



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

Draft Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 29 February 2024

Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present: Declan McAleer MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

John Blair MLA

Nicola Brogan MLA

William Irwin MLA

Áine Murphy MLA

Michelle McIlveen MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

None

Apologies: Tom Elliott MLA (Chairperson)

Tom Buchanan MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

In Attendance: Dr Janice Thompson, Assembly Clerk
Ms Gillian Barker, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Mr Michael Greer, Clerical Supervisor
Ms Andrienne Magee, Clerical Officer

The Chair reminded members of the 'Declaration of Interests' and asked Members if there are any new interests to declare, relevant to the items under consideration at this meeting, that had not already been declared at the first meeting. None were declared.

The meeting opened in public session at 10.06 am and Declan McAleer (Vice Chair) took the Chair.

1. Apologies

The following apologies were noted:

Mr Tom Elliott MLA
Mr Tom Buchanan MLA
Mr Patsy McGlone MLA

2. Minutes

Minutes of 22 February 2024 were agreed and signed.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chair advised Members that the Clerk had prepared a short briefing note regarding the informal meeting he, the deputy Chair and the Clerk held on Tuesday 20 February 2024 with Minister Andrew Muir and the Permanent Secretary, Katrina Godfrey.

Agreed: The Committee noted the briefing note.

The Chair highlighted three reports forwarded by the previous Speaker regarding 'Decisions Taken by Northern Ireland Departments in Accordance with The Guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under the provisions of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2022'.

Agreed: The Committee noted the Speaker's memo and the three reports.

The meeting remained in Public Session at 10.09 am

4. Departmental Briefing - Food Farming and Rural Affairs

The Chair welcomed the Departmental Officials to the meeting and invited them to brief the Committee:

- Mr Norman Fulton, Deputy Secretary, Food, Farming and Rural Affairs Group;
- Ms Teresa O'Neill, Director of Rural Affairs; and
- Ms Alison Chamber, Director of Sustainable Agri-Food Development

The Committee noted the following papers for the briefing;

- DAERA First Day Brief; and
- DAERA Key Challenges.

The Officials briefed the Committee followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Chair thanked the Officials for attending the meeting and it was agreed that the Committee would write to the Department for some further information regarding the Department's Ammonia Strategy and how many farmers have taken up the 'low emissions equipment' available, to date.

The Departmental Officials re Food Farming and Rural Affairs left the meeting at 10.57am.

The meeting was suspended at 10.57 am.

Ms Nicola Brogan MLA left the meeting at 10.57 am.

Ms Áine Murphy MLA left the meeting at 10.57 am.

Ms Nicola Brogan MLA re-joined the meeting at 11.03 am.

The meeting went in to public session at 11.03 am

Ms Áine Murphy MLA re-joined the meeting at 11.14 am

5. Departmental Briefing - Veterinary Services and Animal Health

The Chair welcomed the Departmental Officials to the meeting and invited them to brief the Committee.

- Mr Robert Huey, Chief Veterinary Officer, DAERA
- Mr Neal Gartland, Director, Animal Health & Welfare Policy
- Ms Gemma Daly, Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, Enzootic Disease Control & Field Delivery.

In addition, the Chair welcomed three further Officials who remained in the public gallery for the question and answer session. During that session Ms Patricia Quinn-Duffy was called to the table.

- Ms Patricia Quinn-Duffy, Director, Veterinary Medicines and EU Reporting
- Mr David Kyle, Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, Epizootic Disease Control & Public Health Delivery
- Mr Jim Blee, Deputy Director I Animal Health and Welfare Policy Division

The Committee noted the following papers for the briefing;

- DAERA First Day Brief; and
- DAERA Key Challenges.

The Officials briefed the Committee followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Chair thanked the Officials for attending the meeting and it was agreed that the Committee would be writing to the Department regarding:

- The number of staff required to carry out the 'Protocol / Windsor Framework' checks at Ports, compared to the number of staff currently in post;

- Clarity regarding the October 2023 Judicial Review brought by the NI Badger Group and Wild Justice, specifically the last sentence of Paragraph 46; and
- Further information on the welfare groups included in the 'Paws for Thought' grouping.

The Departmental Officials re Veterinary Services and Animal Health left the meeting at 12.16 pm.

6. Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe) Briefing

The Chair welcomed Mr Mark Allen, Research Officer and Ms Suzie Cave, Research Officer to the meeting and invited them to brief the Committee.

The Committee noted the following papers:

- An Introduction to RaISe; and
- RaISe service guide.

The Research Officers briefed the Committee outlining the services they provide.

Agreed: The Chair thanked the Research Officers for the briefing and for their work in supporting committees.

Ms Michelle McIlveen MLA left the meeting at 12.16 pm.

Ms Michelle McIlveen MLA re-joined the meeting at 12.18 pm.

7. Matters Arising

The Committee noted the SL1 The Agriculture (Student Fees) regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023. Chair reminded Members that at last week's meeting the Committee had no objection to SR 2023/98 The Agriculture (Student Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the SL1 for The Agriculture (Student Fees) regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023.

8. Northern Ireland Assembly European Affairs Manager – Written Briefing

The Committee noted briefing papers from Shauna Mageean, The European Affairs Manager in the Northern Ireland Assembly:

- A general Brexit paper covering the Protocol, amended by the Windsor Framework, and the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement;
- A paper summarising Brexit issues within the remit of the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the papers for reference and information.

The Departmental Officials with responsibility for the Statutory Rules being addressed joined the meeting at 12.29 pm.

Ms Áine Murphy MLA left the meeting at 12.30 pm.

Ms Áine Murphy MLA re-joined the meeting at 12.30 pm.

