



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 8 JULY 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

In Attendance: Ms Marie Austin (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Andrienne Magee (Clerical Officer)

** Members who attended the meeting via video conferencing.*

The meeting commenced at 2.02pm.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 1 July 2020.

3. Matters Arising

The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office regarding the remaining stages of the Executive Committee (Functions) Bill.

4. Victims' Payment Scheme – Oral Evidence from Departmental Officials

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.05pm:

Mark Browne, Director of Strategic Policy, Equality and Good Relations, The Executive Office,
Gareth Johnston, Director, Victims and Survivors Division, The Executive Office.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Victims' Payment Scheme.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office requesting further information on a range of issues relating to the Victims' Payment Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a further departmental oral evidence session on the Victims' Payment Scheme.

5. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme for July to September 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a departmental oral evidence session on the outcome of the 16 July 2020 meeting of the Specialised Committee on the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland and other Brexit issues, for 29 July 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, to attend a meeting of the Committee for the Executive Office to provide an update on the negotiations on the future relationship between the European Union and the UK Government; engagement with the devolved administrations; and, plans for the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland.

6. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a written briefing paper from the Executive Office on the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 7) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 8) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Clerk to the Committee for Finance regarding the Executive's review of Arm's Length Bodies in accordance with the New Decade, New Approach document.
- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly EU Affairs Manager regarding the establishment of common frameworks.
- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly EU Affairs Manager enclosing a copy of correspondence from the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee to the RT Hon. Michael Gove MP, regarding transparency of the UK-EU Joint Committee.
- v. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Lord Chief Justice's Office to an individual regarding the President of the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board.
- vi. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from an individual to the Lord Chief Justice's Office regarding the President of the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board.
- vii. The Committee noted the Pivotal report: *Covid-19 in Northern Ireland: A New Economic Vision*.
- viii. The Committee noted: *The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland – Investing Activity Report – 28 June 2020*.
- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Communities, given the issues raised fall within the remit of the Department for Communities.

- x. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the Chairperson of the Committee for Justice to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, requesting further information on arrangements to administer the Victims' Payment Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister requesting that it is copied into the response to the Committee for Justice.

- xi. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Chairperson of the Committee for Communities to the First Minister and deputy First Minister in relation to a briefing from Solace NI on Covid-19 and its financial impact on local government.
- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Interim Advocate for Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse.
- xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding guidance on weddings and church services during the COVID -19 pandemic.
- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding guidance on weddings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. Chairperson's Business

The Committee considered arrangements for dealing with Freedom of Information requests during the summer recess period.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, during periods of recess, to submit views on the releasing or withholding of information in any non-routine/contentious Freedom of Information requests received.

8. Any Other Business

Mr Christopher Stalford referred to the alleged breaches of the COVID-19 Regulations by Michelle O'Neill, MLA, deputy First Minister, at Mr Bobby Storey's funeral.

Mr Christopher Stalford proposed:

"That the Committee for the Executive Office seeks legal advice on:

- i. Whether it is within the remit of the Committee for the Executive Office to carry out an inquiry into the scale of the alleged breaches of the COVID-19 Regulations by Michelle O'Neill, MLA, deputy First Minister, at Mr Bobby Storey's funeral; and*
- ii. Whether such an inquiry creates the potential to prejudice the outcome of any other investigation."*

Mrs Martina Anderson, Mr Pat Sheehan and Ms Emma Sheerin registered their objections to the proposal.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek legal advice as proposed.

Mr Doug Beattie proposed:

"That the Committee for the Executive Office asks the First Minister and deputy First Minister to establish an independent statutory inquiry into the events

surrounding the funeral of Mr Bobby Storey, to include the involvement of Belfast City Council, and to make recommendations.”

Consideration of Mr Beattie’s proposal was deferred until receipt of the legal advice.

9. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 29 July 2020 at 2.00 pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.10pm.

Mr Colin McGrath MLA
Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office