



**COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH 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 Matthew O'Toole MLA  
Mr Jim Wells MLA

Apologies: Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA

In Attendance: Mr Jim McManus (Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

*The meeting commenced at 2.08pm in closed session.*

**1. Request for Legal Advice – Executive Budget 2020-2021**

Members considered the legal advice provide by the Legal Services Office.

*Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to all Committees the letter received from the Department with regards to the Executive Budget 2020-2021.*

*The meeting moved to public session at 2.20pm*

## **2. Apologies**

An apology was received from Mr. Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA

## **3. Draft Minutes**

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 4 March 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 4 March 2020.

## **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **5. Oral Evidence: Overview and priorities for the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)**

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

*The following officials joined the meeting at 2.26pm*

- Siobhan Carey, Registrar General and Chief Executive of NISRA
- Kathie Walker, Deputy Registrar General
- Dr. Tracey Power, Director of Analysis
- Dr. David Marshall, Director of Census and Population

Issues discussed included the future of the 10-year census and aligning statistics to the Programme for Government.

*Matthew O'Toole MLA joined the meeting at 2.20pm*

*This agenda item concluded at 3.19pm*

## **6. Oral Evidence: SL1 – Census Order (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

*The following officials were in attendance at 3.20pm*

- Siobhan Carey, Registrar General and Chief Executive of NISRA
- Kathie Walker, Deputy Registrar General
- Dr. Tracey Power, Director of Analysis
- Dr. David Marshall, Director of Census and Population

*This agenda item concluded at 3.40pm*

The Committee considered the SL1 - Census Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 which is the largest and most complex statistical exercise undertaken by Government and traditionally occurs once every 10 years.

*Agreed:* That the Committee has considered the Department of Finance's proposal for subordinate legislation The Census Order (Northern Ireland) 2020, and has no objection to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.

*Agreed:* To inform the Committee for the Executive Office that the Committee for Finance has no objections to the policy implications of this proposed legislation at this stage.

#### **8. SL1 – The Whole of the Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered the SL1 – The Whole of the Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 which enables the Department of Finance to request information from those departments and bodies designated in the Schedule to the Order and to pass the information provided to HM Treasury for use in the preparation of the Whole of Government Accounts (WGA).

*Agreed:* That the Committee has considered the Department of Finance's proposal for subordinate legislation The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objections to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.

#### **9. SL1 – The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered the SL1 – The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 which specifies the annual percentage change in prices and earnings for the purposes of revaluation of pension benefits accrued by active members in Career Average Revaluated Earnings (CARE) public service pension schemes.

*Agreed:* That the Committee has considered the Department of Finance's proposal for subordinate legislation The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.

*Agreed:* To ask the Department to outline the reason why the Committee was not afforded the time for consideration, given that this is routine legislation which is updated annually.

*Agreed:* To ask the Department why the Committee was not notified earlier that there may be a delay in bringing forward the legislation.

## **7. Oral Evidence – The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2020**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance advising that the policy on non-domestic rates for 2020-2021 is changing rapidly as a result of external circumstances and the draft legislation to which the SL1 relates may now need to be revised. The oral evidence session was, therefore, postponed.

*Agreed:* The Committee were content to receive a written briefing in relation to a number of matters relating to support for businesses.

## **10. Written Briefing – Chancellor’s Budget 2020-2021**

The Committee considered a draft memo from the Clerk to be circulated to clerks of statutory committees to inform of the indicative timing of the Executive Budget 2020-2021 and asking for co-operation to follow a single agreed process of budget scrutiny.

*Agreed:* The memo was approved.

*Agreed:* To forward the memo to the clerks of statutory committees.

## **11. Written Briefing – Department of Finance’s role in RHI tariffs as set out in the Regional Rates and Energy (No. 2) Act.**

The Committee considered the response from the Department of Finance on its role in RHI tariffs as set out in the Regional Rates and Energy (No.2) Act.

*Agreed:* The Department to provide urgently any minutes taken from meetings in relation to this issue and to provide the Committee with details of any involvement of, and interaction between the Department and, the NIO. This information is to be provided for the Committee’s meeting on 25 March 2020.

*Agreed:* The Department to note for future to provide a more accurately formatted briefings particularly with paragraph numbering order.

## **12. Written Briefing – Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission**

The Committee noted the written briefing from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

### **13. Chairperson's Business**

The Committee considered the response from the Permanent Secretary in relation the redacted First Day Brief.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the Department to provide oral evidence to the Committee on the reasoning behind the redactions of the First Day Brief.

### **14. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee considered the minutes of meetings of the Construction Industry Forum of Northern Ireland and the focus of its recent meetings.

*Agreed:* The Department to note for the future the Committee to receive a more concise briefing regarding this issue.

- ii. The Committee considered the response from the Department of Finance to the number of Accounting Officers still requiring training.

*Agreed:* The Department to provide a written briefing on when the Accounting Officers training will be undertaken and completed.

- iii. The Committee noted the update by the Department on the CPD timeline for a procurement review.

- iv. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding Hospitality Ulster.

*Agreed:* To forward the response to Hospitality Ulster for information and to consider the correspondence further when Hospitality Ulster provides oral evidence to the Committee on 29 April.

The Committee noted the following remaining items of correspondence from the Department:

- i. an update on the monthly outturn and forecast outturn
- ii. detailed information on the adjustments within DAERA between the main estimate position and the SSE position
- iii. DoF 2020-2021 resource requirements
- iv. Current heads of professions

The Committee noted the information request to the Department.

### **15. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme for February – April 2020.

The Committee was informed that an LCM on an emergency Coronavirus Bill may be tabled for debate.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to consider holding an additional meeting if there is an LCM on an emergency bill which requires detailed consideration by the Committee in advance of a debate in plenary.

The Committee considered the Department's request to defer the evidence on the review of financial process until after the Budget is announced.

*Agreed:* To defer the item.

The Committee noted that the Minister of Finance will write to the Committee with an initial brief on the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Inquiry Report and will provide a more substantive briefing once the report has been analysed.

The Committee considered the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill which passed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage and was referred to the Committee for Finance.

*Agreed:* To request written evidence from the identified groups and individuals and to include the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

*Agreed:* To commission research on a number of issues relating to the Bill from the NI Assembly researchers.

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

## **16. Any Other Business**

The Committee noted a letter from the Minister of Finance on transparency, accountability and the functions of the Executive.

The Committee noted a press release from the Minister of Finance regarding the NICS disciplinary process for cases arising from the Renewable Heat Incentive Inquiry.

The Committee noted a press release from the Minister of Finance regarding RHI recommendations.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Clerk to the Committee on Procedures seeking the Committee's view on the review of Legislative Consent Motions (LCM).

*Agreed:* To review the Committee for Finance & Personnel's consideration of LCMs during the 2011-2016 mandate.

**17. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 25 March 2020 at 2:00pm in Room 29.

*The meeting was adjourned at 4.13pm*

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