

# Brexit Committee

Thursday, 20th February, 2020

## MEETING OF BREXIT COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor de Faoite (Chairperson);  
Alderman Rodgers; and  
Councillors Brooks, Collins, Flynn, Hanvey,  
Long, Magee, McAteer, McKeown,  
McLaughlin, McMullan and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, City Solicitor;  
Mrs. C. Sullivan, Policy and Business Development  
Officer; and  
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

(The Deputy Chairperson, Councillor McLaughlin, in the Chair.)

An apology was reported on behalf of Alderman Haire and Councillors Canavan Dorrian, Hutchinson and Magennis.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 9th January were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3rd February.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

(Councillor de Faoite, in the Chair.)

### **Presentations**

#### **David Phinnemore - Professor of European Politics, Queen's University Belfast**

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr. D. Phinnemore, Professor of European Politics, Queen's University Belfast.

Prof. D. Phinnemore provided an overview of the impact of The Withdrawal Agreement on Northern Ireland. He explained the objectives of the Northern Ireland Protocol, under Article 1, were as follows:

- This Protocol was without prejudice to the provisions of the 1998 Agreement in respect of the constitutional status of Northern

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Ireland and the principle of consent, which provided that any change in that status could only be made with the consent of a majority of its people;

- This Protocol respected the essential State functions and territorial integrity of the United Kingdom; and
- This Protocol sets out arrangements necessary to address the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, to maintain the necessary conditions for continued North-South cooperation, to avoid a hard border and to protect the 1998 Agreement in all its dimensions.

He advised that the Transition Period would be extendable up until 2022 providing that a decision was made on the extension by the end of June 2020. He suggested that the purpose of the government negotiations for the year ahead was to determine the trade agreement and the future UK relationship with the EU.

He explained the potential impact of the Northern Ireland Protocol across a range of issues such as the rights of individuals, Common travel area, customs and movement of goods, VAT and excise, state aid, common provisions and safeguarding.

He outlined perceptions of the implementation of the protocol and raised concerns in relation to Services, the flow of trade and further regulatory checks.

He pointed out that there were four sets of decisions for the UK-EU Joint Committee to consider, as follows:

1. Goods: which goods were to be exempted from tariffs on entering Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK – which goods were not ‘at risk’ of onward movement into the EU?;
2. Fish: conditions under which fish and ‘other aquaculture products’ could enter the EU’s customs territory;
3. Agriculture: level of permissible agricultural subsidies the UK could make available to producers in Northern Ireland; and
4. Practical working arrangements for EU officials involved in the implementation of the Protocol.

He described the governance structure of the UK-EU Joint Committee and the institutional arrangements and mechanisms, which would feed into that Committee. He illustrated how the democratic consent mechanisms, which the UK government had secured as part of the revised terms of withdrawal agreed in October, 2019, might be applied and informed the Committee of the potential outcomes.

During discussion, Prof. Phinnemore answered a range of questions in relation to tariff agreements, transition time periods, fishing trade, the impact on the services industry and democratic consent arrangements and timeframes.

The Chairperson thanked Prof. Phinnemore for attending and he retired from the meeting.

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The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

**Update on Brexit Preparedness (Verbal Update)**

The City Solicitor provided an update on the Council's Brexit preparedness and arrangements.

He advised that Officers would continue to monitor developments over the coming months and key services would continue to engage with central government departments. He highlighted that, as the potential impact on Council services became clearer, the Business Continuity Management Template process would be reviewed and updated as necessary.

Noted.

**Update on the EU Settlement Scheme**

The Policy and Business Development Officer provided an overview of the following report:

**"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

**The purpose of this report is to update Members on the latest information from the Home Office in relation to the EU Settlement Scheme.**

**2.0 Recommendations**

**Members are asked to note this report.**

**3.0 Main report**

**Key Issues**

**The EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) enables EEA and Swiss citizens living in the UK, and their family members, to obtain the UK immigration status they will require to live, work and study in the UK after 30 June 2021. Irish Citizens are not required to apply to the EUSS but may choose to do so.**

**Members are reminded that this Committee received a report in January 2020 updating them on a session that was being held in City Hall on 12th February. This session was run by Advice NI and specialist advisors were in attendance to assist people with the application process. A total of 22 people with a range of nationalities attended the session.**

**Members are also advised that the Home Office has held a series of teleconference calls for local authority staff from**

across the UK. The most recent call took place in mid-January and key messages from it included:

- EUSS application figures by local authority now published quarterly on <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/eu-settlement-scheme-quarterly-statistics-december-2019>
- An update was provided on the communications that had been undertaken to promote the scheme and the marketing materials that are available for Councils.
- In 2020, there will be a move away from large-scale campaigns to more targeted marketing at the hard to reach groups.
- To be eligible to apply to the EUSS you must be in the UK on or before 31st December 2020 and the application process closes on 30th June 2021.
- Under the Withdrawal Agreement there is an indefinite right for close family members to join a relative in the UK, if the relationship existed prior to the end of the transition period.
- Funding for the organisations who are supporting people to apply to the EUSS ends on 31st March 2020 – the Home Office are currently reviewing the funding and will make a decision on additional funding in due course.

#### Number of applications

The statistics covering the period up to 31st December 2019 were released in early February and a breakdown of the applications for Northern Ireland by local council area are included as appendix 1. Some key facts are:

- As of 31 December 2019, over 2.7 million (2,756,130) applications had been received, with 92% received in England, 5% in Scotland, 2% in Northern Ireland and 2% in Wales.
- 44,580 applications have been made in Northern Ireland and 8,400 of these have been made in Belfast.
- Northern Ireland had a noticeably higher proportion (17%) of applications from applicants under 18 compared to the rest of the UK.
- In Belfast, the highest number of applications were from Polish (2,490) and Romanian (1,460) nationals.
- Of the applications submitted in Belfast, 86% have been concluded and of these 61% were awarded settled status and 38% pre settled status<sup>i</sup>.

**Members are advised that the UK government are currently developing their immigration policy post EU exit. The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) published a report on 28th January 2020, which responds to the request from the Home Secretary to the MAC to consider how a points-based system immigration system could be introduced in the UK to strengthen the UK labour market. A copy of this report is available at**

**<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/migration-advisory-committee-mac-report-points-based-system-and-salary-thresholds>**

**Financial & Resource Implications**

**There are no financial or resource implications relating to this report.**

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**

**There are no implications relating to this report.”**

The Policy and Business Development Officer highlighted that, since the report had been published, the Government, on 19th February, had published its new Immigration Policy which included its proposed immigration plan (copy available [here](#)).

During discussion, Members raised concerns in relation to the impact of the new immigration policy. The City Solicitor advised that work was already being undertaken by the Economic Development Unit in this regard and that a report would be submitted to a future meeting with details of how the new Immigration Policy might impact Belfast and Northern Ireland.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed that representatives from the Retail NI/Trade Sector Groups and Trade Unions be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss the impact of the new Immigration Policy.

Chairperson