



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

2 DECEMBER 2014

ROOM 29, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, 10.00AM

Present:

Mr Patsy McGlone (Chairperson)
Mr Phil Flanagan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Steven Agnew
Mr Gordon Dunne
Ms Megan Fearon
Mr Paul Frew
Mr Paul Givan
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Fearghal McKinney
Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir

In Attendance:

Mr Jim McManus (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Angela McParland (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Nathan McVeigh (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Christopher Jeffrey (Clerical Officer)
Mr Peadar Ó Lamhna (Bursary Student)

Apologies:

None

The meeting began at 10:15am

1. Apologies

Apologies were noted as above.

2. Draft minutes of meeting of 25 November 2014

Agreed: the Committee agreed the draft minutes of 25 November 2014.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson welcomed Paul Givan to the Committee and thanked Sydney Anderson for his input and commitment to the Committee.

Members noted a list of Departmental items from the Forward Work Programme which the Department has moved forward to the next session.

Agreed: to ask the Department when the G8 Legacy report will be available.

The Committee moved to Agenda Item 8

8. Legislation: Insolvency (Amendment) Bill

The Committee noted written responses from the Insolvency Technical Committee of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland and PricewaterhouseCoopers regarding the Insolvency Bill.

Agreed: to ask both the Insolvency Technical Committee and PricewaterhouseCoopers to provide oral evidence to the Committee on the issue at next week's meeting.

Agreed: members agreed the draft motion to extend the Committee Consideration Stage. The Motion was then laid in the Business Office.

Steven Agnew and Megan Fearon joined the meeting at 10:20am

4. Oral Briefing from DETI and BT : Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project

The representatives joined the meeting at 10:20am

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir joined the meeting at 10:39am

Paul Givan joined the meeting at 10:47am

Danny Kinahan joined the meeting at 10:53am

Steven Agnew left the meeting at 11:04am
Megan Fearon left the meeting at 11:18am
Gordon Dunne joined the meeting at 11:20am

Members received an oral briefing from Mr Mike Thompson, Head of Tourism, Telecoms and Geological Survey Policy Division, DETI, Mr Trevor Forsythe, Project Manager, DETI, Mr Frank McManus, Head of Wholesale Sales and Service, BT, and Mr Alan Irwin, Head of Major Bids, Wholesale NI, BT

Key issues discussed included: the fibre network, generation broadband, rural proofing, problems with customers in Northern Ireland accessing the RTÉ Player, capacity for businesses to grow inhibited due to lack of broadband, the super connected cities project, planning issues, inequalities in broadband speeds affecting businesses and the 4G Rollout.

Agreed: to write to DARD regarding broadband rollout in areas of deprivation.

Agreed: to receive a quarterly update on the project.

Agreed: to receive a copy of the rural proofing document.

Agreed: members to confirm with the Committee Office if they wish to accept BT's invitation to accompany engineers when installing broadband in their constituencies.

Agreed: to write to BT on the issue of the RTÉ Player.

The representatives left the meeting at 11:30am

William Humphrey left the meeting at 11:30am

Danny Kinahan left the meeting at 11:30am

5. Oral Briefing from DETI: Legislative Consent Memorandum – UK Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill

The representatives joined the meeting at 11:30am

Members received an oral briefing from Mr Keith Brown, Head of Financial Capability, Mutuels & Company Law, Ms Fiona McCausland, Head of Business Development Unit and Mr Jack Reid, Deputy Principal/Insolvency Service.

Key issues discussed included: what the provisions in the Bill would extend to with regards access to finance, company transparency, company filing requirements and company Directors' disqualification, whether it would have been more appropriate to include the proposed measures in an NI Bill rather than legislated for by Westminster through an LCM and why the LCM has not been extended to include provisions for Westminster to legislate on statutory regulations for Insolvency Practitioners.

The representatives left the meeting at 11:41am

The Committee moved to Agenda Item 7

7. Matters Arising

Members considered a response from DETI to the Committee's queries in respect of the Departmental response to the Electricity Policy Review – Part II – Security of Supply.

Agreed: to ask the Department, when it is responding to Part III of the Review, to provide a clear response to the Committee in table form on its level of support for each of the recommendations in the three parts of the Review, the reasons why for those not supported and actions it will take, is taking or has taken to implement each of the recommendations its supports.

Agreed: to write to NIE, the Utility Regulator, SONI and DoE Planning in relation to recommendations applicable to them, and to ask for a response by the end of January.

Members considered correspondence from Manufacturing NI in response to the Electricity Policy Review, Part II, Security of Supply.

Agreed: Members agreed to consider Manufacturing NI's response to Part II when considering the Department's future response.

Members noted a response from the Department of Finance and Personnel for an update on Small Business Rate Relief further to the Committee's queries following the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy (NICEP) briefing to the Committee.

