



Committee for Regional Development

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment)
Bill: Clause-by-Clause Consideration

23 January 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Jimmy Spratt (Chairperson)
Mr Seán Lynch (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Stewart Dickson
Mr Alex Easton
Mr Declan McAleer
Mr Ian McCrea
Mr David McNarry
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín

The Chairperson: We will now do the clause-by-clause consideration of the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill. We need to agree each clause individually.

Clause 1 (Grants to water and sewerage undertakers: further extension of initial period)

The Chairperson: Clause 1 grants to water and sewerage undertakers future extension of initial period.

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

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2 (Statutory charges)

The Chairperson: Clause 2 is on statutory charges.

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

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 3 (Short title)

The Chairperson: Clause 3 is the short title. I put it to the Committee that it is content with clause 3.

Mr McNarry: What you said on the short title gives me an opening.

The Chairperson: Are you saying that you do not want to agree it at the minute?

Mr McNarry: I want to ask you a question to clarify something.

The Chairperson: OK. Go ahead.

Mr McNarry: In light of the evidence, it is clear that this is a Bill to cover a short time. Is there any danger of this Committee walking itself into something that we will be leaving for another Committee or another Assembly? As far as I am concerned, what we are agreeing is patchwork stuff. We have no choice but to agree it. Within what you might say, or if it was the view of the Committee, will there be scope for the Committee to say that it is aware of where the Bill sits and what its intentions are but that, really, that is not the whole story? I have not yet heard any valid reasons from the Department, and there was no point questioning it there. Where we are going with this seems to be a secret, particularly given that the regulator told us last week that if efficiencies were introduced now, all our constituents would be paying 38% less. I do not know whether there is room to cover that, but it seems to me that the Committee might want to cover that itself.

The Chairperson: I will let the Committee Clerk come in on that.

The Committee Clerk: Members will have the opportunity soon. One of the outcomes of members considering a Bill such as this is a formal Committee report, and that is on the agenda to be considered following this. The Committee has the opportunity in the report to comment further on the clauses in the Bill, and there will be a debate on that. Members will then have a further opportunity, over and above that, in plenary, to put forward whatever concerns or comments they have about the Bill, provided that that sticks to the policy direction of the Bill.

Mr McNarry: Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: Does that clarify it for you, David?

Mr McNarry: Yes. Thank you.

Mr Dickson: On a similar note, I am not convinced that extending it by that period is necessarily correct; I believe that it should be extended by one year less than the period by which it has been extended. That would require the Executive to leave the way open for a future Administration to make the decision rather than this Administration making a decision that will flow into the next Administration. Therefore, I am concerned about the length of time.

The Chairperson: It has to be extended beyond 2015 for the Programme for Government commitment. It has to be extended by a year to allow —

Mr McNarry: What happens if the Assembly is extended for another year?

The Chairperson: That is not the case at the moment; we have to deal with the here and now. That is, I suppose, a reasonably strong possibility, but we have no control over that. Members have already agreed to this. Stewart, a short time ago, you agreed to extend it through clause 1.

Mr Dickson: I am sorry, Chair; that is why I am raising the issue. I have a concern about the period by which the Bill extends the subsidy. My preference is for one year less.

The Chairperson: That concern can be recorded in the report. I am sure that you will make your feelings felt in the debate.

Mr Dickson: Ok.

The Chairperson: We go back to the Question on the short title.

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

Clause 3 agreed to.

The Chairperson: Members, we now go into closed session to discuss the Committee report. This should not take long.

The Committee discussed its report in closed session.

The Chairperson: We are now back in open session. We return to the Committee report, which we have just discussed and agreed in closed session. I now need to formally put it on the record. I am going to go through it. Members have already gone through it, so I will now formally ask members again. Are members content with the powers and management and with paragraphs 1-11, which were agreed in closed session?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Are members content with paragraph 12, as amended by the Committee in closed session?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Are members content with paragraphs 13-27 of the report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Are members content with paragraph 28, as amended during the closed session?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Are members content with paragraphs 29-31?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Are members content with the clause-by-clause scrutiny?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Are members content that the report, associated minutes of proceedings and appendices be ordered to be printed?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: That concludes this morning's session.