.

*Noted:* a survey carried out by the Federation of Small Businesses(FSB) Northern Ireland on the impact of COVID-19 on small businesses in Northern Ireland.

*Agreed:* the Committee considered correspondence from the Association of British Insurers (ABI) following the Committee’s reference to trade credit insurance at last week’s meeting and agreed to an oral briefing from the Association.

*Noted:* a response from the Minister of Finance regarding the self-employed income support scheme.

*Agreed:* the Committee considered a response from the Home Office on the Home Secretary's statement on the UK's points-based immigration system and agreed to respond to the Home Office, copying in the Migration Advisory Committee, to highlight its concerns in regards to low level skilled workers within the policy.

## **8. Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) for the Corporate Insolvency & Governance Bill**

*Agreed:* Members considered Departmental correspondence on the forthcoming LCM for the Westminster Corporate Insolvency and Governance Bill, meant to assist companies in danger of being forced into liquidation as a result of the current COVID-19 situation. The Committee agreed to review any responses to its micro call for evidence in regards to the LCM at its next meeting.

## **9. SR 2020/79 The Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

Members considered SR 2020/79 The Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

*Question put and agreed:*

*“That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2020/79 The Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report has no objection to the Rule.”*

## **10. Correspondence**

*Agreed:* Members considered correspondence from the Committee for Justice which has agreed to write to all Departments and all Assembly Statutory Committees to invite any views/comments they wish to provide on The Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill. The Committee agreed to respond to that Committee that it is supportive of the Bill.

*Noted:* Members considered correspondence from the Committee for Communities on its briefing from Solace NI on Covid-19 and its financial impact on local government. The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the written submission from Solace to all Executive Ministers, and to encourage the development of a cross-departmental strategic approach to support councils. The Committee noted ahead of its briefing from SOLACE NI and NILGA on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

*Noted:* the Committee noted a copy of the Examiner of Statutory Rules Tenth report.

*Agreed:* Members considered correspondence from the Chairman of Celine Jersey Topco Ltd in relation to on ongoing difficulties facing Debenhams stores in Northern Ireland due to the COVID-19 situation. The Committee agreed to liaise with the Committee for Finance on the matter.

*Agreed:* the Committee agreed to liaise with the Committee for Finance to receive clarity on the eligibility criteria for the rates relief fund.

*Agreed:* the Committee considered correspondence from the Director of SOURCE Gyms Ltd regarding the impact for small businesses of the COVID-19 situation which included suggested solutions to reopening this style of gym. Members agreed to forward to the Department for an urgent response on the matters raised.

*Agreed:* Members considered correspondence from a Director of a small Limited Company detailing frustration at falling through the gaps of funding available during the COVID-19 crisis. The Committee agreed to forward to the Department for an urgent response on the matters raised.

*Agreed:* Members considered correspondence from the Royal Academy of Engineering regarding the National Engineering Policy Centre's decarbonisation policy project. The Committee agreed that the submission be included in responses to the call for evidence on the Committee's micro Energy Strategy and invite RAE to brief the Committee at a later date on its views on rebuilding the economy post COVID-19 in an imaginative way.

*Agreed:* Members considered correspondence from NICVA and Social Enterprise NI on the eligibility criteria for social enterprises to apply to the Micro-Business Hardship Fund. The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department as part of its ongoing liaison with the Department over adequate support for social enterprise businesses.

## **11. Any Other Business**

There were no items of business.

## **12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2020 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings at 10am.

*The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 13.31pm*

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**Dr Caoímhe Archibald**  
**Chairperson**  
**Committee for the Economy**  
**26<sup>th</sup> May 2020**