



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR THE ECONOMY

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

22 JUNE 2016

SEMINAR 2, INNOVATION CENTRE, CATALYST INC, 10:00am

Present: Mr Conor Murphy (Chairperson)
Mr Steve Aiken OBE (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Caoimhe Archibald
Mr Tom Buchanan
Ms Sinead Bradley
Mr Alan Chambers
Mr Gordon Dunne MBE
Mr Stephen Farry
Mr Gordon Lyons
Mr Alex Maskey

In Attendance: Mr Peter Hall (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Angela McParland (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Sinead Kelly (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Michael Greer (Clerical Supervisor)

Apologies: Mr Mervyn Storey

The meeting began at 10:02am in closed session

1. Strategic Planning

The Committee discussed the forthcoming Strategic Planning session scheduled for September.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to return to this issue at the next meeting.

The meeting moved into open session

2. Apologies

As noted above.

3. Draft Minutes of Meeting on 15th June 2016

Agreed: the Committee agreed the draft minutes of the meeting on 15th June 2016 with a minor amendment.

4. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that a revised agenda had been tabled to include SL1 Proposed Renewables Obligation Closure (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 and SR The Renewables Obligation Closure (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Agreed: the Committee put on record its discontent at the Department's handling of the legislation and lateness in providing papers for the Committee.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to the revised Agenda with the exception of Ms Bradley who suggested that it would be more appropriate to hold a special meeting with the Minister to focus on the SL1 and SR.

The Chairperson congratulated Catalyst Inc for the successful rebranding of the organisation and invited representatives to speak. Members received a briefing from Dr Norman Apsley OBE, Chief Executive, Catalyst Inc., and Dr Joanne Stuart OBE, Director of Development, Catalyst Inc.

The key issues discussed included the rebranding of the organisation to Catalyst Inc., plans to expand the Belfast base and its aims to increase Northern Ireland's knowledge economy.

The Chairperson informed Members of correspondence from the National House Building Council requesting that the Committee sponsor a roundtable discussion on Wednesday 19th October and that the Chairperson Chair the event.

Agreed: that the Committee will sponsor the event and the Chairperson will Chair the event.

5. Oral Briefing by Queen's University Belfast

The representatives joined the meeting at 10:29am

Steve Aiken declared an interest as former CEO of Dublin City University Educational Trust

Members received a briefing from Professor Patrick Johnston, President and Vice Chancellor, QUB, Mr James O’Kane, Registrar and Chief Operating Officer, QUB, and Ms Wendy Galbraith, Director of Finance, QUB.

The key issues discussed included funding, the importance of higher education to the economy, undergraduate and postgraduate student placements, international student placements, global rankings, academies to assist working with local and international businesses and building a knowledge economy,

The representatives left the meeting at 11:10am

6. Oral Briefing by Ulster University

The representatives joined the meeting at 11:11am

Steve Aiken declared an interest as former CEO of Dublin City University Educational Trust

Members received a briefing from Professor Paddy Nixon, Vice Chancellor and President, UU, Professor Alastair Adair, Deputy Vice Chancellor, UU, and Mr Peter Hope, Chief Finance and Information Officer, UU.

The key issues discussed included funding and the need for stability in any funding model, the new Belfast campus building, public spaces to allow local engagement, engagement with businesses, SMEs and international businesses, student accommodation and expansion of the Magee campus.

Agreed: the representatives agreed to forward the Committee figures on the projected costs for the proposed Magee campus expansion; and the action plan for dealing with disturbances in the Holyland area of Belfast on St Patrick’s Day.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to visit one of Ulster University’s campuses as part of its Forward Work Programme.

The representatives left the meeting at 12:09pm

Stephen Farry left the meeting at 12:10pm

7. Matters Arising

Noted: Members noted a response from the Department regarding the Draft Programme for Government.

Members considered a response from the Department regarding energy issues from the Legacy Report of the former Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Agreed: to await the Department's recommendations to the Executive regarding Contracts for Difference, the Internal Audit report on the Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme and a summary of responses on the consultation of the Strategic Energy Framework Review and Refresh.

Members considered a response from the Department regarding the Careers Strategy.

Agreed: to await an update from the Department on its work with the Department of Education on the action plan for Preparing for Success and an update on progress against the action plan for the Careers Strategy.

Noted: Members noted a response from the Department to its queries following a Departmental briefing on Operational Policy Overview.

Noted: Members noted a Departmental response to the Legacy Report of the former Committee for Employment and Learning in relation to Graduating to Success and Access to Success.

