



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance and Personnel

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Public Service Pensions Bill: Clause-by-
clause Scrutiny

20 November 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Finance and Personnel

Public Service Pensions Bill: Clause-by-clause Scrutiny

20 November 2013

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Megan Fearon
Mr Paul Girvan
Mr John McCallister
Mr Ian McCrea
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
Mr Adrian McQuillan

Witnesses:

Mr Stephen Ball	Department of Finance and Personnel
Mrs Grace Nesbitt	Department of Finance and Personnel

The Deputy Chairperson: Are members content to proceed to the formal clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill? *[Interruption.]* I am sorry; you do not have any speaking rights. *[Interruption.]* I will adjourn the meeting.

The Committee suspended at 11.57 am and resumed at 11.59 am.

On resuming —

The Deputy Chairperson: Members, we will resume the meeting. Thank you all for your cooperation during that brief interruption.

We will now begin the clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill. This session will be recorded for the Hansard report. Therefore, all electronic devices, with the exception of Committee tablets, must be switched off while the Committee is in session, otherwise they may interfere with the transmission and recording of proceedings. I refer members to the updated secretariat paper, which has been tabled, to assist with the clause-by-clause decisions. It has been updated from the version in the packs to take account of Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) undertakings to table amendments to clauses 5, 12 and 14. An updated table of issues from the evidence can be found in the Committee meeting pack, along with a copy of the Bill. We will now go to the secretariat paper.

Clause 1 (Schemes for persons in public service)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause contains the enabling power for new public service pension schemes and schemes providing other benefits, such as injury and compensation benefits, that are made under the Bill. The Committee and the Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade

Unions (NIC-ICTU) raised an issue in respect of the clause, to which DFP responded. That can be found in the table of issues in the meeting pack.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 2 (Responsible authority for schemes)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause enables the Departments listed in schedule 2 to make scheme regulations for the main categories of persons in public service. The Committee and the ICTU raised an issue in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. That is in the table of issues.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 3 (Scheme regulations)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause contains additional provisions about how the power to make scheme regulations under the Bill may be used. NIC-ICTU, the British Medical Association (BMA) and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) raised issues in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. That is in the table of issues.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 4 (Scheme manager)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause makes provision for public service pension schemes to have a scheme manager who is to be responsible for managing or administering the scheme. The Committee and the BMA raised issues in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. Information on that can be found in the table of issues.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 5 (Pension board)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause requires schemes to provide for the establishment of a pension board to assist the scheme manager with certain matters. NIC-ICTU, the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) raised issues in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. The information is in the table of issues in your meeting packs.

Mr Girvan: Chair, can we agree with the amendment?

The Deputy Chairperson: I would add that, arising from the Committee's scrutiny relating to NILGA's concerns, the Department has agreed to table an amendment to replace "must" with "may" in clause 5(2).

Mr Girvan: With the Committee's agreement, I think that we should agree to the amendment to change "must" to "may" in clause 5(2).

The Deputy Chairperson: Are you in agreement?

Mr Girvan: Yes.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 6 (Pension board: information)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause requires the scheme manager to publish information about the pension board for the scheme or schemes. No issues were raised in the evidence about the clause.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 7 (Scheme advisory board)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause requires schemes to provide for the establishment of a scheme advisory board to advise on certain matters. NIC-ICTU, the NASUWT and NILGA raised issues in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. The information is in your meeting packs.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 8 (Types of scheme)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause sets constraints on the design of schemes, including requiring defined benefit schemes to provide those benefits through a career average revalued earnings (CARE) scheme or such other description of defined benefit scheme as DFP may specify in regulations but not a final salary scheme. NIC-ICTU and the NASUWT raised issues in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. Again, the information is in the table of issues in your meeting packs.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 9 (Revaluation)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause provides for the revaluation of pensionable earnings of a person in a CARE scheme in accordance with changes in prices or earnings as set out in an annual order made by DFP. The Committee, NIC-ICTU and the NASUWT raised issues in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. Is the Committee content with clause 9?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: The Committee divided on this last week. I think that my party is still not content to be part of a unanimous decision. I also think that we would reserve our position until Consideration Stage. However, I do not want to divide the Committee.

