



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 2 DECEMBER 2020

Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Colin McGrath MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Doug Beattie MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Martina Anderson MLA*
Mr Trevor Clarke MLA*
Mr Trevor Lunn MLA
Mr George Robinson MLA*
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA
Ms Emma Sheerin MLA*
Mr Christopher Stalford MLA

Apologies: None.

In Attendance: Ms Marie Austin (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Carla Campbell (Assistant Clerk)
Ms Sarah-Anne McKinley (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Craig Mealey (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Andrienne Magee (Clerical Officer)

* Members who attended the meeting via video conferencing.

The meeting commenced at 2:03pm.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. **Draft Minutes**

The Committee noted the minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2020, which had been agreed by the Chairperson.

3. **Matters Arising**

Members noted that the debate on the Committee's *'Report on the evidence received from local councils on the impact of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union'* is on the provisional Order Paper for Tuesday 15 December 2020.

The Committee considered correspondence from the House of Lords European Union Committee to the Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, highlighting the lack of clarity around the implementation of some key elements of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, and the potential economic impact on Northern Ireland.

Reference was made to the Finance Bill, due to be tabled in Westminster. Some Committee Members expressed concern around media reports that the Bill contains controversial clauses that would override the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement. Particular reference was made to the reported clause that would give the UK Government unilateral power to decide which goods being exported from Britain to Northern Ireland would be deemed "at risk" of entering the Republic of Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Minister Gove to request clarification on the content of the Finance Bill and the implications for Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Executive Office for information on the Westminster Finance Bill.

4. **The Executive Office Work Strands under New Decade, New Approach – Oral Evidence Session with Departmental Officials**

The Chairperson informed Members that the departmental oral evidence session, Executive Office Work Strands under New Decade, New Approach, had been removed from the agenda as a briefing paper was not provided in advance of the meeting to allow Members to prepare for the session.

The Committee expressed concern and disappointment that departmental briefing papers are continually not being provided in line with agreed timescales.

The Chairperson informed Members of his intention to raise the issue at the next Chairpersons' Liaison Group, in the context of the need to review the protocol: *Timescales for Interaction between Assembly Committees and Departments*.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule the oral evidence session on Executive Office Work Strands under New Decade, New Approach.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister expressing concern and disappointment at the continuing failure to provide papers to the Committee in line with the timescales agreed in the protocol: *Timescales for Interaction between Assembly Committees and Departments*, and ask for details of the process that is followed within the Executive Office to get papers cleared for issue to the Committee.

5. Historical Institutional Abuse, Engagement with Institutions – Departmental Written Briefing

The Committee considered a short departmental written briefing paper on Historical Institutional Abuse, Engagement with Institutions, and expressed disappointment at the late submission of the paper.

The issue of funeral costs for victims of Historical Institutional Abuse was raised. Members noted the difficulties experienced by families of victims/victims' groups in trying to meet funeral costs, and the dialogue that has taken place around options to provide financial assistance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office to express its support for the option that the Executive Office should include provision for funeral costs in the funding arrangements for the Historical Institutional Abuse Support Service to help families and groups pay for funeral costs.

6. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme for December 2020 to February 2021.

Members considered the Department's request to reschedule the oral evidence session on the assessment of the impact of Brexit on the Institutions and North/South and East/West relationships, which is scheduled for 13 January 2021.

Agreed: It was agreed that the oral evidence session on the assessment of the impact of Brexit on the Institutions and North/South and East/West relationships should remain on the agenda for 13 January 2021 meeting to allow officials to update the Committee on any discussions that have taken place on the matter.

7. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of State for Northern Ireland regarding evidence given to the Committee by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council on the UK's exit from the European Union.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response to Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly informing Members of a request from the Public Services Ombudsman to commence Part 3 of the Public Service Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the 2016 Act) to enable her office to exercise a complaints standards authority role.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Public Services Ombudsman to brief the Committee on Part 3 of the Public Services Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

- iii. The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Finance confirming his intention to engage with local councils to discuss financial concerns around future EU Funding.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance to the Minister of Finance supporting the Committee for the Executive Office's request that he engage with local councils to discuss financial concerns around future EU Funding.

- v. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for the Economy to the First Minister and deputy First Minister expressing concerns around business preparedness for EU Exit and calling for full resources to be applied to a media campaign to ensure that businesses are aware of requirements that will be placed on them from the end of the Transition Period.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister in support of the Committee for the Economy's suggested Executive media campaign.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy which included papers from the Department for the Economy on Business Readiness for the end of the Transition Period.

- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy to the First Minister and deputy First Minister seeking clarification on whether golf

courses can continue to operate while the current COVID-19 restrictions are in place.

- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Executive Office requesting regular updates on the work of the High Streets Task Force.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (CRC) welcoming the opportunity to meet with local groups who are interested in community relations activities and funding through CRC, and encouraging Committee Members to signpost groups to CRC.
- x. The Committee noted the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council Annual Report and Accounts for the Year ended 31 March 2020.
- xi. The Committee considered correspondence from the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding the appointment of the Interim Head of the Civil Service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Jenny Pyper, Interim Head of the Civil Service, to a Committee meeting to provide an introductory briefing.
- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Victims and Survivors Service regarding its new service to support the health and wellbeing of survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse.
- xiii. The Committee noted the Northern Ireland Assembly Brexit Brief Newsletter – 30 November 2020.

8. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that he had met with the Chairpersons from the Committees for Economy, Health and Communities to discuss a range of issues faced by students because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Committee considered a draft joint letter from the Chairpersons to the First Minister and deputy First Minister calling for a co-ordinated approach across the Executive to address the student issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to support the joint letter to the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

9. Any Other Business

None.

10. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 9 December 2020, at 2:00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2:33pm

11. Common Frameworks – NIA EU Affairs Manager Briefing

The Northern Ireland Assembly European Affairs Manager, Ms Shauna Mageean, joined the meeting at 2:33pm.

The European Affairs Manager briefed Members on Common Frameworks.

Christopher Stalford left the meeting at 3:06pm.

Members were advised that the Common Framework: Equal Treatment Legislation, falls within the remit of the Executive Office.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request information from the Executive Office on the Common Framework: Equal Treatment Legislation.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Mageean for the briefing.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:16pm.

Mr Colin McGrath MLA
Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office