



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Infrastructure

Minutes of Proceedings

11 December 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mrs Deborah Erskine MLA (Chairperson)
Mr John Stewart MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Danny Baker MLA
Mr Cathal Boylan MLA
Mr Keith Buchanan MLA
Mr Andrew McMurray MLA
Mr Peter McReynolds MLA

Via video conference:

Mr Mark Durkan MLA

Apologies:

Mr Stephen Dunne MLA

In Attendance:

Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Lawless (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr William Kinnear (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in closed session at 10:07 am.

1. Termination of Vehicle Equipment Testing Contract – Legal Advice – Assembly Legal Services

The Committee considered written legal advice on the scope or limitations in considering issues of a commercially sensitive nature in the context of live legal proceedings.

Agreed: To defer consideration of any potential next steps, including oral evidence from Construction and Procurement Delivery and the Strategic Investment Board, until after a judgement has been determined in respect of the ongoing legal proceedings.

The meeting moved into public session at 10:12 am.

2. Apologies

As above.

3. Declaration of Interests

Deborah Erskine declared an interest as living in an un-adopted development. Mrs Erskine also declared that she is currently developing a Private Members Bill on un-adopted developments.

Mark Durkan declared an interest as living in an un-adopted development.

4. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised Members that correspondence has been received from Logistics UK seeking an informal meeting to discuss issues that are impacting its members in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: To schedule an informal meeting with Logistics UK.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 4 December 2024.

6. Matters Arising

The Committee noted a response from the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the proposed industrial action by Northern Ireland Water employees due to a pay dispute. Members noted that the proposed industrial action had been suspended while the relevant trade unions consulted their members on a pay offer.

7. Correspondence

Response from the Minister for Infrastructure regarding the conversion of BT street furniture to electric vehicle charging points and time taken to assess planning applications for mobile infrastructure.

Agreed: To forward the correspondence to BT Group for information.

Response from the Minister for Infrastructure regarding Northern Ireland Audit Office's (NIAO) recommendation for a review of alternative funding and governance arrangements for NI Water, led by suitably qualified experts.

Agreed: To consider further in oral evidence sessions with NI Water and NIAO.

Response from NI Water regarding the loss of automatic connection rights and expenditure on consultants.

Agreed: To consider further in oral evidence sessions with NI Water and NIAO.

Notification of the Minister for Infrastructure's intention to launch a consultation on Biennial MOT Testing.

Agreed: To consider further when the consultation document is available.

Correspondence from Mr Peter McReynolds MLA regarding his proposed Member's Bill on Tree Protection

Agreed: To consider further when the outcome of the consultation and proposed way forward are available.

Invitation from Archway Products to view a demonstration of Roadmaster Spray Injection Patcher for repairing potholes.

Agreed: To consider including a visit and external meeting in the forward work programme.

Correspondence from Save the Moat – Save the Sperrins regarding a request for a copy of correspondence sent to the Committee by Renewables NI.

Agreed: To forward a copy of the correspondence.

Correspondence from the Licensed Taxi Operators Association (LTOA) containing proposals to address congestion in Belfast city centre.

Agreed: To request a copy of DfI's response to the LTOA including an update on plans to permit taxis to utilise bus lanes.

Northern Ireland Civil Service Quarterly Sickness Statistics July 24 – September 24.

Agreed: To ask the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) for its assessment of the reasons for the absences cited by industrial staff and measures being taken to support staff to mitigate future occurrences.

Response from the Minister for Infrastructure providing information on potential enforcement action that may be taken and penalties imposed should a reservoir manager fail to comply with the requirements of the 2015 Act.

Agreed: To consider further when updated SL1s are available.

Response from the Minister for Infrastructure providing information on the grant scheme to support reservoir managers including an update on the position on the development of the scheme and the related business case and associated timescales.

Agreed: To consider further when updated SL1s are available.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Response from the Minister for Infrastructure providing further information on part-time 20mph speed limits outside schools.
- Notification of decision to approve a Reserved Matters planning application in respect of the Maritime Museum Ebrington from the Minister for Infrastructure.
- A number of items of correspondence providing clarification on issues relating to the proposed A5WTC road scheme following the concurrent meeting with the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs from:
 - Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs;
 - Minister for Infrastructure; and
 - Minister of Finance.
- Copies of two responses from DfI to a member of the public regarding a complaint against a traffic warden.
- Response from The Executive Office on work to establish an Infrastructure Commission.
- Copy correspondence from the Committee for Communities to DfI requesting that work be expedited on the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

- Correspondence from the Committee for the Economy and the Committee for Finance providing information from their respective Departments on the numbers zero emissions vehicles, e-vehicles or alternative fuel vehicles in their fleets.
- Responses on the numbers of zero emissions vehicles in their fleets from:
 - Ards and North Down Borough Council;
 - Belfast City Council;
 - Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council;
 - Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council;
 - Newry, Mourne & Down District Council;
 - Fermanagh & Omagh District Council;
 - Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council;
 - Mid Ulster District Council;
 - Mid & East Antrim Borough Council;
 - Derry City & Strabane District Council; and
 - Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council.
- Responses on the discharge of planning conditions for new developments from:
 - Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council;
 - Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council;
 - Mid & East Antrim Borough Council;
 - Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council;
 - Mid Ulster District Council;
 - Newry, Mourne & Down District Council;
 - Ards & North Down Borough Council;
 - Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council; and
 - Derry City & Strabane District Council.
- Request from Strategem on behalf of Peace Summit Partners to meet the Committee to discuss the Executive's commitment to peace in the draft Programme for Government and the need for collaborative working.
- Correspondence from a member of the public in relation to the policing of parking in yellow boxes.
- Copy correspondence from a member of the public to DfI regarding footpaths and cycle paths in Ballymena area.
- Notification from Co-Operation Ireland of €40m PEACEPLUS Change Makers Small Grants Programme.

