



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR THE ECONOMY**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

**10 JUNE 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  
Mr Christopher Stalford

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

Apologies: Mr Stewart Dickson

*The meeting began at 10:13am in open session.*

**1. Apologies**

As noted above.

## 2. Minutes

*Agreed:* the Committee agreed the Minutes from 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020.

## 3. Chairpersons Business

The Chair raised an issue of the launch of the Hardship Fund and the number of applications made.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to write to the Minister.

## 4. Oral Briefing by Teleconference from Belfast Chamber, Retail NI & NI Retail Consortium on Re-opening of the Retail Sector as COVID-19 Related Restrictions are Lifted

*The representatives joined the meeting at 10.17am*

Members received a briefing from:

<b>Mr Simon Hamilton</b>	Chief Executive, Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce;
<b>Mr Glyn Roberts</b>	Chief Executive, Retail NI; and
<b>Mr Aodhán Connolly</b>	Director, Northern Ireland Retail Consortium.

Key issues discussed included: the need to set a date for shopping centres and the hospitality sector to open, the need for financial support to continue as retail will not be operating at full capacity, councils to be given more powers for town regeneration, a need for a joint up approach across government to assist in customer guidelines during and regaining consumer confidence in the high street.

*The representatives left the meeting at 11.26am*

*Agreed:* Members agreed to write to the Minister, the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Infrastructure, Finance, Justice and Communities Ministers, as well as SOLACE and NILGA regarding the issues raised at the briefing concerning a joined-up approach to the reopening of the economy.

## 5. Oral Briefing by Teleconference from the Construction Employers Federation (CEF) on the Impact of COVID-19

*The representatives joined the meeting at 11.36am*

Members received a briefing from:

<b>Mr John Armstrong</b>	Managing Director, CEF; and
<b>Mr Mark Spence</b>	Assistant Director, CEF.

Key issues discussed included: an overview of the success of the measures advised by CEF for the sector throughout the COVID-19 situation, the importance currently of the resumption of the pipelines for the sector, site safety, non-COVID-19 priorities such as apprenticeships including the Apprenticeship Levy and uncertainties around the UK leaving the EU and the importance of Executive approval of infrastructure projects.

*Christopher Stalford left the meeting at 12noon*

*The representatives left the meeting at 12.11pm*

*Agreed:* to write to the Minister on the issues raised in the briefing.

## **6. Matters Arising**

*Noted:* Members noted a letter from the Minister outlining a proposal for UK wide regulations that will maintain the North's alignment with the EU's pressure equipment directive.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the Minister of State for Business, Energy and Clean Growth on the future relationship with the EU on energy.

*Agreed:* Members considered a response from the Department in relation to the Job Retention Scheme. The Committee agreed to write to the Minister regarding the reported potential loss of 500 jobs at Thompson Aero Seating to seek her support for these workers being given access to the Job Retention Scheme following the completion of contracts, as the Scheme will close to new entrants prior to the completion of these contracts.

*Agreed:* Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding changes to the Hardship Fund criteria. The Committee agreed to forward a copy of its Official Report (Hansard) on the matter to the Finance Committee for clarification.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department for clarity on whether its original estimated numbers for applicants to the Hardship Fund were correct and ascertain current balance left in the Fund with a view to possible re-profiling of funds,

*Agreed:* Members agreed to seek clarity with regard to owners of multiple premises who receive Small Business Rate Relief being turned down for support for which they would appear to be eligible.

*Agreed:* Members considered a briefing from the Manufacturing & Engineering Growth Advancement Network (MEGA) highlighting the importance of apprenticeships to manufacturing in Mid-Ulster and to the North's economy. The Committee agreed to forward to the Department and include the issues raised in regards to the Apprenticeship Levy in the Committee's letter to the Minister as agreed above.

*Agreed:* Members considered up to date information from the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance (NITA) and agreed to forward to the Department for information. The Committee also agreed to keep a watching brief on the work of the Minister for Finance in regards to clarity on the criteria of a rates rebate for 12 months.

*Agreed:* Members considered up to date information from the Londonderry Chamber of Commerce. The Committee agreed to forward to the Department for comment, including the case study detailed in the paper.

*Agreed:* Members considered a update from NUS-USI on the Student Hardship Fund and agreed to seek clarity from the Department on additional monies to be made available and whether this matter is now incorporated into the June Monitoring Round.

## **7. Correspondence**

*Agreed:* Members considered correspondence from Bliss and TinyLife regarding the current parental leave policy that does not provide any additional support for parents if their baby is born needing specialist care and agreed to consider the matter in more detail and forward to the Department for comment on whether the issue can be incorporated to other Departmental policy.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from RHANI regarding the DfE RHI Tariff Consultation and proposed scheme.

Noted: the Committee noted the Twelfth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

## **8. Forward Work Programme**

*Agreed:* Members agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

## **9. Any Other Business**

*Agreed:* the Committee agreed to write to the Minister to seek confirmation that students at the NRC's Coleraine campus whose courses ended early due to construction will receive their full allowance of Education Maintenance Allowance, and seek clarification whether these students will be 'marked absent'.

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

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings at 10am.

*The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.48pm*

---

**Dr Caoímhe Archibald**  
**Chairperson**  
**Committee for the Economy**  
**17<sup>th</sup> June 2020**