9. Subordinate Legislation

The Chair welcomed the Departmental Officials to the meeting and thanked them for being available to come to the table if required by Members to give additional information on particular Statutory Rules (SRs).

SR 2022/286 The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

Agreed: The Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs considered SR 2022/286 The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022, and had no objection to the rule.

10. SR 2023/183 The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

Agreed: The Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs considered, SR 2023/183 The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and had no objection to the rule.

11. SR 2023/219 The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

Agreed: The Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs considered, SR 2023/219 The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and had no objection to the rule.

12. SR 2022/288 The Waste Management Licensing (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

Agreed: The Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs considered, 2022/288 The Waste Management Licensing (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and had no objection to the rule.

13. SR 2022/302 The Environmental Offences (Fixed Penalties) (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

Agreed: The Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs considered, SR 2022/302 The Environmental Offences (Fixed Penalties) (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and had no objection to the rule.

14. SR 2023/5 The Edible Crabs (Conservation) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

Agreed: The Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs considered, SR 2023/5 The Edible Crabs (Conservation) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and had no objection to the rule.

15. SR 2023/163 The Aquatic Animal Health (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

Agreed: The Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs considered, SR 2023/163 The Aquatic Animal Health (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and had no objection to the rule.

16. SR 2023/179 The Specified Diseases (Notification) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023

Agreed: The Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs considered, SR 2023/179 The Specified Diseases (Notification) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 and agreed to note the official sensitive protection marking on the SL1.

Agreed: The Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs considered, SR 2023/179 The Specified Diseases (Notification) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 and had no objection to the rule

17. SR 2023/211 The Waste (Fees and Charges) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

Agreed: The Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs considered, SR 2023/211 The Waste (Fees and Charges) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and had no objection to the rule.

18. SR 2023/212 The Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

The Committee asked the Departmental Official to come to the table to clarify some issues around the impact of the rule and was content with the response. The Chair then put the formal question on the SR to the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs considered, SR 2023/212 The Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and had no objection to the rule.

The Committee noted at next week's meeting they will consider SR 2024/16 The Farming for Generations Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.

The Committee noted the Second Report of the Examiner of Rules (Ms Kelly). Ms Kelly had drawn attention to this rule as the Regulations made provision for a power of entry in regulation 9(2). The Department has since advised that this provision has now been removed and an amendment will be made to the rule. The ESR is content with this approach.

Agreed: The Committee noted the SR will come before the Committee at next week's meeting.

19. SI 2024/192 The Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme (Amendment) 2024.

Agreed: The Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs considered, SI 2024/192 The Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme (Amendment) 2024 and had no objection to the Statutory Instrument.

The Chair thanked the Departmental Officials for attending the meeting. The Officials left the meeting at 12.41 pm

20. Correspondence

The Committee addressed the following items of correspondence:

- a) The Committee noted correspondence dated 20 February 2024 from Mineral Products Association NI [MPA NI] which included a briefing paper plus request to brief the Committee.

Agreed: The committee agreed to write to Mr Gordon Best Director of MPA NI and ask for a written briefing in the first instance.

- b) The Committee noted correspondence from the Department dated 20 February 2024 regarding the publication of a UK wide policy framework for managing radioactive substances and nuclear decommissioning. That Minister Muir has written to Andrew Bowie, MP, Minister for Nuclear and Renewables, Department for Energy Security & Net Zero (DESNZ), to confirm his agreement to the publication of the UK Government's response to a UK wide consultation on the Framework and the associated finalised UK Policy Framework, which will extend to Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and to ask the Department for a briefing once the Framework is completed.

- c) The Committee noted correspondence regarding a 'UK-Wide Statutory Instrument – the Sea Fisheries (Amendment) Regulations 2024, that the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) intends to make and lay the UK-Wide Statutory Instrument - The Sea Fisheries (Amendment) Regulations 2024 at Westminster on 28 February 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note.

- d) The Committee noted correspondence dated 20 February 2024 from the Clerk for the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee regarding two matters – Organic Egg Production and Non-commercial movement of birds.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek advice from the Assembly's EU Affairs Manager; and to write to the Department regarding any actions they are taking to seek derogations and extensions on derogations.

- e) The Committee noted correspondence from the Clerk for Finance dated 24 February 2024 regarding The Report on the 2022 Review of the Effects of the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence.

- f) The Committee noted correspondence from Investment Strategy NI – ISNI Delivery Tracking System – Investing Activity Report dated 25/02/2024.

Agreed: The Committee noted the report.

- g) The Committee noted an invitation from Sean Kelly NIEL to a Farming and Food Conversation Event on 26 April 2024 in Ulster University Belfast.

Agreed: The Committee noted the event.

- h) The Committee noted correspondence dated 26 February 2024 from Clerk for Finance regarding the matter of the Victoria Square Residents, and noted they have written to the Department for Finance for further clarification.

Agreed: The Committee was content to note until they receive a response from the Department.

The Committee were content to action the remainder of the correspondence memo as drafted and also noted the Articles of Interest referenced in the Correspondence Memo.

21. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme to 21 March 2024 including an additional meeting of 5 March, a first day briefing from Minister Muir and the Permanent Secretary, Katrina Godfrey.

The Committee noted that through to Easter, the Forward Work Programme included four Departmental briefings and three potential stakeholder briefings; and noted the proposal to hold a strategic planning day in the weeks after Easter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk to publish the draft Forward Work Programme.

22. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meetings of the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

- Tuesday 5 March 2024 at 2.15 in Room 30; and
- Thursday 7 March 2024, 10.00 am in Room 21.

The Meeting adjourned at 12.48 pm .

Signature:

Tom Elliott, Chairperson

Dated