



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 5 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 Jim Wells MLA

Apologies: Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

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

The meeting commenced at 2.20pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

Members declared the following interests:

Mr. Steven Aiken MLA, at Agenda Item 4 – Ratings (a constituency matter)
Mr. Pat Catney MLA, at Agenda Item 4 – Ratings (a constituency matter)
Mr. Jim Allister MLA declared an interest at Agenda Item 21 – Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill – (Private Members' Bill)

2. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 29 January 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 29 January 2020.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Land and Property Services Overview and Priorities - Evidence Session

The officials joined the meeting at 2.23pm

Mr Ian Snowden, Chief Executive of Land and Property Services, Department of Finance

Mr Alan Bronte, Director of Rating Policy Division, Department of Finance

The officials provided the Committee with an update on Land and Property Services issues and priorities.

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

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The officials agreed to provide further information on a range of issues.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Rating – Subordinate Legislation

The following officials joined the meeting at 4.45pm

- Mr Alan Bronte, Director of Rating Policy Division, Department of Finance
- Mr. Andrew McAvoy, Department of Finance (Agenda Item 19)

The official provided an overview of Statutory Rules for rating since 2017-2019

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

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move Agenda Item 19.

19. SL1 – The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Finance to make a draft Statutory Rule titled The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020. The purpose of the draft Rule is to set the amount of the domestic and non-domestic regional rates for the year ending 31 March 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee has considered DFP’s proposal for subordinate legislation under the “The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (NI) 2016, and has no objections to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.”

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move Agenda Item 20.

20. Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) - Fiscal Powers: A Review of the Fiscal Powers of the Northern Ireland Assembly – Evidence Session

The witnesses joined the meeting at 4.25pm

- Mr Seamus McAleavey, CEO, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
- Mr Geoff Nuttall, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action

The witnesses provided the Committee with an update on its review of the fiscal powers of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

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

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

Agreed: The Chairperson agreed to write to Dr. Esmond Birnie, Chief Economist, PricewaterhouseCoopers apologising for the lateness of this agenda item.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move Agenda Item 5.

The officials provided an overview of the SL1 – The Rate (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020

5. SR 2017/72: The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017.

The Committee considered SR 2017/72 - The Rates (Small Business hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017. These Regulations amend the Rates (Small Business hereditament) Relief Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 (“the 2010 Regulations”) so as to provide small business rate relief in respect of eligible small business hereditaments to 31 March 2018.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2017/72 The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 and had no objection to the Rule.

6. SR 2017/184: The Rate Relief Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017

The Committee considered SR 2017/184 - The Rate Relief Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017. These Regulations implement a new rate of relief for eligible claimants and come into operation in line with the making of a relevant Commencement Order under Article 2(2), (3)(a) and (4) of the Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2017/184 - The Rate Relief Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 and had no objection to the Rule.

7. SR 2017/231: The Rates (Unoccupied Hereditaments) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017

The Committee considered SR2017/231 - The Rates (Unoccupied Hereditaments) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017. The draft Rule amends the Rates (Unoccupied Hereditament) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (S.R. 2011 No. 36) (“the principal Regulations”).

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2017/231 - The Rates (Unoccupied Hereditaments) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 and had no objection to the Rule.

8. SR 2018/61: The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2018.

The Committee considered SR2018/61 - The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2018. These Regulations amend the Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 (“the 2010 Regulations”) so as to provide rate relief in respect of eligible small business hereditaments to 31 March 2019.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2018/61 - The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2018 and had no objection to the Rule.

9. SR 2018/67: The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2018.

The Committee considered SR2018/67 - The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2018. These Regulations amend the Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 (“the principal Regulations”).

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2018/67 - The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2018 and had no objection to the Rule.

10. SR 2018/68: The New NAV List (Time of Valuation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2018.

The Committee considered SR2018/68 - The New NAV List (Time of Valuation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2018. The Order specifies 1 April 2018 as the time by reference to which net annual values (NAVs) are to be ascertained for the new rating valuation list coming into force on 1 April 2020.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2018/68 The New NAV List (Time of Valuation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2018 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, had no objection to the Rule.

11. SR 2018/109: The Rate Relief (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2018.

The Committee considered SR2018/109 - The Rate Relief (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2018. This draft rule amends the Rate Relief Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 (S.R. 2017 No. 184) ("the 2017 Regulations"). It provides for consequential amendments to the 2017 Regulations identified as a result of policy changes made to Universal Credit ("UC") in Northern Ireland and are necessary to ensure the rate rebate scheme can continue to operate as intended.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2018/109 -The Rate Relief (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2018 and had no objection to the Rule.

12. SR 2019/44: The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019.

The Committee considered SR2019/44 - The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019. These Regulations amend the ~Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland 2010 ("the 2010 Regulations")) so as to provide rate relief in respect of eligible small business hereditaments t 31 March 2020.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2019/44 - The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland 2019 and had no objection to the Rule.

