

End of session report 2013-14

OFMDFM Committee

Remit and Powers

The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is a Statutory Committee established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Belfast Agreement, Section 29 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and under Assembly Standing Order 48. The Committee has a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and has a role in the initiation of legislation.

The Committee has power to:

- Consider and advise on Departmental Budgets and Annual Plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- Approve relevant secondary legislation and take the Committee stage of relevant primary legislation;
- Call for persons and papers;
- Initiate inquiries and make reports; and
- Consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Membership

Committee Members:

Chairperson	Mr Mike Nesbitt
Deputy Chairperson	Mr Chris Lyttle
	Mr Alex Attwood
	Mr Leslie Cree
	Miss Megan Fearon
	Mrs Brenda Hale
	Mr Alex Maskey
	Ms Bronwyn McGahan
	Mr Stephen Moutray
	Mr George Robinson
	Mr Jimmy Spratt

Meetings Held

In the period from September 2013 to August 2014, the Committee held a total of 33 Committee meetings, 19 of which were fully public. 14 meetings were held in partially closed session, the majority of which related to the Committee's development of the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsperson Bill.

Primary Legislation

The Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsperson Bill

Throughout this session the Committee has continued to develop its legislative proposals to update and reform the Office of the Northern Ireland Ombudsman.

In September 2013 the Committee's Report on its proposals for a Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsperson was debated in plenary and the proposals received unanimous support from the Assembly. The Committee subsequently finalised decisions in relation to the policy content of the proposed Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsperson (NIPSO) Bill and sought advice from the Assembly's Legal Services in relation to the legal implications of some decisions. Following discussions the policy proposals were provided to the Assembly's drafter in order for the draft Bill to be prepared. During May and June the Committee considered Parts I-V of the draft Bill, along with Schedule 1.

The Committee expects to be in a position to introduce the Bill to the Assembly early in the next session.

Subordinate Legislation

During the 2013-14 session the Committee considered a Statutory Rule in relation to the salary of the Northern Ireland Ombudsman. The Committee also noted a Commencement Order in relation to the application of the Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations.

Legislative Consent Motion

The Committee considered a Legislative Consent motion in relation to the UK Intellectual Property Bill: Freedom of Information Provisions. The legislation provided a change to the law in response to representations in favour of greater protection for pre-publication research made by the Higher Education sector. The Committee agreed so support the Legislative Consent Motion at its meeting on 16 October 2013, and its report was subsequently made available on the Committee's webpage.

A Legislative Consent Memorandum with regard to the Childcare Payments Bill was laid in the Business Office on 23 June 2014 and subsequently referred to the Committee. The Bill introduces a new tax-free childcare scheme to support eligible parents with childcare costs. The proposed new scheme will be operated by HMRC and financed centrally by the UK Government, and its operation will be made an excepted matter. At its meeting on 2 July 2014 the Committee heard evidence from Employers for Childcare and departmental officials. The Committee's final report on the LCM will be considered early in the 2014/15 session.

Inquiries

(i) Inquiry into the Barroso Taskforce

At its meeting on 29 January 2014 the Committee agreed to undertake an Inquiry into the Barroso Taskforce and the Barroso Taskforce Working Group. The Inquiry sought to examine the work of the Northern Ireland Taskforce which was established by President Barroso in 2007 to support Northern Ireland in its efforts to improve its economic competitiveness and to create sustainable employment. The Committee received a total of 14 written submissions from key representatives in Europe and from stakeholders. The Report contains 11 recommendations for the support and enhancement of future engagement in EU affairs and was agreed by the Committee on 2 July 2014. The Report was debated in Plenary in September 2014.

(ii) Inquiry into Building a United Community

The Committee agreed the terms of reference for its Inquiry into Building a United Community at its meeting on 2 July 2014. The purpose of the inquiry is to inform the Executive's approach in the actions it takes to tackle sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance; and to make recommendations in order to support and enhance policy in uniting communities and community integration, including how communities are involved in decision making. The Inquiry will also seek to make recommendations based on the evidence gathered. The closing date for written submissions is 26 September 2014, following which the Committee will consider the emerging themes and its approach to taking further evidence from interested stakeholders.

Scrutiny

(i) Victims and Survivors

The Committee was the catalyst in drawing out issues with the delivery of services and weaknesses within the process for assessing victims and survivors. The Committee scrutinised the role and work of the Department and the Victims and Survivors Service, including the implementation of the recommendations following the independent review by the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors to ensure that service delivery was improved. The Committee has been briefed on 10 occasions through the year, by the Commissioner, the Forum, the Service, the Department and junior Ministers. The Commissioner highlighted that if it wasn't for the Committee's intervention progress wouldn't have been as swift.