- Response from the Minister for Infrastructure providing clarification on oversight of NI Water's day-to-day operating policies and practices and decision making.
- Response from the Minister for Infrastructure to request for clarification on whether SIDs fall within the definition of a variable message traffic sign.

8. Regional Property Certificates – Adequacy of information and variation in responses - Law Society of Northern Ireland – oral evidence

The following representatives joined the meeting at 10:23 am:

- Claire McNamee, Law Society of Northern Ireland, Conveyancing and Non-Contentious Business – Lead;
- Catherine Heyes, Partner, Peter Bowles & Co Solicitors; and
- Simon Murray, Partner, Murray Kelly Moore Solicitors.

The representatives provided the Committee with an overview of the inadequacy of information requested in Regional Property Certificates and the variation in responses received.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their briefing.

The representatives left the meeting at 11:40 am.

Andrew McMurray left the meeting at 11:40 am.

John Stewart left the meeting at 11:40 am,

Agreed: To forward a copy of the Minister for Infrastructure's response regarding Regional Property Certificates to the Law Society for information.

9. Public Sector Procurement in Northern Ireland – Assembly Research & Information Service – RalSe briefing

The Research Officers joined the meeting at 11:41 am:

- Karen Clarke, Researcher Officer, Research and Information Service; and
- Nathan Mulholland, Researcher Officer, Research and Information Service.

Andrew McMurray re-joined the meeting at 11:42 am.

John Stewart re-joined the meeting at 11:44 am.

The Research Officers provided the Committee with an overview of Public Sector Procurement in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson thanked the researchers for their briefing.

Keith Buchanan left the meeting at 11:59 am.

The officials left the meeting at 12:00 pm.

10. Department for Infrastructure 2024-25 Business Plan – Quarter 1 and 2 monitoring – Written Evidence

The Committee considered written evidence from DfI on Quarter 1 and 2 monitoring of its 2024-25 Business Plan.

Agreed: To schedule oral evidence on the Department's performance against its business plan objectives.

11. Private Streets Inspection Fees – Consultation – Department for Infrastructure – Written Evidence

The Committee considered written evidence from DfI on the outcome of the consultation on Private Streets Inspection Fees.

Agreed: To seek further information from DfI on:

- How it will determine if an assessment of cumulative impact on households is required;
- What modelling has been undertaken to identify the potential costs to households, beyond the indicative average cost calculations as highlighted in its report;
- The timescale for the increase in fees or introduction of new fees, in the event of a decision be made to proceed; and
- An assessment of the number of properties benefiting from the cap of £5,000 on fees.

12. Road Safety – Grass Cutting

The Committee considered an analysis of responses to grass cutting and road safety by local councils.

Agreed: To ask DfI for a response to the issues highlighted in the analysis and to clarify:

- how the Department ensures that there are no areas of its land not maintained either by it or by local councils;
- whether there are any plans to formalise arrangements with councils where grass cutting is undertaken on land for which DfI is responsible; and
- if 'No Mow May' is expected to be adopted in 2025 and if sightlines will still be maintained where there is a potential impact on road safety.

13. SR 2024-202 The Marcus Ward Street, Belfast (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered SR 2024-202 The Marcus Ward Street, Belfast (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had indicated that she had no comment to make by way of technical scrutiny.

Agreed: That the Committee for Infrastructure has considered SR 2024-202 The Marcus Ward Street, Belfast (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024 and has no objection to the Rule.

14. SL1 - The Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered SL1 - The Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.

Agreed: That the Committee was content with the proposal for the statutory rule.

15. Subordinate Legislation – SRs Not subject to Assembly Procedure

The Committee noted the following Statutory Rules that have been laid in the Business Office, which are not subject to Assembly Proceedings:

- SR 2024-205 The Waiting Restrictions (Whitehead) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.
- SR 2024-206 The Loading Bays on Roads (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.
- SR 2024-207 The On-Street Parking (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.

- SR 2024-208 The Urban Clearways (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.
- SR 2024-209 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Limavady) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.
- SR 2024/210 The Parking Places on Roads (Saintfield) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.

16. Subordinate Legislation – SL1s Not subject to Assembly Procedure

The Committee noted the following proposals for Statutory Rules, which are not subject to Assembly Proceedings:

- SL1 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Belfast) (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.
- SL1 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Fivemiletown) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.

17. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Draft Forward Work Programme.

Members noted that the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs had indicated that officials from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) would not be available to attend the Committee meeting on 15 January to discuss issues within its remit relating to NI Water and that alternative dates for the oral evidence session had not been proposed.

Agreed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to encourage NIEA officials provide oral evidence to the Committee at the earliest opportunity to enable the Committee to fulfil its scrutiny function.

Agreed: To proceed with the scheduled evidence as set out in the Draft Forward Work Programme.

18. Any Other Business

Agreed: To request an update from the Minister for Infrastructure on his meeting with the business community on traffic congestion in Belfast City Centre.

Agreed: To ask Translink for an update on measures to increase capacity on trains and the provision of additional buses/bus routes to alleviate the

ongoing traffic congestion in Belfast generally and, more specifically, to meet demand over the Christmas period.

19. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday, 15 January 2025 at 10:00 am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:18 pm.

Mrs Deborah Erskine
Chairperson, Committee for Infrastructure
15 January 2025