



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR THE ECONOMY

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

24 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

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

Apologies: Mr Stewart Dickson
Mr Christopher Stalford

The meeting began at 10:07am in open session.

1. Apologies

As noted above.

2. Minutes

Agreed: the Minutes from 15th June 2020.

Agreed: the Minutes from 17th June 2020.

Agreed: the Minutes from 22nd June 2020.

3. Chairpersons Business

Agreed: Members considered a Clerk's Memo on the Chair's motion on membership of the Department's Economic Advisory Group, as voted on by Members at the meeting on 22nd June 2020, and agreed to await the agreed Terms of Reference for the Group before discussing the issue further.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from the Chairperson's Liaison Group to consult with the Committee on the Speaker's desire that the Assembly no longer hold Plenary business on a Monday and agreed it be considered in closed session at the end of the meeting.

Agreed: Members agreed that the Clerk should write to the Chairpersons' Liaison Group reflecting Members' views on this issue.

4. Oral Briefing by the Department for the Economy (DfE)- Skills Strategy

The officials joined the meeting at 10.09am

Members received a briefing from:

Ms Heather Cousins, Head of Skills and Education group, Department for the Economy; and

Mr Graeme Wilkinson, Director of Skills Strategy and Policy, Department for the Economy

Key issues discussed included: the Department's Skills Strategy.

The officials left the meeting at 11.31am

5. Matters Arising

Agreed: Members considered a Ministerial letter concerning technical changes to the Climate Change Agreements, CRC Energy Efficiency Scheme and Energy Savings Opportunity Scheme (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020. The technical amendments are on a UK wide basis to ensure the legislation is activated following

completion of the Implementation Period on 31 December 2020. Members agreed with the approach taken by the Minister.

Noted: Members noted a Ministerial letter and Westminster Statutory Instruments on the Electricity and Gas etc (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 which have been published by the UK Government.

Noted: Members noted a Ministerial letter providing a written update on the programme of EU Exit legislation following the Committee's informal briefing on 18th June.

Noted: Members noted a Departmental response to the Committee's query regarding contact made with the Department for Transport Tourism and Sport in the Republic of Ireland regarding COVID-19 and planning for recovery.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure on that Committee writing to the Minister for the Economy regarding the provision of support for the private coach hire industry and the road haulage sector and agreed that this Committee write to appropriate Ministers on the matter of a joined up approach by the Executive to provide appropriate support and guidance, including agreement on departmental responsibilities for the reopening of the economy. [To be incorporated into the letter agreed below in regards to Members' consideration of correspondence from SOLACE NI]

Noted: Members noted a response from the UK Treasury on the Committee's letter regarding Air Passenger Duty following the collapse of Flybe and the economic impact of Covid-19 related restrictions.

Agreed: Members considered a response from Ulster University to the Committee's request for views on the impact of student number controls on English domiciled students attending universities here and agreed to consider the issue further at its next meeting.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from the Chair of SOLACE NI on a commitment to joined up working with the appropriate bodies in the rebuilding of the economy and agreed to write to the Economy Minister, Infrastructure Minister, Communities Minister and Finance Minister to relay the Committee's frustration that Executive responsibility has not yet been agreed to deal with guidance on reopening and funding matters for all types of businesses during the reopening of the economy. The relevant Committees copied into the correspondence.

Noted: Members noted a Ministerial letter regarding the end of the transition period in the EU Withdrawal agreement, the need for alignment with Directive 2014/34/EU ("the ATEX Directive") and the outlining of the BEIS proposal to bring forward overarching UK-wide Regulations to revoke the amendments to the ATEX Regulations.

Noted: Members noted a Ministerial letter regarding the transposition requirements for the Energy Efficiency Directive which establishes binding measures to help the

EU reach its 20% energy efficiency target by 2020, with some articles having a transposition deadline of 25th June, and the Minister's support of the BEIS de minimis approach to transposition in relation to the EED to allow for legislation being required for these Articles.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Minister of Health on advice to estate agents during the re-opening of the sector.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Minister of Education regarding the re-opening of the economy, childcare, and joined up working on the 14-19 Strategy.

Noted: Members noted a Departmental press release regarding an additional £1.4m for student hardship, bringing the total to £5.6m – half of which is additional.

Noted: Members noted a copy of the published performance targets for councils in relation to prompt payment, as discussed at Monday's meeting.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from a member of the public regarding post-graduate funding in Northern Ireland compared to that available to the rest of the UK and agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for comment on the matter.

Noted: Members noted a copy of correspondence from the General Medical Council to the Minister stating that it is progressing, with urgency, the application in relation to the Ulster University Graduate Entry Medical School and a decision on the September 2021 intake will be taken by the end of July.

6. Departmental Written Briefing: Energy Strategy Call for Evidence Summary Report

Members considered a Departmental Written Briefing on the Call for Evidence Summary Report for the Energy Strategy.

7. Correspondence

Noted: Members noted a copy of the Thirteenth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

Noted: Members noted a copy of the Northern Ireland Certification Officer's Annual Report 2018-2019.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from a small sized complementary therapies business, Sole Touch, on the re-opening of the economy and agreed to include the issues raised in the Committee's letter to the relevant Executive Ministers, as mentioned above.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from a fitness studio owner regarding guidance for the re-opening of small fitness studios and agreed to include the issues raised in the correspondence in the letter to Executive Ministers, as mentioned above.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from the CEO of Bus and Coach NI regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the sector and agreed to include the issues faced by the sector in its letter to Executive Ministers, as mentioned above.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from Women's Policy Group NI, in regards to representation on the Economic Advisory Group, and agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for information, as Members await the final Terms of Reference for the Group before holding further discussion on the matter.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from fonaCAB on issues facing the taxi industry as a result of restrictions due to COVID-19 and agreed to include the issues for the sector in the letter to the Executive Ministers, as mentioned above.

Noted: Members noted a report on the operation of the Non-Domestic Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive (NIRHI) Scheme Voluntary Buy-Out arrangements in 2019/2020, detailing that, following the return of the Executive in January 2020 and the closing down of the RHI scheme, the Department halted the 2019/20 Voluntary Buy-Out Arrangements and no participant received a buy-out payment.

Noted: Members noted an invitation from the Institute of Directors to a webinar with the UK Committee on Climate Change in partnership with SONI, "Secure a green recovery from the COVID-19 crisis", to take place on Wednesday 22nd July at 11.30-12.30.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from an individual detailing issues currently faced by hospitality workers, redundancy fears, and the operation of the Job Retention Scheme and agreed to include the issues face by the sector in its letter to Executive Ministers, as mentioned above.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from Arc21 regarding job creation opportunities in the waste management sector, in line with the Department's policy objectives, and agreed to schedule an oral briefing with Arc21 into the Committee's work programme.

Agreed: Members considered correspondence from Future Screens NI regarding a programme of recovery for the creative industries which will also support regional recovery and agreed to schedule an oral briefing into the Committee's work programme.

8. Any Other Business

Noted: Members discussed verbal reports individual Members continue to receive from stakeholders on issues surrounding the Hardship Fund and noted the Committee

is awaiting responses to its correspondence in regards to the forthcoming Executive's decisions around the distribution of funds for the June Monitoring Round.

The meeting moved to closed session at 12.44pm

The meeting moved to open session at 1.01pm

9. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on Monday 1st July 2020 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings at 10am.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1,02pm

Dr Caoímhe Archibald
Chairperson
Committee for the Economy
1st July 2020