Mr Girvan: If you want to table an amendment, you can do so at that stage.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I can; that is right.

The Deputy Chairperson: As I said at the outset, members are free to reserve their position on any of the clauses and to table amendments at Consideration Stage.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: To allow you to proceed, Chair, I will reserve my position on the clause.

Mr McCallister: Likewise.

The Deputy Chairperson: OK. Thank you.

Clause 10 (Pension age)

Mr Girvan: Chair, there is really only one area of the clause about which I have concern.

The Deputy Chairperson: Can we wait until we deal with the formalities of putting the clause to the Committee?

Clause 10 contains requirements relating to the normal pension age of schemes made under the Bill, including linkage with the state pension age in most cases. The Committee, the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), NIC-ICTU, NASUWT and NIHRC raised issues in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. Responses were also sought from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Health Department, which were referred to earlier. Is the Committee content with clause 10?

Mr Girvan: My issues with clause 10 are similar to Mitchel's concerns about clause 9. My party will consider whether to table an amendment at Consideration Stage.

Mr McCallister: Likewise, Chair. It might be useful if we could agree a Committee amendment for Consideration Stage.

Mr Girvan: I am looking at only one area.

The Deputy Chairperson: Can members indicate whether they want to speak?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I suggest to you, Chair, that, in the interests of saving time, we record that there is no agreed Committee position on the issue.

The Deputy Chairperson: Yes. John, do you want to speak on this?

Mr McCallister: I am content with that. I would like it if we could, at some point, agree an amendment. That would be useful. Our concerns about the clause are probably all the same, so it might be useful if we could get a Committee amendment before Consideration Stage, if that is possible.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thanks, John. For the sake of the minutes, can I clarify with you, Paul, that you are referring to clause 10 and not to clause 9?

Mr Girvan: Clause 10.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thank you. Do you want to say something additional?

Mr Girvan: No. I agree with what John just said. It would be better if we could come forward with an agreed approach. However, to allow us to move forward, we will take Mitchel's form of words.

The Deputy Chairperson: I take it that all parties, including mine, are adopting a reserved position on the clause and that parties intend to work together to formulate an agreed amendment to it at Committee Stage?

Mr Girvan: I think that an agreed amendment would be the right way forward.

The Deputy Chairperson: If possible.

Mr McCallister: All this harmony will never catch on.

The Committee Clerk: Is the Committee content that the record states that the Committee did not agree clause 10 at this stage?

Members indicated assent.

Clause 11 (Valuations)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause requires that defined benefit schemes be actuarially valued in accordance with DFP directions. The Committee, the BMA and NIC-ICTU raised issues in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. The information is in the table of issues in your meeting packs.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 12 (Employer cost cap)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause requires scheme regulations for defined benefit schemes to set an employer cost cap. It sets out how that cap should be set, measured and operated. The Committee, the BMA and NIC-ICTU raised issues in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. Following the concerns that the Committee raised, the Department has agreed to table an amendment to clause 12 to make the direction and regulation-making powers subject to consultation.

Is the Committee content with clause 12, subject to the Minister tabling an amendment at Consideration Stage undertaking to include further provisions to the fact that DFP directions and regulations may be made only after DFP has consulted with the relevant stakeholders?

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 13 (Employer contributions in funded schemes)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause provides for the setting of the employer contributions rate in defined benefit schemes with a pension fund, most notably the funded local government pension scheme Northern Ireland. The clause requires an actuarial valuation of the pension fund to inform the setting of the employer contribution rate and makes provision for the valuation to be reviewed. At its meeting on 13 November, the Committee agreed to table the following amendment:

"In clause 13, page 9, line 20

After 'Qualified' insert —

'and must not be —

(a) an employee of the responsible authority;

(b) the scheme manager;

(c) a scheme manager; or

(d) an employee of the Department of Finance and Personnel."

