



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Office of the First Minister
and deputy First Minister

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill

20 June 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mike Nesbitt (Chairperson)
Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Alex Maskey
Mr Francie Molloy
Mr George Robinson
Ms Caitriona Ruane

The Chairperson: Last week, you were asked to consider the Bill with a view to discussion this week in anticipation of the Second Stage debate on the principles of the Bill. The Second Stage debate is scheduled for Monday 25 June. The debate will be on the principles of the Bill as opposed to the detail of the clauses. Ministers from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) will explain the general principles, and members may seek clarification and support and, indeed, challenge aspects of the Bill.

Members have a limited opportunity to consider the Bill at this point in time, but there may be some issues that members may wish to discuss today and potentially raise in the Second Stage debate as areas where the Committee will be seeking further clarification. The Clerk circulated a list of possible issues that we may wish to discuss. That was sent by e-mail yesterday. There is also a hard copy in your tabled items. Does anybody want to kick off?

Mr A Maskey: It might be useful if we wait until the debate on the Second Stage of the Bill. By that stage, parties will have collected their thoughts, and I presume they will outline their case in the Second Stage debate. I do not know if all the parties are fully prepared today. I appreciate that the Committee Clerk has given us some information, but it is still useful after today. I am just thinking that we are going to have a discussion here that will not be as well informed as it might otherwise be.

The Chairperson: I have to emphasise that it is the principles, Alex, rather than the nitty-gritty of it. The Clerk's note makes clear certain issues, such as the fact that the terms of reference are in a ministerial statement rather than in the legislation, but the legislation will allow Ministers to change the terms of reference in consultation with the presiding officer. However, it also allows Ministers to remove him. On the face of it, that does not seem to be the most democratic way of doing business.

The terms of reference are not in the legislation, but the legislation allows them to change the terms of reference. We have a proposal from Alex that —

Mr A Maskey: Why do we not invite someone from OFMDFM to come along and have a discussion on this issue?

The Chairperson: Is Sir Anthony Hart going to come?

The Committee Clerk: Yes, the chairperson of the inquiry is going to come to the meeting on 4 July. The Second Stage debate will be on Monday. If members want to comment or want the chair to comment on any specific issues, the Committee will seek clarification from officials in due course or from the chair of the inquiry.

Mr A Maskey: Broadly speaking, I am happy enough with the legislation that is before us. I would like a bit more understanding as to why some of the points are in it, but I may be convinced by and happy enough with the explanations that I get.

The Chairperson: Are you happy to go forward on a party political basis?

Mr A Maskey: At this moment in time. Obviously, it has to come back here for full scrutiny because this is the principal Committee, so we have to deal with it.

Mr Lyttle: Obviously, it has been a small window of time. I presume that we have not had any soundings from any stakeholders, for want of a better word.

The Committee Clerk: We wrote to a number of stakeholders but have not had a response yet.

The Chairperson: Ok, that seems to be way forward. Thank you.