Members noted a response from the Utility Regulator regarding the planned publication of a paper on the potential cost to consumers that creating the additional electricity will bring.

Members considered the announcement of the withdrawal of First Flight Wind from Northern Ireland

Agreed: to write to the Department for information on what exactly the issues and obstacles were for the company and what this announcement may mean to Northern Ireland in terms of security of supply.

9. Legislation: The Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Members noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules has considered this Statutory Rule and has indicated the points that he has raised with the Department and which have subsequently been agreed to and changed by the Department.

Agreed: that the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has considered the Statutory Rule – The Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and, subject to the ESR's report, recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

10. Written Briefing from DETI: January Monitoring Round

No papers were received from the Department for this item of business. Therefore this item of business was not discussed.

Members agreed to return to Agenda Item 6

6. Oral Briefing from DETI: Budget 2015/2016

The representatives joined the meeting at 11:54am

Members received an oral briefing from Mr Eugene Rooney, Head of Management Services Group, Trevor Cooper, Head of Finance Division and Ms Bernie Brankin, Principal Officer, Finance Branch.

Key issues discussed included the impact of proposed reductions on the Economic Strategy and Programme for Government commitments, reducing the number of staff within the Department and its ALBs, funding for the Cross Border bodies, Invest NI's budget, reductions in the HSENI budget for farm safety campaigns and the Department's Financial Transaction Capital budget.

The Chairperson left the meeting at 12:15pm

The Deputy Chairperson took the Chair at 12:15pm

Danny Kinahan left the meeting at 12:30pm

Paul Givan left the meeting at 12:48pm

William Humphrey left the meeting at 12:57pm

Agreed: to receive a copy of the administration and programme table which the representatives had at the meeting; to ask the Department to confirm that, as was stated by the Executive, no viable Job Creation Scheme will be lost due

to financial constraints; to ask for a comparison year on year from 2008 of percentage change in the InterTradeIreland and Tourism Ireland budgets and comparison percentage change of the DETI budget, also a comparison in monetary value; to ask what proportion of DETI's allocated budget is already contractually committed; to ask for further information on the figures secured from Europe; and to ask, DETI had previously been rewarded FTC funding for the implementation of the agri-food loan scheme and this was surrendered during the January 2014 monitoring round due to delays in the scheme. DETI's budget document proposes that FTC funding will again be allocated to the agri-food loan scheme in 2015/16. Is the loan scheme now operational and how confident is DETI that the FTC set aside for this purpose in 2015-16 will be utilised, or is there a risk of further delay.

Agreed: to write to the Committee for Finance and Personnel highlighting the inadequacies of the current process and informing its members that the Committee only received papers from the Department for tabling at this week's meeting and will not be in a position to consider and agree a report until the next Committee meeting on 9th December.

Agreed: to write to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development for comment regarding the proposal to suspend the current farm safety campaign activity.

Agreed: to write to the Ulster Farmers' Union and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association for comment regarding the proposal to suspend the current farm safety campaign activity.

The representatives left the meeting at 1:26pm

11. Written Briefing from DETI: Review of Business Red Tape

Members noted the written briefing from the Department on the review of Business Red Tape.

Agreed: to forward the report to other Statutory Committees for consideration and await the outcomes of consultation before agreeing any further action.

12. Written Briefing from DETI: Air Connectivity

Members noted a written briefing from the Department on air connectivity and DETI's role on Northern Ireland air access issues.

13. Correspondence

Members noted the following items of correspondence:

- i. A copy of correspondence from the Minister to the Chairperson of the CAL Committee in relation to a Creative Arts ‘Virtual’ School.
- ii. A copy of correspondence from the Minister to the Chairperson of the CAL Committee regarding the visit of the BBC Director General to Northern Ireland.
- iii. A copy of correspondence from the Minister to the Chairperson of the CAL Committee in relation to the North West 200.
- iv. Correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report on the Economic Mobility of Ethnic Minority Communities in Northern Ireland.
- v. Correspondence from the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation confirming receipt of correspondence regarding an update on Interreg IVa and V.
- vi. Correspondence from the Protect Our North Coast Group requesting to meet with the Committee in regards to its opposition to fracking on the North Coast.

Agreed: to discuss a possible visit at the next Forward Work Programme planning meeting and the visit to include tourism representatives.

14. Any Other Business

There were three items of additional business:

- i. Bank closures, reduction in banking services – to consider again at the next Forward Work Programme planning meeting.
- ii. Banking partnership scheme – to commission research on a banking partnership scheme carried out in Co. Down.
- iii. A Written Question to the Minister from the Deputy Chairperson regarding Credit Unions - the Deputy Chairperson to bring the answer before the Committee once received.

15. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on **Tuesday 9 December** at **10.00am** in The Senate Chamber, **Parliament Buildings**.

The meeting concluded at 1:45pm

Mr Patsy McGlone
Chairperson
Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment

9 December 2014