



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 30 JUNE 2021

Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Keith Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister MLA
Mr Pat Catney MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

Present by Video-conference:
Ms Jemma Dolan MLA
Mr Philip McGuigan MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA

Apologies: Mr Jim Wells MLA

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Angela McParland (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stephen Magee (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in open session at 2:01pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

No Member delegated authority to vote under Temporary Standing Order 115(6).

2. Declaration of Interests

The Chairperson declared an interest indicating previous professional engagement with Professor Katy Hayward, Christian Benson and Shanker Singham, in his role as former chief executive of the British Irish Chamber of Commerce.

The Chairperson and Mr Jim Allister declared an interest as being applicants regarding a judicial review on the Northern Ireland Protocol.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 June Monitoring

The Chairperson advised Members that the June Monitoring Round statement referred to a number of changes to the capital programme including a reduction in Financial Transaction Capital and Reinvestment and Reform Initiative (RRI) borrowing. The Chairperson expressed concern as to whether this was a possible sign of a softening of the Executive's capital programme.

Ms Jemma Dolan joined the meeting at 2:03pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department and seek clarity on the delivery of capital projects in the construction sector and if there are sufficient officials in the Northern Ireland Civil Service to manage the Executive's capital programme.

3.2 Northern Ireland Affairs Committee – informal Northern Ireland Protocol Meeting

The Chairperson informed Members that he had been invited to chair the next Northern Ireland Affairs Committee informal meeting on the Northern Ireland Protocol - on Wednesday 7 July 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to chair the informal meeting with the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on 7 July 2021.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 23 June 2021.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Oral Evidence: Expert Advisers — Northern Ireland Protocol

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.04pm.

- Professor Katy Hayward, Professor of Political Sociology, Queen's University Belfast;
- David Henig, Director, UK Trade Policy Project, European Centre for International Political Economy;
- Martin Howe QC; and
- Dr Anna Jerzewska, Director, Trade and Borders.

The Committee noted briefing papers from David Henig, Professor Katy Hayward and Martin Howe QC, and an Institute for Government report on the UK Internal Market Act forwarded by the Assembly European Union Affairs Manager.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Mr Matthew O'Toole joined the meeting at 2:22pm

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

7. Oral Evidence: Expert Advisers — Northern Ireland Protocol

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3.50pm.

- Christian Benson, Fujitsu, Senior Responsible Owner for the Trader Support Service (TSS);
- Shanker Singham, CEO and Chair of the Competere Group, Senior member TSS;
- Robert Hardy, Commercial Director, Customs Clearance Consortium; and
- Sam Lowe, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for European Reform.

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Sam Lowe and TSS.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Mr Keith Buchanan left the meeting at 4:15pm

Mr Philip McGuigan left the meeting at 4:26pm and delegated authority to vote to Mr Maoliosa McHugh under Temporary Standing Order 115(6)

Mr Jim Allister left the meeting at 4:41pm

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to TSS seeking information on client satisfaction including figures setting out how the levels of customer calls received have varied since TSS was established.

8. Written Briefing: Department of Finance Disposal and Retention Schedule

The Committee considered the Retention and Disposal Schedule of the Department of Finance as laid in the Business Office under Section 8(2) of the Public Records Act (NI), 1923 and in accordance with the Rules of the Disposal of Documents Order 1925, by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department regarding its concerns over the retention periods assigned at Section 3, 1.1, Health & Safety and Section 3, 1.5, Premises. The Committee agreed to seek from the Department information on how

these retention periods compare with those of other Executive departments and those of other United Kingdom jurisdictions.

9. Written Briefing: The Business Tenancies (Coronavirus) (Restriction on Forfeiture: Relevant Period) (Northern Ireland) (No. 2) Regulations 2021

The Committee considered Ministerial correspondence advising the Committee of the forthcoming secondary legislation: The Business Tenancies (Coronavirus) (Restriction on Forfeiture: Relevant Period) (Northern Ireland) (No. 2) Regulations 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an explanation as to why the relevant period has been extended to 30 September 2021 which is a significantly shorter period than that granted by the UK Government and may mean the Assembly will have to revisit the matter again immediately following recess.

10. Correspondence

10.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

10.2 The Committee noted a Memorandum of Reply from the Department to the Public Accounts Committee on its Report: 'Major Capital Projects'.

10.3 The Committee considered a response from the Department on its current legislative programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the timing of building fire safety regulations and whether the Department is now responsible (rather than HOCS) for the building fire safety programme.

10.4 The Committee noted a Departmental response in regards to accruing resources which advises that where these exceed levels projected in the Estimates, they are retained in Northern Ireland.

10.5 The Committee noted a Departmental response regarding the different designations available to Arm's Length Bodies.

10.6 The Committee noted a further Departmental update on the delay to payments to members of the Civil Service Pension Scheme in May this year. The Department confirms the error was with the Northern Ireland Civil Service and not Capita, as previously indicated.

10.7 The Committee noted an invitation from the Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland to attend the re-launch of the WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan on Wednesday 28th July 2021 from 10am-12pm via Zoom.

10.8 The Committee considered a response from the Department for Communities regarding the building fire safety programme, confirming measures taken in respect of tower blocks.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to Rockwool Limited, having brought this initially to the Committee's attention.

10.9 The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence in relation to the 2020-21 Provisional Outturn and 2021-22 June Monitoring.

10.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Audit Office advising of its work in respect of the Department of Finance and providing a copy of its corporate plan.

10.11 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department on a consultation planned for the summer involving a 35% increase in building regulation fees. Members expressed considerable concerns in respect of the impact on individual house-builders.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to convey its concerns and seek an explanation for the increase in fees, and to receive a summary of responses post consultation.

10.12 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office to the Department seeking its views on the use of participatory budgeting.

10.13 The Committee considered the composite information request.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, notwithstanding recently received responses, the composite request was an accurate and complete record of the Committee's outstanding information requests.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft of its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its forward work programme.

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Finance will be on Wednesday 7 July at 2:00pm in the Senate Chamber and on Starleaf.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:59pm.

Dr Steve Aiken MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Finance
7 July 2021