13. SR 2019/198: The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019

The Committee considered SR2019/198 - The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019. These Regulations amend the Schedule to the principal Regulations to provide an update of the gas companies laid out in Part 2 of the Schedule to the principal Regulations.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2019/98 - The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 and had no objection to the Rule.

14. SR 2020/5 The Rates (Making and Levying of Different Rates) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR2020/5 - The Rates (Making and Levying of Different Rates) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020. These Regulations enable different rates to be made and levied on the rateable net annual values of properties and on the rateable capital values of properties and set out the formula to be applied by district councils in making their capital value district rates.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2020/5 - The Rates (Making and Levying of Different Rates) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and had no objection to the Rule.

15. SR 2018/94 The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2018.

The Committee considered SR2018/94 - The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2018. This legislation is being made to designate bodies, for the financial year ended 31 March 2017, for the purposes of section 15 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2018/94 - The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2018 and had no objection to the Rule.

16. SR 2018/130: The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) (No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2018.

The Committee considered SR2018/130 - The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) (No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2018. The Order is made under section 15(1) of the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 (c.6 (N.I)).

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2018/130 - The Whole of the Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) (No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2018 and had no objection to the Rule.

17. SR 2019/95: The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019

The Committee considered SR2019/95 - The Whole Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019. This Order is made under section 15(1) of the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 (c.6 (N.I.)).

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2019/95 - The Whole Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 and had no objection to the Rule.

18. SR 2019/76: The Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspections) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019.

The Committee considered SR2019/76 - The Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspections) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019. The Regulations amend the Energy performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspections) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 SR 2008 No. 170 (as amended) (“the principal Regulations”) which came into operation on 30 July 2008.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2019/76 - The Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspections) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 and had no objection to the Rule.

The Chairperson suspended the meeting at 4.20pm

The Chairperson resumed the meeting in public session at 4.25pm

21. Correspondence

The Committee noted:

- Letter to the NI Executive re Mental Health;
- Open Invitation to Minister of Finance to visit Catalyst; and
- Acknowledgement of the Committee’s request for an informal confidential briefing from the NCA

The Committee considered:

Correspondence from Mr. Jim Allister MLA to the Chairpersons of the Committee for Finance and the Committee for the Executive Office regarding the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

Agreed: To include the Bill as a substantive item on 12 February 2020 and to schedule oral evidence from the Bill sponsor on 26 February 2020.

22. Chairperson’s Business

There was no Chairperson’s Business

The Chairperson left the meeting at 5.12pm

The Deputy Chairperson convened the meeting at 5.12pm

23. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the updated Forward Work Programme for 22 January – 1 April 2020.

Agreed: To include the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill as a substantive item on the agenda for the meeting on 12 February 2020.

Agreed: To include the 2019-2020 Spring Supplementary Estimates and Budget Bill (Northern Ireland) 2020 as a substantive item on the agenda for the meeting on 12 February 2020.

Agreed: To commission Assembly research into the use of, and the difficulties faced by other devolved administrations in drawing down Financial Transaction Capital.

Agreed: The Committee was content with the Forward Work Programme as amended.

24. Any Other Business

The Committee considered a proposal from Mr Jim Allister MLA in relation to the family of Paul Quinn.

Proposed:

“To write to the Quinn family conveying the Committee’s sympathy; commending them for their courage and tenacity in seeking justice for their son; and conveying the Committee’s dismay and condemnation of the Minister’s behaviour.”

The Committee considered an amendment to Mr Allister’s proposal from Mr Seán Lynch MLA.

Proposed Amendment:

“To write to the Quinn family conveying the Committee’s sympathy and commending them for their courage and tenacity in seeking justice for their son.”

The Committee divided on Mr Lynch’s amendment: Ayes 3; Noes; 4; Abstain 0.

AYES

Séan Lynch MLA
Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA

NOES

Jim Allister MLA
Pat Catney MLA
Jim Wells MLA
Paul Frew MLA

Agreed: Not to amend the proposal.

The Committee divided on Mr Allister's proposal: Ayes 4; Noes 3; Abstain 0.

AYES

Jim Allister MLA
Pat Catney MLA
Jim Wells MLA
Paul Frew MLA

NOES

Séan Lynch MLA
Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA

Agreed: To write to the Quinn family as proposed.

The Committee considered a proposal from Mr Paul Frew MLA in relation to the family of Paul Quinn.

Proposed:

"To write to the Minister asking for an explanation as to why he uttered the words at the time of the murder; why he then concealed and denied the comments for all those years, stating that this now puts his position for fitness for office in question; and asking him to report and give all information to the PSNI and Garda that he knows in relation to this crime and all other subsequent conversations and meetings that he has had in connection to this crime."

The Committee divided: Ayes 4; Noes 3; Abstain 0.

AYES

Jim Allister MLA
Pat Catney MLA
Jim Wells MLA
Paul Frew MLA

NOES

Séan Lynch MLA
Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA

Agreed: To write to the Minister as proposed.

25. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be on **Wednesday 12 February 2020** at **2.00pm** in **Room 29**.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.40pm

Dr Steve Aiken, OBE MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance
12 February 2020