



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Adoption and Children Bill: Extension of
Committee Stage

14 October 2021

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson)
Mrs Pam Cameron (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Paula Bradshaw
Mr Jonathan Buckley
Mr Gerry Carroll
Mr Alan Chambers

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): I refer members to the Clerk's memo and the draft motion to extend the Committee Stage, which are in members' packs.

The call for evidence for the Bill closed on 8 October. We now need to decide whom we wish to invite to give oral evidence to assist with our consideration of the Bill. We should also decide whether we wish to request an extension to the 30-day Committee Stage period. I ask the Committee Clerk to give us a brief overview of the responses that have been received.

The Committee Clerk: Thank you very much, Chair. I will give members a very brief overview. The Committee has received 16 responses about the Bill. You will see a list of those in your pack. Respondents range from Action for Children to the Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) and a number of adoption and fostering organisations. We will try to schedule briefings with all those organisations. We will try to put them into batches and maybe to do the briefings over three Thursdays. We are waiting for responses from the Law Society of Northern Ireland and the Children's Law Centre. Those organisations said that they should have responses with us by the end of this week. I want to check that members are content for staff to start scheduling briefings from some of those organisations and looking at how to put them together to get through them.

Given the size of the Bill, I recommend that we push the extension period as far as we can, which is 28 January 2022.

That highlights our recommendations, from a staff point of view.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Thank you, Clerk. Do members have any thoughts on what the Clerk has advised about the oral evidence sessions? It would certainly be useful to meet those groups. They all have valuable input to give, so I am certainly in favour of that approach. Are there any other thoughts from members? Are members content?

Members indicated assent.

The Committee Clerk: We will try to organise a couple of informal sessions in addition to those briefings. We are looking at having a couple of sessions with the likes of VOYPIC, which will be able to

bring young people along to an informal session, as well as possibly with some adoptive parents. In addition to those briefings, we are looking at scheduling some informal sessions during November.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): We will possibly try to take those sessions out into areas. That is another angle on that. Members are content with that approach to oral evidence and taking further evidence.

In view of the heavy workload outlined by the Clerk, it is proposed that we seek an extension to the Committee Stage to 28 January 2022. As always, we will aim to report before that, if possible, but it is an extensive and complex Bill. Are members content with an extension to 28 January 2022?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Gildernew): Thank you, members.