(ii) Late Papers

The role of the Committee in scrutinising the Department was at times impacted by the lateness of papers from the Department, delays in receiving briefings and delays in responding to the Committee's request for information. The Committee raised

this issue with officials, the Head of the Civil Service, junior Ministers and the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Whilst some difficulties remain the situation had improved significantly by the end of the 2013-14 session, and this was acknowledged by the Chairperson during the briefing with the First Minister and deputy First Minister on 25 June 2014.

(iii) Budget Scrutiny

The Committee has continued its Budget scrutiny role during the session and received briefings from officials on the monitoring rounds in October, January and June. The Committee also received a briefing in June on the 2014/15 budget allocations, although papers for this evidence session were received late.

(iv) Programme for Government

Scrutiny of the Programme for Government was a key priority for the Committee in this session, especially in relation to how the Department monitors progress against its own PfG commitments. The Committee had previously written to the Department requesting quarterly updates on its PfG progress. However, over the session, the Committee received only two such briefings, in February 2014 and June 2014.

The Programme for Government will again be a key priority for the Committee in the next session, as the Committee continues its scrutiny of the Department's progress in achieving its PfG commitments. It is anticipated that there will be an extension to the Programme for Government for the 2015/16 session and the Committee will have a key role in that regard.

(v) Committee Strategic Priorities for 2013/14

At its planning meeting in September 2013 the Committee agreed a number of headline actions and strategic priorities for the 2013/14 session. This included:

- a. PfG 15 - Develop Maze/Long Kesh as a regeneration site of regional significance

In September, the Committee wrote to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to request an urgent briefing on the Maze/Long Kesh project. As no response was received, the Committee pressed again on 7 January for a briefing. Ministers responded to advise that, as there had been no political agreement, a briefing on Maze/Long Kesh could not go ahead.

- b. PfG 31 & 32 – Social Investment Fund

The Committee was briefed by officials specifically on 4 December 2013 and 19 February 2014. The Committee also raised the issue of Social Investment Fund (SIF) with junior Ministers during briefings on the Programme for Government on 27 November 2013. At the briefing on 19 February, the Department announced that a total of £33m had been allocated to 23 projects in the initial tranche and that 29 further projects were being worked on.

- c. PfG 33 – Childcare

The Committee was briefed on the Bright Start Framework at its meeting of 2 October 2013. The Committee then received a briefing from officials on 26 March, who provided information on progress of putting in place 7000 school age childcare places. The Committee commenced consideration of a Legislative Consent Memorandum in relation to the Childcare Payments Bill recently introduced at Westminster.

d. PfG 34 - Delivering Social Change Delivery Framework

The Committee has been briefed many times by officials on a number of issues that fall within the remit of Delivering Social Change. The Committee was also briefed by junior Ministers in November.

The Committee held a successful event on the Delivering Social Change Signature Projects in November, at which over 90 representatives from voluntary, community and statutory sectors attended the event. The Committee produced a report containing recommendations which was debated in the Assembly in January. The Department responded to say that it would take into account the Committee's recommendations in relation to consultation with stakeholders as the programmes are taken forward.



Delivering Social Change - roundtable discussions



Delivering Social Change - roundtable discussions

The Committee has also considered a number of other issues that fall within the remit, such as Child Poverty, Active Ageing Strategy, Sexual Orientation Strategy, Gender Equality Strategy and the Racial Equality Strategy. The Committee will follow the development of these strategies in the 2014/15 session.

e. PfG 67 – Together: Building a United Community

The Committee has been briefed on a number of occasions in relation to progress of Together: Building a United Community. The Committee has also considered the draft Good Relations Indicators and the proposals to create an Equality and Good Relations Commission. The Committee launched its Inquiry into Building a United Community at its meeting on 2 July 2014 and will take forward this work into the 2014/15 session.

(vi) Historical Institutional Abuse

The Committee is waiting for the Department to produce a scoping paper in relation to those victims of abuse that fall outside the remit of the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse. Once this paper is completed the Committee will consider how the needs of these victims can be addressed.

Europe

Throughout the 2013/14 session the Committee engaged with a wide range of European issues and stakeholders at all levels. It scrutinised the Department's and Executive's work in Europe and awaits the publication of the Executive's 2014/15 European priorities. The Committee also scrutinised in detail the Department's Programme for Government commitment to increase the uptake of competitive EU funding across all Departments by 20%, the Committee is waiting for further information in relation to the contribution of Arm's-Length Bodies to the figures.

