

Brexit Committee

Thursday, 9th January, 2020

MEETING OF BREXIT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor de Faoite (Chairperson);
Aldermen Rodgers and Haire; and
Councillors Brooks, Canavan, Flynn, Hutchinson,
Long, Magee, Magennis, McAteer, McKeown,
McLaughlin, McMullan and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. N. Grimshaw, Strategic Director of City and
Neighbourhood Services;
Mr. D. Connolly, City Protection Manager;
Mrs. C. Sullivan, Policy and Business Development
Officer; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Newton.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 5th December were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 6th January.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Deputation

Utility Regulator – Jenny Pyper, Chief Executive

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Jenny Pyper, Chief Executive of the Utility Regulator.

Mrs Pyper provided an overview of the work of the Utility Regulator as the independent non-ministerial government department responsible for regulating Northern Ireland's electricity, gas, water and sewerage industries. She advised that the Utility Regulator promoted the short and long-term interests of consumers. She explained the all-island Single Electricity Market and its benefits for consumers and the importance of the development of efficient renewable sources such as wind and solar.

She highlighted that the Utility Regulator was also preparing for Brexit and emergency situations had been planned for. She informed the Committee that they

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continued to engage with key stakeholders to ensure that prices and supply were regulated, together with protecting the most vulnerable.

Mrs. Pyper stated that, in relation to the energy transition, Northern Ireland should take advantage of the changes and progress new policies, to ensure that consumers were not left behind. She praised the work of the Belfast Commissioner for Resilience and highlighted that data was key in the advancement of consumers using utilities in a smarter way.

She stated that issues for concern in the future included sustainability, the clean energy package, the risk of policy divergence and inefficiency, together with the necessity for investment and advised that smarter networks were required and the development of a new energy strategy.

During discussion, Mrs. Pyper answered a range of questions in relation to the transformation of the electricity network, government energy targets, solar energy, electric vehicles, self-generation of energy models, the 'buy back' of supply, technology and investment and the energy strategy.

She highlighted the importance of renewable energy and the potential to expand and increase capacity of other types of energy such as geo-thermal, off-shore wind farms and tidal energy.

The Chairperson thanked Mrs. Pyper for attending and she retired from the meeting.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Day 1 Preparedness

The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services advised that planning for a 'no deal' Brexit had been formally halted and the focus was now on preparing within the context of the Withdrawal Agreement. He confirmed that officers continued to engage with central government departments, including the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs and the Department for Communities. He advised that the Council would shortly commence a review of the Business Continuity Management templates for the Council's critical services and these would be updated in the context of the Withdrawal Agreement. He stated that Members would be kept updated on the process.

The City Protection Manager provided an update in relation to the implications of the NI Protocol on Food Safety and Port Health. He reminded the Committee of the Council's regulatory function responsibility of canned, chilled and non-prepacked and Fish and highlighted that DAERA was responsible for the following produce:

- Canned, chilled and non-prepacked products of animal origin (excluding fish);
- Equines;
- Pets;

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- Commercial pets;
- Germplasm;
- Animal By Products;
- Live fish; and
- Plant health e.g. timber

He advised that the following assumptions were being made in relation to further checks at the Port, post Brexit:

- Foods from Great Britain to be subject to EU checks on entry to Belfast;
- A vast increase in the volume of foods subject to import controls;
- A wider range of product types than the Belfast Council Port was currently approved to handle;
- 'Roll on Roll off' freight would be subject to checks for the first time;
- The need to provide service on disembarkation with minimum delays;
- New facilities required and improved technology and processes; and
- More staff resources and shift working.

The City Protection Manager presented an overview of the new Brexit infrastructure that had been built in Dublin for the 'Roll on Roll Off' checks and inspection facilities.

He concluded that data collection and verification was needed to establish volumetrics and inform infrastructure requirements, together with analysis and the redesign of processes to remove delays. He also highlighted the need to support trader readiness to avoid any disruption.

During discussion, the City Protection Manager answered a range of questions in relation to the impact on the Belfast Port and confirmed that it was a matter for DAERA to decide if further infrastructure was required in Belfast, however, it might be put in place to futureproof the risk of divergence of products over time. He reiterated that there would be a transition period until the end of December to implement new processes.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor McLaughlin,
Seconded by Councillor McAteer and

Resolved – The Committee agrees to undertake a study visit to the Port Health Unit Facilities in Belfast and Dublin.

The Committee noted that, if possible, both visits should be undertaken on the same day, subject to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee budget approval.

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After discussion, the Committee also agreed that information in relation to goods, products and services being exported from Northern Ireland would be reported at a future meeting.

Brexit Committee Workplan

The Committee was provided with an overview of its activities which had taken place since August, 2018 to date, including the presentations it had received, workshops and visits which had taken place, together with emergency planning exercises.

The Policy and Business Development Officer highlighted the range of topics and reports which had been considered by the Committee:

- Potential impact of increased controls on the Port Health Unit (a site visit was undertaken to the Port);
- Technical notices issued by the UK government;
- Updates on the EU Settlement Scheme;
- Possible scenarios for the Belfast services industry ;
- North South Collaboration Mapping Exercise;
- Shared Prosperity Fund;
- Status of EU retained law; and
- Belfast Dublin Corridor.

She advised that Mr. A. Connolly, Director of Northern Ireland Retail Consortium, would present to the Committee in February.

She confirmed that Democratic Services were awaiting date confirmation from various organisations to present to Committee and the following approved organisations would also be invited to attend future meetings of the Committee to discuss the impact of the Withdrawal Agreement on their services:

- NI Water;
- DfI Roads;
- PSNI;
- Invest NI; and
- Belfast Chamber.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and the future Workplan and agreed that David Phinnemore from Queen's University Belfast be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss the current Withdrawal Agreement.

Update on the EU Settlement Scheme - Advice session for applicants

The Policy and Business Development Officer provided an update on the EU Settlement Scheme and a request for a future information session for potentially affected residents to learn more about the scheme.

She advised that, following on from the two Home Office information sessions, held in the City Hall on 3rd October, 2019, Advice NI had now approached the Council to

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request the facilitation of a further session for applicants in the City Hall. The purpose of this event would be to provide specific information and advice to those potentially affected and there would also be the option to apply online for the Scheme with the assistance of advisors. Council officers had approached STEP and they had also agreed to participate in the session.

It was suggested that the session would take place on Wednesday, 12th February in City Hall from 6-9pm. Advice NI and STEP would disseminate information on the session through their networks and information would also be disseminated through the Migrant Forum and the Council's usual communications channels. If attendance at the session was high, the Council planned to work with both organisations to facilitate further sessions across the City.

The Policy and Business Development Officer also advised that, in relation to Government updates on the scheme, the next Home Office teleconference for local authorities across the UK had been organised for mid-January and officers would provide an update in due course.

The Committee agreed to the information and advice session scheduled for Wednesday, 12th February, City Hall, and noted that an update on the next Home Office Teleconference in relation to the EU Settlement Scheme would be provided at the next meeting.

Chairperson