



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR THE ECONOMY**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

**10 FEBRUARY 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 Paul Givan  
Mr John O'Dowd  
Mr John Stewart  
Mr Christopher Stalford  
Ms Claire Sugden

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

Apologies:

None

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

## 1. Apologies

As noted above.

## 2. Minutes

*Agreed:* the Committee agreed the Minutes from 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021.

## 3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson welcomed Mr Paul Givan MLA to the Committee and wished Gary Middleton MLA well in his new post as Junior Minister, thanking him for his contribution to the Committee.

The Chairperson highlighted to Members a letter from the Speaker regarding a Public Petition that was laid in the Assembly on Broadband provision in the Sperrins.

The Chairperson informed Members of the plans to have a joint Committee briefing with the AERA and Infrastructure Committee from TSS and HRMC.

*Agreed:* to write to the AERA and Infrastructure Committees to seek approval for the Economy Committee taking a lead on arranging the briefing.

## 4. Departmental Briefing – Draft Budget 2021/22

*The Officials joined the meeting at 10.12am*

Members received a briefing from:

**Mr Mike Brennan,** Permanent Secretary, Department for the Economy

**Mr David Malcolm,** Grade 3. Management Services and Regulation Group, Department for the Economy

**Ms Sharon Hetherington,** Director of Finance, Department for the Economy

Key issues discussed included: the current situation regarding the NI Economy, the challenges facing the Department in 2021 including staffing, the current rate of unemployment claims, the replacement for the Shared Prosperity Fund and the need to rebuild the Economy following the pressures of Covid-19.

*The Officials left the meeting at 12.09pm*

*Agreed:* Officials agreed to provide further updates to Members regarding a number of issues that were raised during the briefing.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to a number of ALB's seeking their views on the draft 2021-22 budget.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Permanent Secretary & the Minister regarding the pressures the Department is under due to Covid-19 support schemes and the impact this has had on staffing.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the FM & dFM urging support to the Department on prioritising Skills at an Executive level.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Minister urging that she prepares bids and brings them to the Executive regarding Skills.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Minister regarding support for all NI full and part-time students, including a financial package for FE students, and to ask the Minister to urge private landlords to be flexible in relation to ending student rental contracts.

## **5. Departmental Briefing – Parental Bereavement Leave & Pay**

*The Officials joined the meeting at 12.19pm*

Members received a briefing from:

**Mr Colin Jack,** Director of Business & Employment Regulation,  
Department for the Economy

**Ms Kellie Spratt,** G7, Employment Relations, Department for  
Economy

**Mr Laurence Rogers,** DP, Employment Relations, Department for the  
Economy

Key issues discussed included: the draft legislation for Parental Bereavement Leave & Pay and the impact this will have.

*The Officials left the meeting at 12.50pm*

## **6. Matters Arising**

*Noted:* Members noted a response from the Department regarding the Argus Blog and steel imports.

*Noted:* Members noted a response from the Department regarding support for the soft play sector.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the response onto the company concerned.

*Noted:* Members noted a response from the Department regarding support for golf professional and other sports/membership clubs.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from Michael Gove MP to the European Commission VP regarding the next steps for the NI Protocol.

*Noted:* Members noted a response from St Marys UC regarding awarding arrangements and admissions for 2021.

*Noted:* Members noted a response from QUB regarding International Student Travel.

*Noted:* Members noted a response from the UCU regarding issues facing its members at QUB.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to QUB and UCU urging them to engage in dialogue over the issues raised.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the PAC Committee regarding a letter from the UK Public Accounts Committee on the NI Protocol and preparedness for the end of the transition period.

*Noted:* Members noted a paper from the National Audit Office on the UK boarder preparedness and the end of the transition period.

*Noted:* Members noted a response from the Committee on the Administration of Justice regarding Frontier Workers.

*Noted:* Members noted the Departmental weekly SITREP.

*Noted:* Members noted a response from the Department regarding BTEC's

*Noted:* Members noted a response from the Department regarding issues faced by students due to the pandemic.

*Noted:* Members noted a response from the Department regarding the student hardship fund.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the DALO regarding Invest NI Advice Clinics.

## **7. Programme for Government - Draft Outcomes Framework**

*Members agreed to defer this item until next week due to time constraints.*

## **8. Correspondence**

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice to the Minister for the Economy regarding accelerated passage of the Damages (Return on Investment) Bill.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the AERA Committee to the Department for the Economy regarding correspondence they received from Business in the Community NI.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office regarding the High Street Task Force.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward any further correspondence on this matter to the TEO Committee.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the Department for Communities regarding the Invest NI Retention and Disposal schedule.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the Airport Operators Association regarding an Airport Recovery Plan.

*Agreed:* to forward to the Department for comment.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the CBI NI's Emergency Working Group.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from CBI NI to the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding their roadmap for re-opening the Economy.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the paper onto the Department for comment.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from an individual regarding a whistle blowing complaint about the UU's decision to relocate medical courses to Magee.

*Noted:* Members noted the Twenty-second Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules 2020-2021.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding business support for driving schools sector.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Minister for the Economy regarding Workers' Rights.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance to the Minister for the Economy regarding the Presbyterian Mutual Society.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the CEO of the Causeway Chamber of Commerce to the Minister for the Economy regarding support schemes.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to endorse the call from the Chamber for further funding support and agreed to forward to the Department for consideration and comment.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from an individual regarding Internet and Technology poverty.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking what consideration is being given to support students experiencing such difficulties.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the Forum for Adult Learning highlighting their recent report “Learn Well Live Well”.

## **9. Any Other Business**

Members considered the latest Committee Forward Work Programme.

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

Members considered correspondence from the Captain of Donaghadee Golf Club regarding business support schemes.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for comment.

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

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2021 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings at 10am.

*The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 13.32pm*

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**Dr Caoímhe Archibald**  
**Chairperson**  
**Committee for the Economy**  
**17<sup>th</sup> February 2021**