

20240220/SRA/WFDSC/1

20 Feb 24

**Chair WFDSC**

V Chair WFDSC

Committee Clerk

**WFDSC Committee**

**WFDSC – Any Other Business**

References:

WFDSC Papers dated 15 and 22 Feb (Members Packs)

*Dear Chair and Vice Chair,*

I would like the following items, stated at (a) and (b) below, to be added to ‘any other business’ and appended into the minutes of our next meeting. After careful perusal of the committee papers (at the references), coupled with what I believe as our clear remit to ‘*examine proposed EU acts or replacement acts that have a specific impact on everyday life in Northern Ireland*’, I believe we have to act swiftly.

I am sure the committee will agree with me that while the challenges of the (so far undefined or legislated for) ‘Trivergence’ dilemma mean that parts of our remit may be open to some interpretation, it should be very clear that it is the role of the elected representatives on this committee are to be the arbiters of whether there is an impact on the everyday life of our constituents.

As pointed out in discussion around the table last week, this must be evidence based; however, we can only act on the information we, as a committee, have received.

Furthermore, while the roles of NI departments, the EU Commission, UK Government and the wide definition of what is contained within the expression of ‘civil society’ needs to be understood, our committee must have the central, rather than a peripheral, role in representing and deciding the interests of our electorate.

We can only do that effectively if we are kept informed.

In looking at the papers in the reference, two critical areas, for action under ‘AoB’, have stood out to me.

- (a) The first is that the Inter-Governmental and Internal Relations Directorate of the TEO should have a direct reporting responsibility to us. Committee members will have noted that the TEO directorate have stated that under their achievements section ‘*has been issues identified with the ongoing implementation of the Windsor Framework*’ (Page 74 22 Feb papers). Yet, as a committee, we have not been informed of any of these issues, despite the well flagged setting up of our committee, as first postulated in the Windsor Framework declaration, over a year ago. It is disappointing to me that we have been denied a ‘first day brief’ of these issues. This should be corrected as a matter of urgency and TEO ToR should

also be amended to ensure a direct line of reporting to this committee coupled with opportunities to question the relevant TEO Minister(s) on the floor of the Assembly.

- (b) Secondly, it is also clear that other committees across our nation, such as the House of Lords European Affairs – Sub-Committee of the Windsor Framework (correspondence again at the reference) have already been engaged on matters that have a specific impact on everyday life in Northern Ireland. It is surprising, that these matters, given our remit, have not already been highlighted to us. Again, as a matter of urgency our committee should communicate with both the House of Commons and the House of Lords committees and sub-committees. It is also clear that these committees already have serious areas of concern about the everyday impacts on Northern Ireland - these concerns should now be communicated to us without delay. Formal relationships between our committee and other relevant committees needs to be established, again with urgency.

If the WFSDC is to have relevance, gaining the confidence of all sections of our community, we must be seen to act, and swiftly.

Kind Regards

*Steve Aiken*

Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA  
WFSDC Committee Member