



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY, 23 JANUARY 2014

SENATE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Ms Anna Lo MLA (Chairperson)
Mrs Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Tom Elliott MLA
Mr Ian McCrea MLA
Mr Ian Milne MLA
Lord Morrow 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 Suzie Cave (Research Officer- item 5 only)

Apologies: Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Mr Alban Maginness MLA
Mr Barry McElduff MLA

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:07am

1. Apologies

Apologies were indicated as above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised members that RSPB had requested members' attendance at a photo call to promote the 'Big Garden Birdwatch'.

Agreed: Members agreed to attend after the Committee meeting.

The Chairperson referred members to her recent meeting on behalf of the Committee with representatives of the Institute of Archaeologists Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward correspondence from the Institute of Archaeologists Ireland to the Department for comment. The Committee also agreed to forward this correspondence to the Committee for Culture, Arts & Leisure for information.

3. Draft Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 16th January 2013 were agreed.

4. Matters arising

4.1 The Committee noted further information supplied by Community Places on the use of the general power of competence and examples of community planning in other jurisdictions.

4.2 The Committee noted a Departmental update on Noise Action Plans for roads, railways and airports in Northern Ireland.

4.3 The Committee noted advice from the Examiner of Statutory Rules on the Delegated Powers of the Local Government Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to refer this report to the Department for comment.

4.4 The Committee considered a consultation on UNECE Regulations 129 Enhanced Child Restraint Systems

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

5. Assembly Research briefing on Local Government Bill research papers

Assembly Research briefed the Committee in relation to research papers arising from queries raised by members regarding the statement of ambition in Scotland; the lifting of the current disqualification on council staff from becoming councillors; the procedures for dealing with complaints about the conduct of councillors in other jurisdictions; and the possibility of placing the duty on Ministers, rather than on Departments, to participate in community planning.

The briefing was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a further research paper on the sanctions for breaches on the code of conduct placed on councillors in other jurisdictions.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to request advice from Assembly Legal Services on the difference in Northern Ireland legislation between the respective roles of Ministers and of Departments.

6. Belfast City Council briefing on the Local Government Bill

Mr Peter McNaney (Chief Executive, Belfast City Council), Mr Ronan Cregan (Director of Finance, Belfast City Council), Mr Stephen McCrory (Democratic Services, Belfast City Council) and Mr John Walsh (Legal Services, Belfast City Council) briefed the Committee on the provisions of the Local Government Bill.

The main areas discussed were procedures for call in, performance improvement and how the reorganisation as proposed in the Bill will impact on the position of Belfast City Council.

The briefing was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Belfast City Council should forward a suggested definition of the circumstances in which call in may be used.

7. Departmental briefing on the Local Government Bill

Ms Linda MacHugh (Director, Local Government Policy Division), Ms Julie Broadway (G7, Local Government Policy Division), Mr John Murphy (Local Government Policy Division) and Ms Mylene Ferguson (Local Government Policy Division) briefed the Committee on the Local Government Bill.

The main areas discussed were the implications of the removal of the blanket ban on council staff being councillors, positions of responsibility, executive arrangements, call-in and qualified majority voting, ethical standards, community planning and performance improvement.

The briefing was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Department should provide the exact wording of the ruling in the court case when the prohibition on council staff being councillors was challenged.

8. Correspondence

The Committee considered a letter from Castlereagh Borough Council expressing its concern about the length of time taken to assess the planning application for a Sainsbury's store in Dundonald, and the consequent economic impact on the area.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for comment.

The Committee considered an anonymous letter regarding alleged fraudulent activity in the Planning Service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Public Accounts Committee for consideration.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Regional Development Committee regarding its inquiry into the benefits of cycling to the Northern Ireland economy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content that the Regional Development Committee disposes of this matter in accordance with Standing Order 64a, and that it had no comments on the proposed terms of reference.

The Committee considered correspondence from residents of Carn Valley, Rathfriland, on a planning application for a proposed through-road.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for comment.

The Committee considered correspondence from NIIRTA requesting a meeting with the Chairperson to discuss NIIRTA's manifesto for the forthcoming Local Government elections.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to decline this request for a meeting.

The Committee considered a memo from the Social Development Committee regarding the potential economic impacts of wind energy on consumers and businesses.

Agreed: Members agreed to write back to the Social Development Committee, advising it to communicate its concerns to the ETI Committee which is currently undertaking an inquiry into energy pricing in Northern Ireland.

The Committee noted the following correspondence

Ministerial correspondence advising the Committee of a delay in the closure of Exploris to allow Ards Borough Council to prepare a business case.

Rural White Paper Action Plan – Annual Progress Report 2013.

Copy of George Best Belfast City Airport update on compliance with Planning Agreement.

Memo from the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee regarding farm diversification and renewable generation installations.

Copy of Barroso Task Force Desk Officers Progress Report from July to September 2013.

Copy of Departmental update on enforcement action in alleged cases of breach of planning control.

An invitation to a Long Gallery event with representatives of the Northern Ireland Region of Shopping Centres on 11 February 2014.

An invitation from Queen's University to a showcase event, 'Energy for the Future', on Tuesday 11 February 2014, in Riddel Hall, Belfast.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted the forward work programme.

10. Any Other Business

No business was discussed.

11. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on 30th January 2014 at 10:00am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 13:30pm

**Anna Lo, MLA
Chairperson, Committee for the Environment
30 January 2014**