

Northern Ireland Assembly – Committee for The Executive Office – Written evidence (GOU0009)

Introduction

1. The Committee for the Executive Office held its first meeting on 14 February 2024.
2. Membership of the Committee is as follows:
 - Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA, Alliance (Chairperson)
 - Ms Connie Egan MLA, Alliance (Deputy Chairperson)
 - Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA, Sinn Féin
 - Mr Harry Harvey MLA, DUP
 - Mr Brian Kingston MLA, DUP
 - Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA, SDLP
 - Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, Sinn Féin
 - Ms Emma Sheerin MLA, Sinn Féin
 - Ms Claire Sugden MLA, Independent
3. The Committee is responsible for scrutiny of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and of the Executive Office.

Response to the Inquiry

4. At its meetings of 24 April and 1 May 2024, the Committee considered a response to the House of Lords Constitution Committee inquiry on the Governance of the Union.
5. The Committee does not have an agreed position on the governance of the Union. The Committee has also not heard evidence on the governance of the Union in order for the Committee to form views on the matter. The response therefore comprises the views of individual Members.
6. The inquiry may wish to examine how the new arrangements differ from those in place before, and their relative effectiveness.
7. Good working relationships between the regions are important to address common challenges and to avail of potential opportunities.
8. Efforts should be made to ensure that changes brought about by devolution within the UK by the UK leaving the European Union do not impinge on the place of Northern Ireland within the UK internal market. This includes the ability of Northern Ireland to engage in UK trade arrangements with other markets. The UK Internal Market Act, the creation of the Office for the Internal Market and the Common Frameworks are important in this regard.
9. There should be consideration as to how the new bodies created under the Safeguarding the Union command paper – the East-West Council, the

Independent Monitoring Panel of the Windsor Framework and Intertrade UK – complement the inter-governmental arrangements.

10. There needs to be more engagement on dispute resolution between devolved regions and the UK Government, for example, the dispute over the financing of the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme.
11. Consideration should be given to the effects of the inter-governmental arrangements and commitments in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.
12. When legislation relates to the whole of the UK, more consideration should be given for the impacts on devolved regions. For example, the Illegal Migration Act has significant differential effects in Northern Ireland.
13. The UK has also disregarded the views of Northern Ireland in relation to the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act, where there was almost unanimous opposition from political parties and victim and survivor groups.
14. Consideration should also be given in relation to timescales and opportunities for devolved regions to consider Legislative Consent Motions, so Departments can present impacts that Committees can consider. Such considerations should be more evident on the face of a Bill, for example, the Tobacco and Vapes Bill.
15. More consideration needs to be given of the different governance structures in Northern Ireland when applying policy or legislation. For example, local government in the rest of the UK has significantly more powers and functions than that in Northern Ireland, where such competences lie with the Northern Ireland Assembly.
16. The inquiry should consider the lack of communication and consultation in relation to the delivery of UK-wide programmes. This was most marked during the period the Northern Ireland Assembly was not sitting, particularly in relation to the loss of EU funds and the delivery of replacement funds, such as the Shared Prosperity Fund. The local voluntary and community work was dismissed.

1 MAY 2024