



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2020

Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA (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: Mr Paul Frew MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

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 2.07pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

A Member declared the following interest:

Mr Jim Allister MLA, at Agenda Item 6 – Private Member's Legislation: The Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill sponsor.

2. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 5 February 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 5 February 2020.

3. Matters Arising

Budget Bill (NI) 2020

The Committee noted the letter from the Minister laying out the plans for the introduction of the Budget Bill (NI) 2020.

The Committee noted correspondence which it had agreed to issue to Statutory Committees in relation to budget scrutiny.

Statutory Rules

The Committee had considered SR 2017/29 - The Public Service Pensions Revaluation (Prices) Order (Northern Ireland) 2017 at its meeting on 29 January 2020, and agreed that it had no objection to the Rule subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had no issues to raise with the technical elements of the Statutory Rule.

The Committee had considered SR 2017/30 - The Public Service Pensions Revaluation (Earnings) Order (Northern Ireland) 2017 at its meeting on 29 January 2020, and agreed that it had no objection to the Rule subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had no issues to raise with the technical elements of the Statutory Rule.

The Committee had considered SR 2017/63 - The Pensions Increase (Modification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 at its meeting on 29 January 2020, and agreed that it had no objection to the Rule subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had no issues to raise with the technical elements of the Statutory Rule.

The Committee had considered SR 2018/62 - The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2018 at its meeting on 29 January 2020, and agreed that it had no objection to the Rule subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had no issues to raise with the technical elements of the Statutory Rule.

The Committee had considered SR 2019/71 - The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 at its meeting on 29 January 2020, and agreed that it had no objection to the Rule subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had no issues to raise with the technical elements of the Statutory Rule.

The Committee had considered SR 2019/60 - The Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 at its meeting on 29 January 2020, and agreed that it had no objection to the Rule subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had no issues to raise with the technical elements of the Statutory Rule.

The Committee had considered SR2018/68 - The New NAV List (Time of Valuation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2018 at its meeting on 5 February 2020, and agreed that it had no objection to the Rule subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had no issues to raise with the technical elements of the Statutory Rules

4. Overview and priorities for Strategic Policy and Reform Directorate – Evidence Session

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.11pm

- Mr Bill Pauley, Director, Strategic Policy and Reform Directorate, Department of Finance.
- Mr Tony Simpson, Director, Strategic Policy and Reform Division, Department of Finance.

The officials provided the Committee with an update on Strategic Policy and Reform Directorate.

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

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 2.57pm

Agreed: Officials to provide further information on a range of issues.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

5. Overview and Priorities for Pensions Division – Evidence Session

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.01pm

- Mrs Grace Nesbitt, Director of Pensions division, Department of Finance
- Ms Margaret Coyle, Head of Civil Service, Communication, Policy and Legislation Branch, Department of Finance
- Ms Colette Heaney, Head of Civil Service, Operations Branch, Department of Finance
- Mrs Blathnaid Smyth, Head of Public Service, Policy and legislation Branch, Department of Finance

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

Agreed: Officials to provide further information on a range of issues.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The Chairperson suspended the meeting at 4.07pm

The Chairperson resumed the meeting in public session at 4.15pm

6. Private Members Legislation: The Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provision) Bill

The Committee noted in advance of the oral evidence the Bill and the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum.

7. 2019/2020 Spring Supplementary Estimates and Budget Bill (Northern Ireland)

The Committee considered the 2019/2020 Spring Supplementary Estimates and Budget Bill (Northern Ireland)

Agreed: To write to the Department asking for a written briefing on a number of action points regarding the 2019-2020 Spring Supplementary Estimate and Budget Bill (Northern Ireland).

Agreed: To ask the Department to provide details of when this year's In-Year Monitoring Public Expenditure Guidelines will be available and if the process be reinstated of departments making bids to the Department of Finance for additional funding.

8. Department of Finance – First Day Brief

The Committee considered the First Day Brief and other information provided to Minister by the Department of Finance.

Agreed: To write to the Department asking to receive a clear copy of the detailed correspondence sent in response to a Freedom of Information request.

9. Chairperson's Business

The Committee noted the training date for IT equipment on 26 February 2020 at 11.30-1.30pm.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered an update from the Department of Finance on the outworking and successes or otherwise of the Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive the Department to provide copies of the three valuations undertaken by Public Sector Reform Division (PSRD).

Agreed: To receive a written briefing from the Department relating to issues raised regarding VES and the Northern Ireland Civil Service for consideration at its meeting of 26 February 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) to provide oral evidence on VES, Civil Service pay and pensions.

- ii. The Committee considered an invitation from Mid Ulster Council to hold Committee meetings on Council premises.

Agreed: To write to the Mid Ulster Council stating the Committee would consider this offer as part of its Forward Work Programme.

- iii. The Committee noted a request from the General Secretary of NIPSA to give oral evidence to the Committee on the Northern Ireland Civil Service pay.

- iv. The Committee noted the NCA had not responded to the request to provide an update on NAMA.

Agreed: To follow this matter up with NCA.

The Committee noted the following:

- v. Clerk to the Assembly / Chief Executive response to the Committee regarding staff vacancies in research
- vi. Letter from Mr Wilson MP regarding business rates report
- vii. The Director of Pivotal letter with a link to its first report

- viii. Stranmillis University College including Annual Report
- ix. Outgoing correspondence to the Department regarding requests for information and due dates
- x. A list of the routine papers issued 7 February 2020
- xi. Letter from the Committee to the Minister re: Quinn family
- xii. Letter from the Committee to the Quinn family
- xiii. Apology letter from the Chairperson to Esmond Birnie

11. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme for January to April 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme

12. Any Other Business

Mr Pat Catney, due to a family bereavement, offered his apology for the next meeting.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairperson expressed his condolence to Mr Catney and his extended family.

13. Date, Time and Place of next meeting.

The next meeting will be on **Wednesday 19 February 2020** at **2.00pm** in **Room 29**.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.30pm

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