



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY, 12 DECEMBER 2013

SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

- Present: Ms Anna Lo MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Mr Colum Eastwood MLA
Mr Tom Elliott MLA
Mr Ian McCrea MLA
Mr Barry McElduff MLA
Mr Ian Milne MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA
- In Attendance: Mrs Sheila Mawhinney (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Neil Sedgewick (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Officer)
Ms Roisin Kelly (Bill Clerk – item 1 only)
- Apologies: Ms Pam Brown MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Alban Maginness MLA
Lord Morrow MLA

The meeting commenced in closed session at 10.10am

1. Briefing from Assembly Bill Office

The Committee received a briefing from the Assembly Bill Office on the wording of the Department's proposed amendment to defer the second phase of charging for carrier bags

Mr Elliott left the meeting at 10:20am

The meeting moved into public session at 10:24am

2. Apologies

Apologies were indicated as above.

3. Chairperson's Business

No business was discussed.

4. Draft Minutes

The minutes from the meeting of 5th December 2013 were agreed.

5. Matters arising

5.1 The Committee considered a Departmental reply to its request for further information on the management of the Sperrins as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask to be kept advised of the progress of an application for funding for a management plan.

5.2 The Committee noted a Departmental reply confirming that it plans to draft an amendment to SR2013/255, The Controlled Waste and Duty of Care Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013, following the identification of a drafting error by the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

5.3 The Committee considered the latest report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules in which the Examiner highlighted a drafting error in SR 2013/260.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to express its concern regarding the drafting errors and to urge greater care in the preparation of Statutory Rules.

5.4 The Committee considered a submission from the Community Relations Council in relation to the Local Government Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to accept the submission and to include it in the Committee report.

5.5 The Committee considered correspondence from the OFMDFM Committee regarding the legislative proposals for the Ombudsman Bill and the Local Government Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to keep the OFMDFM Committee informed of any issues around the role of the Commissioner which arise during its scrutiny of the Local Government Bill.

5.6 The Committee considered an invitation from the Northern Ireland Business Trust to visit a Passive House in Crawfordsburn on 30th January 2014.

Agreed: Members agreed to advise Committee staff if they wish to attend.

Mr Eastwood joined the meeting at 10:30am

5.7 The Committee considered a Departmental response regarding EU funding opportunities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of this response until 16th January 2014 when the Committee will receive a briefing from an EU Desk Officer.

6. Consultation on a biodiversity strategy for Northern Ireland

The Committee considered the Departmental consultation document on a biodiversity strategy for Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a synopsis of responses from the Department.

7. Departmental correspondence regarding the Local Government Pension Scheme Consultation.

The Committee noted Departmental correspondence and a further consultation document on the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a synopsis of responses from the Department.

8. SL1 – Proposed amendments to the Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996

The Committee considered an SL1 proposal to make amendments to The Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations (NI) 1996 to ensure compliance with EC Directive 2012/36 on driving licences.

Agreed: The Committee was content for the Department to proceed with making the Rule.

9. Carrier Bags Bill

The Committee considered the wording of the Department's proposed amendment to defer the second phase of charging for carrier bags. The Committee also considered correspondence from the Department and from the Northern Ireland Retail Consortium on the specific date in January 2015 when the second phase of charging is to commence.

Agreed: The Committee was content with the wording of the proposed Departmental amendment.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed that it was content for the implementation date to be set as 19 January 2015.

10. Local Government Auditor briefing on the Local Government Bill

Louise Mason (Chief Local Government Auditor) and Laura Murphy (Policy Officer, NIAO) briefed the Committee on the Local Government Bill.

The briefing was recorded by Hansard.

Mr Eastwood left the meeting at 10:54 am

The main areas discussed were the enhanced role of the Local Government Auditor as laid out in the Bill and the significant time constraints associated with this role.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would be useful if the Local Government Auditor could provide it with information on the potential costs of different levels of monitoring performance improvement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Delegated Powers Memorandum for the Local Government Bill to the Examiner of Statutory Rules for technical scrutiny.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to establish a sub Committee, with a quorum of three, to take detailed stakeholder evidence on the Local Government Bill. It was agreed that the first meeting should be held on 7 January 2014.

Mr Eastwood re-joined the meeting at 11:13am

Mr Weir left the meeting at 11:13am

11. Departmental briefing on the January Monitoring Round

Kieran McMahon (Finance and Business Planning Division) and Siobhan Lynn (Finance and Business Planning Division) briefed the Committee on the Department's January monitoring round submission.

Mr Weir re-joined the meeting at 11:18am

Agreed: The Committee was content to support the Department's monitoring round bids.

Mr Milne joined the meeting at 11:35am

12. Briefing by Taxis Enforcement Team

Iain Greenway (Principal Officer, Road Safety and Vehicle Regulation Division), James Hutchinson (DVA), Jeremy Logan (Taxi Enforcement Team) and Michael O'Neill (Taxis Act Implementation Team) briefed the Committee on the level of enforcement of existing taxi legislation.

The main areas discussed were enforcement procedures and the level of enforcement particularly within the Belfast area. The Committee also discussed the enforcement implications for proposed new legislation.

Mr Eastwood left the meeting at 12:13pm

Mr Milne left the meeting at 12:38pm

Agreed: The Committee was content to note, but not to agree, the Department's proposed timetable for the introduction of subordinate legislation to implement the provisions of the Taxis Act 2008.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to hold a further meeting with Departmental officials to discuss a way forward on the proposed legislation.

13. SL1 – The Motor Vehicles (Taxi Drivers' Licences) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

Agreed: The Committee was content for the Department to proceed in making the Rule.

14. Wind Energy Inquiry

The Committee considered the terms of reference for the inquiry and a draft signposting advertisement requesting written submissions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed amended Terms of Reference. The Committee also agreed that the Terms of Reference should be published on the Assembly website and in the three main newspapers in Northern Ireland.

The Committee noted a letter from SSE Airtricity to the DETI Minister announcing an increase in Community Benefits.

The Committee considered a letter from Omagh and Strabane District Councils asking for comments on its draft guidance protocol on community benefits.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a synopsis of the responses from the Councils.

The Committee noted a letter from Simple Power to the ETI Committee on small scale wind energy.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to request copies of any information available on the APSE conference on Wind Farms which was held in the Strule Arts Centre, Omagh, on 12 December 2013.

15. Correspondence

The Committee considered a copy of the strategic case for the Exploris Aquarium and Seal Sanctuary, provided by Friends of Exploris.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Ards Borough Council asking to be kept informed of developments with Exploris. The Committee also agreed to write to the Minister to express the Committee's support for Exploris.

The Committee considered a memo from the ETI Committee suggesting that the Committee may wish to seek advice from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) when considering REACH regulations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to NIC-ICTU to ask for its views on the proposed REACH Regulations.

The Committee considered an Assembly Research paper on competitive European funding in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek information on NIEA's bid for additional INTERREG funding.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department indicating its intention to consult on its draft Disability Action Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a copy of the synopsis of the responses from the Department.

The Committee noted the following correspondence

Departmental letter detailing the key findings of the Noise Complaint Statistics for Northern Ireland 2012/13 Report.

16. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted the forward work programme.

17. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed the naming of Causeway Coast and Glens council.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department emphasising the need for 'Glens' to be retained in all business marketing and promotional work within the new council cluster of Causeway Coast and Glens

18. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on 9th January 2014 at 10:00am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1:00pm

Anna Lo, MLA
Chairperson, Committee for the Environment
9 January 2014