



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Infrastructure

Minutes of Proceedings

15 January 2025

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 Stephen Dunne MLA
Mr Andrew McMurray MLA
Mr Peter McReynolds MLA

Via video conference: Mr Mark Durkan MLA

In Attendance:

Ms Barbara Love (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Lawless (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr William Kinnear (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in open session at 10:03 am.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

None.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson wished to acknowledge and express the Committee's thoughts to the families of those who had lost their lives on the roads in Northern Ireland in 2024 and reaffirm its commitment to prioritise road safety when undertaking its work in collaboration with the Department for Infrastructure.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 11 December 2024.

5. Matters Arising

The Committee considered a response from the Minister for Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs to its request for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to give evidence on issues relating to its regulatory role for Northern Ireland Water.

Agreed: To write to the Committee for Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs seeking its views on whether it is supportive of the Committee's preference to receive oral evidence prior its consideration of any written or oral evidence as proposed by the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

6. Correspondence

Response from the Minister for Infrastructure requesting its assessment of the causes of the flooding incidents arising from Storm Bert.

Agreed: To write to DfI seeking details of the proposed pilot for the new software under the Environmental Maintenance contract when available.

Response from the Minister for Infrastructure providing further detail setting out why it is necessary to undertake a full review of the regulations set out under the Taxis Act (NI) 2008.

Agreed: To write to DfI seeking its assessment of the resource and staff numbers required to undertake a review of the Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 as undertaken by the Minister for Infrastructure.

Response from the Minister for Infrastructure providing an assessment of the scope to utilise Financial Transactions Capital funding as a means to incentivise private charge point operators to invest more widely.

Agreed: To write to DfI seeking information on:

- the outcome of the roundtable meeting with key stakeholders held on Monday 16 December 2024 and the further update meeting held on Friday 20 December 2024; and
- Progress of the collective communication strategy.

Response from the Minister for Infrastructure providing the Department's assessment of the main reasons cited for sickness absences by Industrial staff and details of measures being taken to support staff to mitigate future occurrences of sickness absence.

Agreed: To write to DfI requesting data on the proportion of absences that were work-related and the proportion of absences that were long term within each of the reasons cited for sickness absences by Industrial staff.

Correspondence from the Committee for Finance requesting information on potential equality impacts of the draft budget for 2025-2026.

Agreed: To write to the Committee for Finance to highlight that no information has been received to date.

Response from the Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland providing the additional information following the oral evidence session on 20 November 2024.

Agreed: To note and include in the briefing by NI Water when scheduled in the work programme.

The Committee considered outstanding requests for correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to MENCAP to establish whether it will be in a position to provide a response to the Committee's previous request.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Correspondence from the Minister for Infrastructure providing notice of his intention to make a written statement on outcome of the October monitoring round.
- Response from the Minister for Infrastructure providing details of active travel initiatives that have been implemented in North Belfast in recent years along with information on future plans for the area.
- Correspondence from the Minister for Infrastructure providing details of his intention to introduce a pilot scheme to permit Class A and C taxis to use certain city centre bus lanes.
- Response from the Minister for Infrastructure to copy correspondence from the Motorcycle Action Group (MAG)
- Response from the Minister for Infrastructure providing details of the specific options identified from the engagement with disability organisations and the associated timescales for their implementation.
- Response from the Minister for Infrastructure to Committee correspondence regarding the Consultation Response Report on Private Street Inspection fees and what factors will determine if an assessment of the cumulative impact on households is required.
- Response from the Minister for Infrastructure to Committee correspondence regarding grass cutting and the Department's assessment of the amount of land it is responsible for that is maintained by local councils and how it ensures there is no duplication of work.
- Response from the Minister for Infrastructure to Committee correspondence requesting a copy of the Ministerial or departmental response to the statement from the LTOA, including an update on plans to permit taxis to utilise bus lanes.
- Department for Infrastructure Investing Activity Report – December 2024.
- Responses from the Minister of Finance and Northern Ireland Water to Committee correspondence regarding the proposed industrial action by Northern Ireland Water staff.
- Response from Translink to Committee correspondence regarding the increased traffic congestion in and around Belfast city centre.
- Correspondence from Paula Bradshaw MLA notifying of the consultation on a proposal for a Private Members Bill regarding the Display of Flags and Emblems.
- Press Release from the Construction Employers Federation - Downturn in the fortunes of Northern Ireland's construction sector.
- Invitation from the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland to a conference - Systems to Support Our People: Embedding a Trauma Informed Approach.
- Correspondence from OFCOM providing its Proposed Plan of Work for 2025/26 and consultation event on 23 January 2025.

- Response from Fermanagh & Omagh District Council regarding discharge of planning conditions for new developments.