In October 2013, the Committee took formal evidence from the Irish Minister for European Affairs, Paschal Donohoe TD in Parliament Buildings, at which he briefed the Committee on the Irish Presidency of the EU in the first half of 2013

The Committee hosted a visit from the Enlarged Presidency of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on 2 April 2014. The Committee met with EESC President Henri Malosse, Vice Presidents Jane Morrice and Hans-Joachim Wilms and other EESC members to discuss the role of the EU in the peace process, social cohesion and the future of the European Union.



Visit of the Presidency of the European Economic and Social Committee

The Committee debated its report on the Assembly committees' EU priorities for 2014 on 7 April. As well as highlighting Committees' priorities for 2014, the report allowed reflection on performance in relation to their 2013 priorities.

During the year, the Committee was involved in a number of explanatory memoranda in relation to possible issues of subsidiarity. The Committee also liaised with the Department in relation to its views on proposals for an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategy. The Committee was also briefed by NICEM and the Traveller, Gypsy and Roma Network in February.

The Committee's European priorities for 2014-2015 include:

- Tackling the Gender Pay Gap
- Accession of the European Union to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
- European Accessibility Act
- Subsidiarity monitoring

Engagement

The Committee undertook a number of events, visits and meetings during the 2013/14 session including:

- October 2013 - Committee Members meet with Irish Minister for European Affairs, Paschal Donohoe TD to discuss the legacy of the Irish Presidency of the European Union and engagement on EU issues.
- November 2013 - Committee Members visited Forthspring Inter-Community Group on the Springfield Road to hear about the work they are doing with young people across the interface.



Committee visit to Forthspring Inter-Community Group

- January 2014 - The Committee hosted a stakeholder event for over 90 representatives from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors on the Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes which resulted in a report that was subsequently debated in plenary.
- March 2014 - The Chairperson attended a number of engagements in Washington DC
- April 2014 - The Committee hosted a visit from the Enlarged Presidency of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on 2 April 2014. The Committee met with EESC President Henri Malosse, Vice Presidents Jane Morrice and Hans-Joachim Wilms and other EESC members to discuss the role of the EU in the peace process, social cohesion and the future of the European Union.
- June 2014 - Members of the Committee participated in an Assembly outreach event with organisations representing Black and Minority Ethnic Communities

Forthcoming Priorities

The Committee meet at the Ranfurly Arts and Visitor Centre, Dungannon on 3 September to discuss its strategic priorities and operation for 2014/15, and these were agreed formally by the Committee at the meeting of 10 September.

The outcomes of these discussions are detailed below.

Strategic Committee Priorities for 2014-15

- Introduction of the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsperson Bill to the Assembly
- Inquiry into Building a United Community with a report to the Assembly in Spring 2015
- Continued scrutiny of matters relating to Victims and Survivors, including the Victims and Survivors Service and funding issues
- Budget Scrutiny
- Programme for Government priorities including specifically:
 - PfG 31/32 - Social Investment Fund
 - PfG 33 - Childcare
 - PfG 67 - Building a United Community
- Departmental Policy/Strategy including:
 - Racial Equality
 - Children and Young People
 - Sexual Orientation
 - Gender Equality
 - EU Priorities

Committee for Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Expenditure for the period 1 September 2013 – 31 August 2014

Budget area	Details	Expenditure
Committee Travel - committee members and staff travel and subsistence in relation to visits and meetings outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of committee visits to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washington (1 Member & 1 staff) • EC-UK Cardiff (1 Member & 1 staff) • EC-UK House of Lords (1 Member & 1 staff) • EC-UK House of Commons (1 Member & 1 staff) 	£4905.82
Printing of committee reports	Includes the cost of committee reports on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assembly Committee Priorities for European Scrutiny 2014 • Report on the Committee's Proposals for a Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman Bill • Report on Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes event 	£4329.64
Advertising – the cost of public notices relating to committee inquiries, the committee stage of Bills and meetings held outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of public notices in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee Inquiry into Building a United Community 	£633.06
Consultancy support - the cost of specialist advisers appointed by the committee and commissioned research, also the cost of drafting Standing Orders	Specialist adviser to the Committee on [issue/inquiry to which the advice related]	£0
General expenses	Cost of refreshments for committee meetings, working lunches, seminars, room hire, witness expenses, gifts provided by the committee during visits and conference fees for members.	£1925.99
Total Expenditure		£11794.51