



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR THE ECONOMY

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

13 JANUARY 2021

ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

10:00am

- Present:
- Dr Caoímhe Archibald (Chairperson)
 - Ms Sinéad McLaughlin (Deputy Chairperson)
 - Mr Stewart Dickson
 - Mr Gordon Dunne MBE
 - Mr Gary Middleton
 - Mr John O'Dowd
 - Mr Christopher Stalford
 - Mr John Stewart
- In Attendance:
- Mr Peter Hall (Assembly Clerk)
 - Ms Sinead Kelly (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
 - Mr David McClure (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
 - Ms Maeve Holly (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
 - Mr Michael Greer (Clerical Supervisor)
 - Mr Thomas Manning (Clerical Officer)
- Apologies:
- Ms Claire Sugden

The meeting began at 10:08am in open session.

1. Apologies

As noted above.

2. Minutes

Agreed: the Committee agreed the Minutes from 16th December 2020.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson highlighted to Members an OCN NI Research Launch paper entitled 'A higher skills ambition – Skills for growth and social inclusion'.

The Chairperson informed Members of a blog piece by Argus regarding steel imports to the North carrying 25pc duties post-Brexit.

Agreed: to forward to the Department for a response.

The Chairperson highlighted to Members a that the Executive has declined to consider a paper from the Minister for Finance in respect of Budget 2021-22. The Budget 2021-22 paper has been submitted again for the Executive meeting scheduled for 12th January 2021.

4. Departmental Briefing - Assured Skills Academy

The Officials joined the meeting at 10.15am

Members received a briefing from:

Graeme Wilkinson,

Director of Skills Strategy and Policy,
Department for the Economy

Ann Williamson,

Head of Employer Skills Branch, Department
for the Economy

Dylan Byrne,

Past participant in the Skills Academy,
Department for the Economy

Key issues discussed included: the key features of the scheme, the success that the scheme has had in finding 80% of participants a job and the need to work with Colleges and Universities to ensure employers needs are met.

The Officials left the meeting at 11.10am

5. Departmental Briefing - January Monitoring Rounds

The Officials joined the meeting at 11.11am

Members received a briefing from:

Sharon Hetherington, Director of Finance, Department for the Economy

Johanna Park, Accountant Grade 7, Department for the Economy

Key issues discussed included: The Department's response to the January Monitoring Round, the proposed high street voucher scheme and the impact covid-19 response support has had on the Department.

The Officials left the meeting at 12.07pm

Agreed: officials agreed to provide the Committee with a copy of the accounting rules as discussed in the context of the Covid-19 support schemes.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Minister regarding the Committee's concern on the rigid approach to ring-fencing Covid support funding and the inability to move money from one scheme to another before handing it back.

6. Matters Arising

Noted: Members noted a statement from the Minister regarding the ESF.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Minister regarding maintaining and developing air connectivity in the three NI airports.

Agreed: Members agreed to forward the response onto the 3 NI Airports.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Minister regarding arrangements for Irish passport holders completing an application to the Student Loan Company.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Department requesting a copy of the Section 75 Equality Screening Exercise by the Department's Equality Unit referred to in the response.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Minister regarding the Student Hardship Fund.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification as to whether any unspent funds will be lost at the end of the financial year.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Department regarding their legislation monitoring dashboard for Energy SR's.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Department regarding the Business Support Scheme.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Department regarding the Energy Strategy bulletin.

Noted: Members noted correspondence that has been issued to the Department's Solicitors Office regarding the Retail, Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure top up grant scheme.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Minister for Infrastructure regarding a briefing from her planning officials.

Agreed: Members agreed to arrange a briefing from the Department for Infrastructure planning officials.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Minister of Finance regarding maintaining and developing air connectivity.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding an update on the budget.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Lord Kinnoull regarding EU funding for Northern Ireland.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Convener of the Finance and Constitution Committee at the Scottish Assembly regarding the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Chair of the Finance Committee at the Welsh Assembly regarding the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Minister of State for NI regarding the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council regarding an update on Project Stratum.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Competition and Markets Authority regarding the LPG market in NI.

Agreed: Members agreed to forward the response onto the original correspondent.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Department regarding the Localised Restrictions Support Scheme (LRSS).