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 14 (Information about benefits)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause provides for scheme regulations to require scheme managers for defined benefit schemes under clause 1 to provide active pension scheme members with benefit information statements in accordance with the requirements of the clause. The Committee and the NIC-ICTU raised issues in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. The Committee identified a typographical error in subsection (1) at line 24 and has agreed to table an amendment to address that. Is the Committee content with the clause, subject to the Minister tabling an amendment at Consideration Stage undertaking to insert in line 24 the word "a" after the words "which is"?

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 15 (Information about schemes)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause relates to the collection and publication of information about schemes under clause 1. It allows DFP to direct schemes to publish or provide information to DFP and to specify how and when that information is to be published or produced. NIC-ICTU raised issues in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. The information is in the table of issues in your meeting packs.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 16 (Records)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause allows the Department for Social Development (DSD) to make regulations requiring scheme managers of pension schemes made under clause 1 and any connected schemes to keep specified records on, for example, information about contributions due to the scheme. No issues were raised about the clause in the evidence.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 17 (Regulatory oversight)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause makes provision about the regulatory responsibility of the Pensions Regulator in relation to the governance and administration of public service schemes made under the Bill, connected schemes and other public service pension schemes. The Committee raised an issue in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. The information is in the table of issues in your meeting packs.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 18 (Restriction of existing pension schemes)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause provides that benefits may not be provided under existing pension schemes in relation to service after the closing date for the scheme. Its effect is to bring to an end further accrual of pension benefits in existing schemes, except where transitional arrangements have been agreed to allow those who are closest to retirement to continue to accrue benefits under the scheme. NIC-ICTU raised issues in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. The information is in the table of issues in your meeting packs.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 19 (Closure of existing injury and compensation schemes)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause deals with existing injury and compensation schemes. It permits scheme regulations to provide for the closure or restriction of existing schemes that provide for the payment of benefits relating to compensation for loss of office and injury benefits. No issues were raised in the evidence about the clause.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 20 (Final salary link)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause introduces schedule 7, which sets out the final salary link that applies to past service in the final salary schemes restricted under clause 18. No issues were raised in the evidence about the clause.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 21 (Consultation)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause obliges the responsible authority to consult those who are likely to be affected before making or changing scheme regulations. The current procedures for making changes to current public service pension schemes vary from scheme to scheme. This Committee and NIC-ICTU raised an issue in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. That information is in the table of issues in the meeting pack.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 22 (Procedure for protected elements)

The Deputy Chairperson: In this clause, the policy intention is that the reforms legislated for in the Bill are designed to last for 25 years. The clause specifies enhanced consultation and report procedures for changes to protected elements of a scheme for a period of 25 years. The Committee raised an issue in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. That is in the table of issues in the meeting pack.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 23 (Procedure for retrospective provision)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause provides a procedure to be followed when retrospective provisions are included in scheme regulations proposed by the relevant authority. The Committee, BMA, NIC-ICTU and NIHRC raised issues in respect of the clause that DFP responded to. That is in

the table of issues in the meeting pack. My party will reserve its position on this until Consideration Stage.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 24 (Other procedure)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause sets out the legislative procedures that apply to the making of scheme regulations. A higher level of Assembly scrutiny is required in each case if scheme regulations are used to amend primary legislation or to make retrospective amendments that appear to the responsible authority to have significant adverse effects in relation to members of schemes. The Committee, NIC-ICTU and NASUWT raised issues in respect of the clause that DFP responded to. Information is in the table of issues in the meeting pack. My party may reserve its position on this until Consideration Stage.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I have indicated that we will do likewise.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 25 (Extension of schemes)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause allows schemes made under clause 1 to be extended to persons who are not in the main categories of persons in public service specified. NIC-ICTU raised an issue in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. That information is in the table of issues in the meeting pack.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 26 (Non-scheme benefits)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause allows scheme managers and employers to make payments towards the provision of pensions and other benefits that are not delivered through a scheme made under clause 1 for persons who could have access to such schemes. This will enable employers to contribute to private occupational pension schemes where members of public service schemes wish to take out or retain private occupational pensions in addition to or instead of being members of public service schemes. NIC-ICTU raised an issue in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. That information is in the table of issues in the meeting pack.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 27 (Consequential and minor amendments)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause introduces schedule 8, which contains consequential and minor amendments to primary legislation that are required because of the provisions of the Bill. No issues were raised during evidence on this clause.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 28 (Existing local government scheme)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause provides for certain regulations made under article 9 of the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 to have effect as though they were scheme regulations made under clause 1 of the Bill. The clause will apply only to regulations under which benefits are provided to or in respect of service on or after 1 April 2014. It will apply only to regulations that provide for pension benefits in respect of service on or after that date. NIC-ICTU raised an issue in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. That information is in the table of issues in the meeting pack.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 29 (Existing schemes for civil servants: extension of access)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause introduces schedule 9, which amends the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 to extend access to schemes made under article 3 of that order. No issues were raised during evidence on the clause.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 30 (New public body pension schemes)

