



**COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE**  
**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

WEDNESDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2020

Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Paul Frew MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Jim Allister MLA  
Mr Pat Catney MLA  
Ms Jemma Dolan MLA  
Mr Seán Lynch MLA  
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA  
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA  
Mr Jim Wells MLA

Apologies:

In Attendance: Mr Jim McManus (Assembly Clerk)  
Ms Kate McCullough (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Neil Sedgewick (Clerical Supervisor)  
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

*The meeting commenced at 2.06pm in public session.*

**1. Apologies**

As above

A Member declared the following interest:

Mr Jim Allister MLA – Agenda Item 4 – Private Members Legislation: The Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

## 2. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 19 February 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 19 February 2020.

## 3. Matters Arising

### Future Budget Process

The Committee considered the undertaking by Central Spending Directorate officials during oral evidence on 19<sup>th</sup> February, to have an open, transparent budget process that will include key roles for statutory committees and for the Committee for Finance in particular.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to work in partnership with RaISE and commission the development of a written policy, with relevant supporting procedures, practices, templates and focused aims.

*Agreed:* To write to statutory committees to inform that the Committee for Finance intends to undertake this work and will engage with the Chairpersons' Liaison Group as work proceeds.

*Agreed:* To engage with the Chairpersons' Liaison Group as work proceeds.

### National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) Loans' Portfolio NI

The Committee considered the response from the National Crime Agency (NCA).

The Committee considered the request from NAMA that members undertake checks to ensure they have no conflict of interest with regard to the investigation.

No member of the Committee declared any interest in relation to the investigation.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to hold an informal meeting with the NCA for an update on its investigation into the sale of the National Asset Management Agency Loans Portfolio NI

### Budget 2020-2021

The Committee considered a letter from the Minister of Finance informing the Chairperson that the Executive intends to announce a Budget at the end of March 2020.

*Agreed:* To receive from the Department specific details on the precise timing of the budget process including the scope for input by Assembly committees.

*Agreed:* To receive from the Department detailed spending proposals for each department when available.

*Agreed:* To receive from the Department the monthly forecast and outturn data on an ongoing basis to inform future financial scrutiny

The Committee noted the following responses from committees to the Budget Bill and resources requirements:

- Committee for Education
- Audit Committee

The Committee considered comments made by the Minister during the wind on the debate on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage of the Budget Bill 2020 on Tuesday 25 February 2020.

*Agreed:* The Clerk to engage with the Department to receive clarification on the issues raised by the Minister.

#### **4. Oral Evidence: Private Members Legislation: The Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill**

*The following witness joined the meeting at 2.15pm*

- Mr Jim Allister MLA

The oral evidence session was followed by a question and answer session.

*Agreed:* The witness to provide further information on request.

The oral evidence was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Allister for his attendance.

*Mr Jim Allister MLA left the meeting at 3.40pm*

*The Chairperson suspended the meeting at 3.40pm*

*The Chairperson resumed the meeting in public session at 3.45pm*

The Committee were informed that under Standing Order 64A the main committees to which the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill is of concern met to consult and agree to which committee the Bill should be referred at 2nd Stage.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that should the Bill pass 2nd Stage it will be referred to the Committee for Finance as the most appropriate statutory committee as provided for in Standing Order 33(1).

The Committee considered a proposal from Matthew O'Toole MLA.

Proposed:

*“That the Committee for Finance does not wish to form a view on whether it supports the general principles of the Bill.”*

The Committee divided: Ayes 5; Noes 3; Abstain 0.

**AYES**

Pat Catney MLA  
Matthew O'Toole MLA  
Jim Wells MLA  
Paul Frew MLA  
Steve Aiken MLA

**NOES**

Séan Lynch MLA  
Maolíosa McHugh MLA  
Jemma Dolan MLA

*Agreed:* That the Committee for Finance does not wish to form a view on whether it supports the general principles of the Bill.”

**5. Written Briefing: Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources (NICSHR)**

The Committee considered the written briefing from the NICSHR.

*Agreed:* To forward this written briefing paper to the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) who will give oral evidence on 4 March 2020

*Agreed:* To forward to NIPSA the briefing paper received from the Pensions Division at the meeting of 12 February 2020

**6. Chairperson's Business**

The Committee considered a request from the Minister for the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to meet with the Permanent Secretary to discuss the First Day Brief and the Departmental issues document provided to the Committee.

*Agreed:* To contact the Department to ascertain the reasons for the meeting.

**7. Correspondence**

The Committee noted a response from the Department to a request for further information regarding Land Registry Fees.

The Committee noted a response from the Department to a request for further information regarding Rating Debt.

The Committee considered correspondence from Hospitality Ulster regarding the evidence session with Land & Property Services (LPS) and an issue relating to a comment made by an official during scrutiny of the Non-Domestic Rates Revaluation.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for comment.

*Agreed:* To invite Hospitality Ulster and the Federation of Small Businesses to a joint oral evidence session in relation to Non-Domestic Rates Revaluation.

The Committee noted the following correspondence:

- From the Ulster University External Relations Officer
- From the Chair to the Minister of Finance regarding First Day Brief
- From the Committee to Mid Ulster Council regarding meeting locations in Mid Ulster
- Request for Departmental Information to the Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer (DALO)

*Mr Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 4.10pm*

## **8. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme for January to April 2020 and issues that are to be scheduled.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

*Agreed:* To schedule in the Forward Work Programme a written briefing for the meeting of 1 April 2020 and oral evidence on 22 April 2020 on the findings and recommendations of the RHI Inquiry Report as it relates to the Department of Finance.

## **9. Any Other Business**

The Committee considered a request to raise the issue of advertising plasma screens and small businesses.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for the Economy and Committee for Justice to raise the matter.

## **10. Date, Time and Place of next meeting.**

The next meeting will be on **Wednesday 4 March 2020 at 2.00pm in Room 29.**

*The meeting was adjourned at 4.15pm*

**Dr Steve Aiken, OBE MLA  
Chairperson  
Committee for Finance  
4 March 2020**