The Committee agreed to move to agenda item 14

14. Legislation: SL1 Proposed Renewables Obligation Closure (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016

The officials joined the meeting at 12:17pm

Members registered their discontent at how the process has been handled by the Department and in particular that the decision by the Minister to close the NIRO to new small scale onshore wind on 30th June 2016 had not been relayed to the Committee earlier. The Chairperson highlighted that this was not an acceptable way to do business in the view of the Committee and indicated that this should not be seen as a precedent.

Members received a briefing from Mr Chris Stewart, Deputy Secretary, Operational Policy Infrastructure and Regulation, DfE, Ms Alison Clydesdale, Energy Renewables Division, DfE, Mr Alan Smith, Principal Economist in

Energy Economics, DfE, and Mr Michael Blower, Electricity Renewables, DfE.

Key issues discussed were the SL1, how the current scenario came about and the issues that led to it.

Members considered the SL1 Proposed Renewables Obligation Closure (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Agreed: that the Committee is content with the policy implications of the proposed legislation.

Noted: that Sinead Bradley and Steve Aiken expressed their discontent at the lateness of the papers and at the Department's handling of the legislation and abstained from the Committee's decision regarding the SL1.

Legislation: SR 2016/000 The Renewables Obligation Closure (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016

Members considered SR 2016/000 The Renewables Obligation Closure (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Examiner of Statutory Rules has not yet reported on the Rule so members will be agreeing to the legislation subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister will seek the Speaker's permission to bring a motion seeking affirmation of the draft Rule at Monday's plenary session.

Question put and agreed, with the exception of Steve Aiken and Sinead Bradley who abstained from participating in the decision:

That the Committee for the Economy has considered The Renewables Obligation Closure (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rule's report, recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

The officials left the meeting at 12:42pm

8. Written Briefing by the Department – The Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project and Superfast Rollout Programme Phase 2

Noted: Members noted the briefing by the Department on The Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project and Superfast Rollout Programme Phase 2.

Stephen Farry returned to the meeting at 12:44pm

9. Consultations by Insolvency Service – Proposal to amend the limits for eligibility for the Debt Relief Scheme, Proposal to raise the threshold level of debt at which a creditor can petition for bankruptcy

Noted: Members considered the summary of responses to consultations by the Insolvency Service on the Proposal to amend the limits for eligibility for the Debt Relief Scheme and the Proposal to raise the threshold level of debt at which a creditor can petition for bankruptcy.

Agreed: to ask the Department to provide further information to the Committee regarding the impact on debtors, when the SLIs come before the Committee.

10. Annual Report on Public Bodies and Public Appointments 2014-15

Noted: Members considered the Annual Report on Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report 2014/15.

Stephen Farry declared an interest as a former Minister to the former Department for Employment and Learning who was responsible for several appointments.

Agreed: to write to the Committee for the Executive Office to ascertain if that Committee intends, going forward, to carry out any kind of review of public bodies. In particular, to review the responsibilities of the public bodies and the current approach to making appointments to them, for example whether action should be considered to address gender and diversity imbalances.

Agreed: to write to the Minister to ask for a written brief on the Department's current policies and practices in relation to appointments to relevant public bodies, including how the Department currently advertises for the positions and what kind of action it takes to encourage applications from under-represented groups.

11. Correspondence

Members considered a submission from National Energy Action's Energy Justice Campaign to the EnergyWise Scheme Proposals Consultation.

Agreed: the Committee to consider the submission again when a summary of responses has been received.

Members considered correspondence from the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) regarding licensing laws in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: the Chairperson to meet with CAMRA.

Members considered correspondence from the Scottish & Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation (SNIPEF) regarding the impact of changes to pension legislation to local businesses.

Agreed: the Chairperson to meet with SNIPEF.

Members considered correspondence from St Mary's University College regarding the review of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Infrastructure and funding.

Agreed: the Committee to hold a meeting at St Mary's University College and receive briefings on the issues raised.

Members considered correspondence from the Construction Industry Training Board Northern Ireland regarding challenges facing the construction industry.

Agreed: to consider again when the Committee receives a briefing on the issues facing the construction industry.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from Invest NI, congratulating the Chairperson on his appointment.

12. Any Other Business

There were no additional items of business.

13. Date, Time and Place of Next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on Wednesday 29th June 2016 at 10.00am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12:55pm

Mr Conor Murphy
Chairperson
Committee for the Economy

29th June 2016