



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY  
FIRST MINISTER  
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS  
WEDNESDAY 15 APRIL 2015  
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

- Present: Mr Mike Nesbitt (Chairperson)  
Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Megan Fearon  
Mrs Brenda Hale  
Mr Alex Maskey
- Apologies: Mr Michael Copeland  
Ms Bronwyn McGahan  
Mr David McIlveen  
Mr Stephen Moutray  
Mr Jimmy Spratt
- In Attendance: Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)  
Miss Karen Jardine (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Stephen Magee (Clerical Supervisor)  
Miss Zuzana Polackova (Clerical Officer)  
Mr Alyn Hicks (Assistant Assembly Clerk) Item 11  
only

*The meeting began in public session at 2.17pm with the following Members present: Mr Mike Nesbitt (Chairperson), Ms Megan Fearon, Mr Chris Lyttle, and Mr Alex Maskey. In the absence of a decision-making quorum proceedings commenced in line with Standing Order 49(5), and the Committee moved to the first evidence session.*

## **1. Equality - Age Discrimination Legislation**

*Junior Ministers and departmental officials joined the meeting at 2.18 pm*

Junior Minister Bell and junior Minister McCann appeared before the Committee, along with departmental officials Ms Margaret Rose McNaughton and Ms Joan Hardy, for discussion and questions on proposals to consult Age Discrimination legislation. Junior Ministers also responded to questions on the call for applications

to the 2015/16 Minority Ethnic Development Fund. The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

*Mrs Hale joined the meeting at 3.03pm.*

*The witnesses left the meeting at 3.12 pm.*

## **2. Apologies**

Apologies were noted as above.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to take the agenda item relating to consideration of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsperson Bill once all other agenda items had been considered.

## **3. Chairperson's Business**

### Children in Northern Ireland

The Committee noted a request from Children in Northern Ireland to meet with the Chairperson regarding policy responsibilities for children and young people following the proposed re-organisation of government departments.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed for the Chairperson to meet with CiNI representatives, along with other Members available at the relevant time.

*Ms Fearon left the meeting at 3.13pm and the Committee lost its decision-making quorum.*

*Ms Fearon returned to the meeting at 3.14pm.*

### The UK and NI health and social care regulators

The Committee noted an invitation from Fearghal McKinney MLA on behalf of the UK and Northern Ireland health and social care regulators to a reception on health and social care regulation to be held on Tuesday 2 June 2015.

### Committee Invitations

The Committee noted the list of current invitations.

#### **4. Draft Minutes of the meetings held on 25 March 2015**

*Agreed:* The draft minutes of the proceedings of 25 March 2015 were agreed by the Committee.

#### **5. Matters Arising**

##### Minority Ethnic Development Fund

The Committee noted correspondence from OFMDFM providing information on the call for applications for funding under the Minority Ethnic Development Fund for 2015/16.

The Committee also noted correspondence from OFMDFM, following the briefing with officials on the draft Racial Equality Strategy on 18 March, which indicated that there would be no extensions to 2014/15 contracts to bridge any funding gaps before awards under the 2015/16 call for applications to the Minority Ethnic Development would be made.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to Stronger Together to advise that the situation regard the extension to existing contractual commitments has now changed.

##### List of Outstanding Correspondence

The Committee noted the list of outstanding correspondence.

#### **6. Correspondence**

##### OFMDFM Announcements

The Committee noted a response from OFMDFM regarding Committee notification of future Departmental announcements.

##### Committee for Employment and Learning

The Committee noted a copy of a letter from OFMDFM to the Committee for Employment and Learning regarding the progress of the Disability Strategy.

##### Procurement Activity Report

The Committee noted the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland Procurement Activity Report for March 2015 relating to OFMDFM.

### Interaction Belfast

The Committee noted a message of thanks from Interaction Belfast regarding the Committee's communication with OFMDFM on funding for Interaction Belfast.

### Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

The Committee noted a copy of a response from OFMDFM to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development regarding Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly.

### Victims and Survivors Service

The Committee noted correspondence from OFMDFM regarding the appointment of a Chair and additional Board members for the Victims and Survivors Service.

### Delivering Social Change

The Committee noted the Delivering Social Change Update for March 2015.

### Historical Institutional Abuse

Following a request for an urgent oral update on the progress of the scoping papers regarding victims who fall outside the remit of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry, the Committee noted correspondence from the Department advising that the issue remains under consideration by Ministers.

### Report on Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service

The Committee noted that the Report on Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service had been published by the Committee for Finance and Personnel, and was scheduled for debate in plenary on Tuesday 21 April.

