



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Office of the First Minister
and deputy First Minister

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill:
Committee Consideration

26 September 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill: Committee Consideration

26 September 2012

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mike Nesbitt (Chairperson)
Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Colum Eastwood
Ms Megan Fearon
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Alex Maskey
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr George Robinson

The Chairperson: Members, before we focus on next week's activity on the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill, does anybody have any comments on what we have heard in our evidence sessions today?

Mr Lyttle: I think that you summarised it well, Chair, when you said that we have clear information on some of our concerns. We probably need to go away and have a think about what the implications are.

The Chairperson: Are we all happy enough with that? I made this point right at the beginning of the meeting, but I know that some members have joined us since then: next week, the intention is to start informal clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill. Given the limited timescale that we have, it would be useful if members could come briefed and ready to go with their concerns, comments and questions.

Mr Clarke: We will not be here next week. As of today, we are leaving the Committee.

The Chairperson: Who is?

Mr G Robinson: We are being reshuffled.

The Chairperson: Oh my goodness. Three of you? That is a major reshuffle. Was it something I said? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Clarke: I think it was your aftershave. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Maskey: Do not take it personally.

Chair, on behalf of our group, I will say that we are broadly happy that what we have heard so far has addressed most of the issues of concern. Clearly, there is the issue of victims of abuse who would not fall within the terms of reference of the inquiry. You heard from the chairman of the inquiry today, and he said that he would be very concerned if we tried to widen the scope of the inquiry. I understand that there will be people who will not fall within this particular inquiry. Although the Committee has not properly formalised anything, I think that there was a general view that we would like something that deals with that as time goes on. The Bill Clerk put it very well in her briefing earlier, and the Committee may well make recommendations or propose amendments to the Bill. So, for example, I can envisage us proposing an amendment or whatever and also recommending that that issue is dealt with so that people who fall outside this inquiry do not feel that they are being treated adversely. That is an important point that we would make, and I offer that as one way of dealing with it.

Anthony Hart referred to three or four examples of what he might like to see in the Bill. Perhaps we could have those points picked out, because I could not pick up on some of what he specifically referred to. It would be helpful if we could be reminded of what those are for our discussion next week. Equally, at the same time, we should ask the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) whether it is prepared to take those on and whether it needs to amend that or we need to.

The Chairperson: If we are fusing together the consultation responses with the document we got this morning, we could also put in the comments from Sir Anthony's evidence today. That will give us one document and an overview of where we stand at the moment.

Mr Maskey: Rather than even waiting until next week, I wonder whether there is a need for people to look at the report that we got from OFMDFM, subject to what Sir Anthony said. If there is any doubt about some of the responses, perhaps some of the officials could deal with OFMDFM before next week.

The Chairperson: Yes, if you want to put that through to the Committee Clerk.

Mr Maskey: Yes, between yourselves or whatever. I would welcome that. It would help to expedite it. We are all concerned about getting this dealt with as quickly as possible, notwithstanding the need for full scrutiny.

The Chairperson: Would any member object if we invited those in the Public Gallery to help themselves to a coffee?

Mr Humphrey: Of course.

Mr Maskey: I do not know. It is £1 a cup.

The Chairperson: Do not be shy.

Mr Eastwood: Leave some for us. Do not take it all.

Mr Kinahan: The only problem, Chair, is that I offered it last week and it ran out. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson: We will just take a five-minute comfort break, folks.