



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 10th November 2021

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin (Chairperson)

Mr Trevor Lunn MLA

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Present via Video Conferencing:

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA

Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

Ms Diane Dodds MLA

Mr Christopher Stalford MLA

Apologies: Mr John Stewart MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

In Attendance:

Mr Michael Potter (Assembly Clerk)

Ms Sarah-Anne McKinley (Assistant Clerk)

Ms Alison Belshaw (Clerical Supervisor)

Ms Andrienne Magee (Clerical Officer)



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The meeting commenced at 2:05pm in open session

1. Apologies

As Above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson raised concerns to the Committee that the former Interim Head of the Civil Service, Jenny Pyper is now a non-Executive Director of Firmus Energy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an explanation as to why there does not seem to have been a cooling off period between taking up the post and being Interim Head of Civil Service and to ask if Ms Pyper was employed as a civil servant during her time as Interim HOCS.

The Chairperson raised concerns to the Committee on how the Committee for the Executive Office does not receive minutes from Executive meetings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask why this is so and to ask for minutes to be provided to the Committee in the future.

The Chairperson raised concerns to the Committee regarding delays in the appointment of commissioners by the Department.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for an update on the appointment of a Commissioner for Public Appointments and a Commissioner for Victims and Survivors.



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The Chairperson noted concerns from Members in relation to the delay of the appointment to the Panel of Experts on a Bill of Rights.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the First and deputy First Minister to ask why there has been no appointment to the Panel of Experts on a Bill of Rights to the Ad Hoc Committee.

The Chairperson updated the Committee in relation to the meeting with the House of Lords Constitution Committee on meeting on 4 November where Members gave evidence on inter-parliamentary relations and devolution issues.

The Chairperson updated the Committee in relation to an informal meeting with the new Permanent Secretary, Denis McMahon, on 9 November 2021. It was intended as a 'getting to know you' meeting.

The Chairperson updated the Committee in relation to an invitation for the Committee to meet Mr David McAllister MEP and Mr Bernd Lange MEP (co-chairs of the European Parliament UK Co-ordination Group) on Monday 15 November 2021 and encouraged all Members to attend.

The Committee passed on condolences in relation to the recent passing of former politician Austin Currie.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 3rd November 2021.



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4. Matters Arising

The Committee considered a proposed list of groups working on refugee issues to give evidence in relation to the Refugee Integration Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite those groups on the list before the Committee.

The Committee considered comments made by the Head of the Civil Service at last week's meeting in relation to the NDNA commitment of sub-regional equality.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ask for details of how this commitment is being fulfilled.

The Committee considered the draft joint letter outlining the proposals from the devolved Committees following the meeting with Lord Kinnoull and the Chairs of the relevant Committees of the three devolved legislatures on Monday 1 November in relation to participation in the Parliamentary Partnership Assembly (PPA).

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Chairperson to sign the letter on behalf of the Committee for the Executive Office.

5. Permanent Secretary of the Executive Office– Introductory Briefing

Denis McMahon and officials joined the meeting at 2:18pm.

- Mr. Denis McMahon, Permanent Secretary, The Executive Office.
- Ms. Karen Pearson, Deputy Secretary, COVID Strategy and COVID Contingencies, The Executive Office.
- Mr. Gareth Johnston, Deputy Secretary, Strategic Policy, Equality and Good Relations, The Executive Office.



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- Mr. Tom Reid, Deputy Secretary, International Relations and EU Exit, The Executive Office.

Diane Dodds joined the meeting at 2.29pm

The Permanent Secretary briefed the Committee on his new role and the future work planned for the department.

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

Christopher Stalford left the meeting at 3:54pm.

During their evidence session the Permanent Secretary and officials agreed to provide the Committee with information in relation to the departments' priorities and future working.

The Chairperson thanked the Permanent Secretary and officials for their attendance.

6. Stakeholder Session Travel Agents (Coronavirus) Financial Assistance Scheme - Oral Briefing

Stakeholders joined the meeting at 3:49pm

- Ms. Sharon Thompson, Proprietor Thompson Travel.
- Mr. Damian Murphy, Managing Director Terra Travel and founder of Association of Northern Ireland Travel Agents.
- Ms. Heather Fielding, Managing Director Gallagher Travel and ABTA Council Representative for Northern Ireland.



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- Ms. Joanne Stewart, Chief Executive Officer Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance.

The Stakeholders briefed the Committee in relation to issues surrounding the Travel Agents (Coronavirus) Financial Assistance Scheme.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Economy Minister to ask what capacity the department has to fund a further support scheme for travel agents.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the First and deputy First Minister to ask what additional support is available for travel agents.

Padraig Delargy left the meeting at 16.28

7. Scrutiny of Arms-Length Bodies – Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission – Written Briefing

The Committee noted a written briefing from the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme for November – December 2021.

The Committee noted alternative meeting dates following the previous invitation from the Seanad Special Select Committee on the Withdrawal of the UK from the EU for meeting in November.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed the new proposed dates are unlikely to suit Members and to request alternative dates.

9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a statement from the EU Commission by Vice President Šefčovič following his meeting with Lord Frost on the Implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/ Northern Ireland on the 5 November 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Vice President Šefčovič and Lord Frost to brief the Committee on current developments in relation to EU Exit.

- ii. The Committee noted an invitation from the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Select Committee to the Chair and Deputy Chair.
- iii. The Committee noted a press release from the Northern Ireland Office regarding funding of £12 Million for skills and local business in Northern Ireland.
- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Equality Commission in relation to investigation under Paragraph 10, Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998: Complaint against the Northern Ireland Office.
- v. The Committee noted correspondence from SAVIA in relation to withdrawal of support for a review into the Redress Board.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for an update and timeline for the review of the redress process and to seek assurances that the review is separate from considerations around an apology and that the review will not impede the process for an apology.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from Amnesty International to the First Minister and deputy First Minister in regards to a panel of experts on a Bill of Rights.



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- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Centre for Children's Rights at Queens University Belfast and the Commission for Victims and Survivors Report titled "It Didn't End in 1998".

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Centre for Children's Rights and the Commission for Victims and Survivors to present to the Committee their findings from the report.

- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Centre for Cross Border Studies in relation to models for Civic Engagement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Centre for Cross-Border Studies to brief the Committee regarding civic engagement and the opportunities for establishing mechanisms for engagement in relation to the Trade and Co-operation Agreement and the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol.

- ix. The Committee noted a survey from the Institute of Irish Studies University of Liverpool titled The Ireland/ Northern Ireland Protocol: Consensus or Conflict?

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from the Renewable Heat Association regarding environmental and economic analysis into the impact of RHI options.

- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from Foyle International in relation international language schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Foyle International to state the stakeholder session has taken place, but if they wish to provide a written briefing, the Committee will consider it in due course.

- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Federation of Small Businesses in relation to a travel agents Scheme appeal.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Federation of Small Businesses to inform them the Committee is currently engaged on this matter and would welcome any written evidence to assist the Committee in its deliberations.

- xiii. The Committee noted a report from ISNI titled Investing Activity Report October 2021.
- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual in relation to an apology and memorial for Historical Institutional Abuse victims.

10. Any Other Business

None.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 17 November 2021 at 2:00pm, in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:25pm.

Sinéad McLaughlin

Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office