7. Situation regarding FE and HE

Members considered a number of papers from NI Universities and Colleges regarding the current situation with Covid-19 restrictions and the guidance they are operating under.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Treasury regarding compensation to NI students who have had their experience compromised due to Covid-19.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to Student Roost regarding the waiving of rent for students in NI as the situation was different here in Semester 1 than in the UK.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to QUB regarding the flying in of students from China in the midst of a global pandemic and ask the Department of Health if this broke the current regulations.

Agreed: Members agreed to contact the Student Unions seeking their views on the move to online learning.

8. SL1 – The Biocidal Products (Fees and Charges) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Members considered SL1 – The Biocidal Products (Fees and Charges) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

Agreed: Members indicated that they are content with the policy implications of the proposed legislation

9. SR 2020/330 The Health and Safety (Amendments and Revocation) (EU Exit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Members considered SR 2020/330 The Health and Safety (Amendments and Revocation) (EU Exit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

Question put and agreed:

“That the Committee for the Economy has considered the SR 2020/330 The Health and Safety (Amendments and Revocation) (EU Exit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the Rule, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules’ report.”

10. SR 2020/331 The Corporate Insolvency and Governance Act 2020 (Coronavirus) (Amendment of Relevant Period for Meetings of Registered Societies and Credit Unions No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Members considered SR 2020/331 The Corporate Insolvency and Governance Act 2020 (Coronavirus) (Amendment of Relevant Period for Meetings of Registered Societies and Credit Unions No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

Question put and agreed:

“That the Committee for the Economy has considered the SR 2020/331 The Corporate Insolvency and Governance Act 2020 (Coronavirus) (Amendment of Relevant Period for Meetings of Registered Societies and Credit Unions No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and recommends that it be confirmed by the Assembly, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules’ report”

11. Northern Regional College Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2020

Noted: Members noted the Northern Regional College Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2020.

12. Belfast Metropolitan College Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 July 2020

Noted: Members noted the Belfast Metropolitan College Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 July 2020.

13. Tourism Northern Ireland Annual report and Accounts 2019/20

Noted: Members noted the Tourism Northern Ireland Annual report and Accounts 2019/20.

14. Correspondence

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the Minister regarding the UK Internal Market Legislative Consent Motion request.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the Minister regarding the Vocational Qualifications 2020-21.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the Minister regarding the Judicial Review of Employment and Health and Safety Law.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the Minister regarding the Departments ongoing activity to prepare business for the end of the Transition Period.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the Department regarding the identification of national crisis scenarios.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office regarding the Common Frameworks scrutiny process in the Assembly and issues that have arisen.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice regarding the SL1 Postal Administration.

Agreed: Members agreed to forward on to the Department seeking an urgent view.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the AERA Committee regarding Youth Climate Action NI.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Department as requested by the AERA Committee.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Economy, Energy and Fair Work at the Scottish Assembly regarding the Shared Prosperity Fund.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from HMT to the House of Lords regarding the EU proposal for a regulation to establish the EU Single Window Environment for Customs.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the CBI NI regarding feedback from members on Brexit and Covid-19.

Noted: Members noted a Pivotal Report entitled New Decade, New Approach – One Year on.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the Policy Forum NI inviting the Chair to an upcoming conference on energy policy.

Agreed: Members agreed that the Chair will attend and chair a session at the Conference.

Noted: Members noted a statement from the Office of Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People regarding children's rights in NI.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from an individual regarding Business Support Schemes.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the FM, dFM, Finance & Economy Ministers regarding support for Sports Club not included in support for Wet Pubs.

Noted: Members noted a report from the Children's Law Centre to inform the UN Committee on the Rights of the Childs "List of issues Prior to Reporting".

Noted: Members noted the latest ISNI report.

Noted: Members noted the seventieth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules 2020-2021.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from John O'Dowd MLA regarding his proposed Small Scale Green Energy Bill.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the Wee Playhouse regarding funding for the Soft Play industry.

Agreed: Members agreed to forward to the Economy and Finance Ministers seeking their views.

15. Forward Work Programme

Noted: Members noted the Committee forward work programme.

16. Any Other Business

There were no items of business.

17. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on Wednesday 20th January 2021 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings at 10am.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 13.11pm

Dr Caoímhe Archibald
Chairperson
Committee for the Economy
20th January 2021