The Deputy Chairperson: In this clause, there are defined benefit schemes for those in public service aside from the main schemes for civil servants, local government workers, health service workers, teachers, police, fire and rescue services and the devolved judiciary. The clause imposes constraints on the design of new pension schemes that may be created under the power in clause 31 for bodies and offices whose pension schemes are restricted for future accrual and whose members cannot join one of the schemes established under clause 1. It also governs the design of pension schemes that are set up in the future or established under future legislation for public bodies, unless future legislation makes specific different provision. NIC-ICTU and the Independent Financial Review Panel (IFRP) raised issues in respect of the clause that DFP responded to. That is in the table of issues in the meeting pack.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: We have made our bed, and we will lie in it.

Clause 31 (Power to restrict other existing public body pension schemes)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause contains provision for DFP to specify public bodies whose pension schemes would be restricted so that no benefits are provided under the scheme to or in respect of a person in relation to their service in the schemes after a date to be specified. IFRP raised an issue in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. That information is in the table of issues in the meeting pack.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 32 (Existing public body pension schemes: pension age)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause allows an existing public body pension scheme to reform itself by including provision that the normal pension age and deferred pension age of members of those schemes is to be the same as their state pension age — subsection (1)(a). The link may apply only to benefits accrued under the scheme after the provision to establish that link took effect. The Committee and IFRP raised an issue in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. That information is in the table of issues in the meeting pack. Is the Committee content with clause 32 as drafted?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Can I just check something? In the notes, it states:

"This clause requires a commencement order by DFP to take effect. The final date for restriction of public body schemes is not yet determined. The proposed amendment would have the effect of placing a requirement on those schemes to change the current provisions for pension age prematurely."

That does not make a lot of sense.

The Deputy Chairperson: Are you referring to the actual Bill?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I am talking about the departmental response.

The Committee Clerk: It is in the table of issues, at pages 103 to 104.

The Deputy Chairperson: Can you shed any light on that, Shane?

The Committee Clerk: It is just an extract from the DFP response to the issue.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: OK.

The Deputy Chairperson: Are you content, Mitchel?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: No. I do not have a clue what was left out. I do not know what it means.

The Deputy Chairperson: Do you want to reserve your position on that?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I do not want to hold things up, but I do not know what we will be agreeing to. I cannot agree to that as it stands, unless somebody can help.

The Deputy Chairperson: Do you want me to ask Mrs Nesbitt to elaborate on that point?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: That is always very helpful.

Mrs Grace Nesbitt (Department of Finance and Personnel): Can I bring a friend?

The Deputy Chairperson: Yes.

Mr Stephen Ball (Department of Finance and Personnel): One of the issues that were discussed during the evidence sessions was whether the clause should be amended to state "must" instead of "may". I think that we provided clarification. Some schemes will not have to reform by 2015. The clause enables those schemes to have the leeway to reform at a later date, so "must" would be inappropriate in that it would force them to change. The legislation would be dictating that they change even though that is not the policy intention, so "may" was the —

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I was not querying that. We may have just an extract from a longer response from yourselves. What is missing may or may not be significant, but I am puzzled by its absence.

Mr Ball: The correspondence probably proposed, suggested or asked us to give a view on a possible amendment.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Do you have the full response in front of you in hard copy? I do not. Do you need me to remind you what it was, if that would help?