### Summer Camps 2015

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department advising of its intention to open the Summer Camps Pilot Programme for applications on 15 April 2015.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek information on how the content of the summer camps will contribute to improving community relations.

## **7. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme up to July 2015.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to invite the First Minister and deputy First Minister to attend the Committee before the end of the session to provide a review of the work of the Department in 2014/15 and an overview of plans for the final year of the mandate.

## **8. Children's Services Co-operation Bill - Evidence from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People**

The Chairperson advised Members that Committee staff had met informally with OFMDFM officials during Easter recess to discuss progress on the Bill, and thanked the Department for its constructive approach.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to make provision for a 20 minute evidence session with the Children's Law Centre on Wednesday 22 April.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to bring forward the meeting scheduled for Wednesday 29 April to Monday 27 April at 12.15pm.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to ask the Examiner of Statutory Rules for his assessment of the delegated powers contained within the Bill.

*Witnesses from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People joined the meeting at 3.20 pm.*

Ms Koulla Yiasouma, Commissioner for Children and Young People; and Dr Alison Montgomery Senior Policy and Research Officer, appeared before the Committee for discussion and questions on the Children's Services Co-operation Bill.

*Ms Fearon left the meeting at 3.21pm. The Committee lost its decision-making quorum. In the absence of a decision-making quorum proceedings continued in line with Standing Order 49(5).*

*Ms Fearon returned to the meeting at 3.24pm.*

Ms Yiasouma also responded to the briefing from junior Ministers on proposals for age discrimination legislation.

The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

*The witnesses left the meeting at 4.04 pm.*

## **9. Children's Services Co-operation Bill - Evidence from Ms Ann Godfrey**

*The witness joined the meeting at 4.04 pm*

Ms Ann Godfrey, retired Children's Services Planning Professional Advisor appeared before the Committee for discussion and questions on the Children's Services Co-operation Bill. The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

*The witness left the meeting at 4.25 pm.*

## **10. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

*The Committee moved to closed session at 4.25 pm.*

*Mrs Hale left the meeting at 4.26pm. The Committee lost its decision-making quorum. In the absence of a decision-making quorum proceedings continued in line with Standing Order 49(5).*

*Mrs Hale returned to the meeting at 4.27pm.*

## **11. Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsperson Bill**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Secretary of State indicating that she was content with the additional provision in clause 41 for a memorandum of understanding, and that she was prepared to grant consent to the consideration of the Bill by the Assembly.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Chairperson to the Speaker seeking permission to introduce the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsperson Bill and the short Ombudsman and Commissioner for Complaints (Amendment) Bill.

The Committee noted correspondence from the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding the initiation of a public appointment process to appoint a replacement NI Ombudsman.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to table a motion for accelerated passage in relation to the Ombudsman and Commissioner for Complaints (Amendment) Bill with the following text:

*“That the Ombudsman and Commissioner for Complaints (Amendment) Bill proceed under the accelerated passage procedure”.*

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Business Committee before introduction of the Ombudsman and Commissioner for Complaints Bill that, in order to give effect to the spirit of Standing Order 42(3).

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to issue the draft letter, as amended, to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to advise of the imminent introduction of the NIPSO Bill and the Ombudsman and Commissioner for Complaints (Amendment) Bill; the intention to proceed with the Ombudsman and Commissioner for Complaints (Amendment) Bill by seeking accelerated passage; and that

following the introduction of both Bills the Committee expects that the Assembly will take forward the recruitment process for the new post of Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsperson.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the update to the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum to reflect the provision in clause 41 for a memorandum of understanding, whilst noting objections from Sinn Féin to the policy proposal contained in clause 41 relating to the disclosure of information.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to issue a draft letter, as amended, to the current Ombudsman to update him on recent developments relating to the legislation.

The Committee noted a timetable for the introduction and subsequent stages of the NIPSO Bill and the Ombudsman and Commissioner for Complaints (Amendment) Bill.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to give notice of introduction of the NIPSO Bill to the relevant stakeholders.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to issue a draft letter, as amended, to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety regarding his concerns on the NIPSO Bill.

The Committee noted a response from the Ombudsman regarding the handling of a previous complaint, and which provided information on how cases are managed where a complainant believes the Ombudsman has been misinformed, where new evidence has come to light or where the manner in which an investigation has been conducted is challenged.

Members noted a transcript of evidence provided by the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, Mr Tom Frawley, to the Finance Committee of the National Assembly for Wales in March 2015 as part of its consideration of the powers of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

## **12. Date, Time and Location of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held at 2 pm in Room 30 on Wednesday 22 April 2015.

*The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 4.43pm.*

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