7. Electric Vehicle Public Charging Infrastructure – Northern Ireland Electricity – Oral Evidence

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

- Derek Hynes, Managing Director NIE;
- Edel Creery, Customer and market Services Director NIE; and
- Andrew Cupples; Network Development Manager NIE.

The representatives provided the Committee with an overview of electric vehicle public charging infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

Mr Peter McReynolds declared an interest as not having a driveway.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their briefing.

The representatives left the meeting at 11:21 am.

8. January Monitoring Round – Department for Infrastructure – Oral Evidence

The departmental officials joined the meeting at 11:27 am:

- Susan Anderson, Director of Finance;
- Declan McGeown, Deputy Secretary for Water and Departmental Delivery;
- Colin Woods, Deputy Secretary for Transport and Road Management; and
- Judith Andrews; Acting Deputy Secretary for Climate, Planning and Public Transport.

The officials provided the Committee with an overview of DfI's submission for the January Monitoring Round.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

The officials left the meeting at 12:06 pm.

Agreed: To write to DfI requesting:

- The supporting information contained within the templates for DfI's return to the Department of Finance for January monitoring round;

- That for future evidence on monitoring rounds the Department will provide copies of the template required by DoF when submitting its departmental return to support its requirements;
- Detail of what resurfacing schemes would be subject to delay in the event of the submitted capital bids not being met;
- To seek clarification of the baseline funding allocation for concessionary fares for the 2024-25 financial year and underlying causes to necessitate the submitted inescapable bid; and
- A summary of the issues taken into account when undertaking the review of the Department's winter service.

Mr Danny Baker left the meeting at 12:07 pm.

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

The departmental officials joined the meeting at 12:08 pm:

- Kiera Lloyd, Director of Corporate Strategy and Performance
- Declan McGeown, Deputy Secretary for Water and Departmental Delivery;
- Colin Woods, Deputy Secretary for Transport and Road Management; and
- Judith Andrews; Acting Deputy Secretary for Climate, Planning and Public Transport.

Mrs Deborah Erskine declared an interest as living in an un-adopted development and is currently developing a proposal for a private members bill on un-adopted roads.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

The officials left the meeting at 12:43 pm.

Agreed: To write to DFI requesting:

- A chronology of discussions between DfI and Translink to monitor, evaluate and propose solutions to the ongoing congestion in and around Belfast; and
- An overview of the key timescales for the completion of upgrades and resurfacing of the Sydenham By-pass.

10. Living with Water in Derry/Londonderry Plan Consultation – Department for Infrastructure – Written evidence

The Committee considered written evidence from DfI on the Living with Water in Derry/Londonderry Plan Consultation.

Agreed: To note the consultation and schedule an oral evidence session in the forward work programme upon the conclusion of the consultation and receipt of the report.

11. Review of Trust Ports Public Consultation – Department for Infrastructure – Written Evidence

The Committee considered written evidence from DfI on the Review of Trust Ports Public Consultation.

Agreed: To note the consultation and schedule an oral evidence session in the forward work programme upon the conclusion of the consultation and receipt of the report.

12. SL1 - The Sydenham By-Pass, Belfast (Stopping-Up) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025

The Committee considered SL1 - The Sydenham By-Pass, Belfast (Stopping-Up) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025.

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

Agreed: To write to DfI seeking further details of the nature of the three objections that were subsequently withdrawn.

13. SL1 - The U8017 (unnamed road) off Redrock Road, Markethill (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025

The Committee considered SL1 - The U8017 (unnamed road) off Redrock Road, Markethill (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025.

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

14. 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 2024-220 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Belfast) (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024; and
- SR 2024-221 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Fivemiletown) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.

15. 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 Places (Disabled Persons' Vehicles) (Amendment No.6) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024; and
- SL1 – The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Derry/Londonderry) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.

16. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an evidence session from DfI on the Review of Residents Parking at its meeting on 22 January 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing session from RalSe on the purchase of agricultural land at its meeting on 22 January 2024.

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

17. Any Other Business

Active Travel

Having noted the correspondence from the Minister of Infrastructure and the subsequent oral evidence from departmental officials, the Committee considered the scope of spending for Active Travel initiatives for the 2024-25 financial year.

Agreed: To write to DfI seeking details of the disaggregation of projects funded by the £20.7 million allocated for the 2024-25 financial year including

an overview of the nature and costs incurred to date to enhance active travel initiatives.

Having noted in the course of the evidence with departmental officials on DfI's business plan the intention that a review of the winter service will be undertaken, members considered how the Department engages with external stakeholders to gain an objective perspective of its approach to winter service planning.

Agreed: To write to DfI to establish how it engages with external stakeholders to gain an objective insight of the operation of the winter plan and how where lessons could be learned for future planning.

18. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday, 22 January 2025 at 10:00 am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:57 pm.

Mrs Deborah Erskine
Chairperson, Committee for Infrastructure
22 January 2025