Mrs G Nesbitt: We responded on 1 November. There is nothing further in the response to what you have there, so there is not a bit missing.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: To allow things to proceed, we will just reserve our position. We may or may not feel the need to take this matter up at Consideration Stage.

The Deputy Chairperson: OK.

Mrs G Nesbitt: The question was whether an amendment would be proposed to change "may" to "must". Our response, put really simply, was no, if that makes it clearer.

Mr Ball: I think that the extract refers to the quotation that Grace just gave.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: OK.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thanks, Mrs Nesbitt and Mr Ball.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I will reserve my position.

The Deputy Chairperson: Agreed, with reservations noted.

Clause 33 (General interpretation)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause contains definitions. No issues were raised during evidence on the clause.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 34 (Regulations, orders and directions)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause sets out the meaning of "affirmative procedure". Subsection (2) provides that directions given under the Bill by DFP may be varied or revoked. No issues were raised during evidence on the clause.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 35 (Financial provision)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause provides that any expenditure for the provision of pensions or other sums payable to present or former holders of judicial office are to be paid out of money provided by the Assembly. No issues were raised during evidence on the clause.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 36 (Commencement)

The Deputy Chairperson: The clause provides for when and how the provisions of the Bill are to come into force. The provisions listed in subsection (1) come into force automatically on the day the Bill is enacted. The Committee raised an issue in respect of the clause to which DFP responded. That information is in the table of issues in the meeting pack.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 37 (Short title)

The Deputy Chairperson: This clause states:

"This Act may be cited as the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2013."

No issues were raised during evidence on the clause.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Schedule 1 (Persons in public service: definitions)

The Deputy Chairperson: The schedule provides the definitions of persons in public service. No issues were raised during evidence on the schedule.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, put and agreed to.

Schedule 2 (Responsible authorities)

The Deputy Chairperson: The schedule provides the definition of responsible authorities. No issues were raised during evidence on the schedule.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, put and agreed to.

Schedule 3 (Scope of scheme regulations: supplementary matters)

The Deputy Chairperson: The schedule provides the scope of the regulations by setting out the eligibility and admission to membership. No issues were raised during evidence on the schedule.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, put and agreed to.

Schedule 4 (Regulatory oversight)

The Deputy Chairperson: The schedule provides for regulatory oversight and consequential changes to current affected legislation. No issues were raised during evidence on the schedule.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, put and agreed to.

Schedule 5 (Existing pension schemes)

The Deputy Chairperson: The schedule provides for the affected schemes. No issues were raised during evidence on the schedule.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, put and agreed to.

Schedule 6 (Existing injury and compensation schemes)

The Deputy Chairperson: The schedule provides for the scope of affected schemes. No issues were raised during evidence on the schedule.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, put and agreed to.

Schedule 7 (Final salary link)

The Deputy Chairperson: The schedule provides for persons who remain in an old scheme for past service. No issues were raised during evidence on the schedule.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, put and agreed to.

Schedule 8 (Consequential and minor amendments)

The Deputy Chairperson: The schedule provides for consequential and minor amendments. No issues were raised during evidence on the schedule.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, put and agreed to.

Schedule 9 (Existing schemes for civil servants: extension of access)

The Deputy Chairperson: The schedule amends the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 to extend access to schemes under that order that provide for superannuation benefits for civil servants. No issues were raised during evidence on the schedule.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, put and agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

The Deputy Chairperson: An initial draft of the Committee's report on the Bill to the Assembly will be considered as the next agenda item, with a view to agreeing the final draft report on 27 November, before Committee Stage expires on 29 November. Members may wish to consider whether they have any recommendations or requests for assurance that they wish to see included in the report.

Consideration Stage is a matter for the Minister to bring forward in line with the requirements set out in Standing Orders. However, DFP has indicated that it will be scheduled for 14 January 2014. Any agreed Committee amendments are required to be tabled in advance of the Consideration Stage. If proposed Committee amendments are agreed, the Bill Office will advise on any minor or consequential amendments that will need to be made at a later date.