



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 29 APRIL 2020

Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

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

Apologies: Ms Jemma Dolan MLA

In Attendance: Mr Jim McManus (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Neil Sedgewick (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced at 14.32pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 22 April 2020.

Agreed: The Committee Agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 22 April 2020.

3. Matters Arising

On 22 April the Committee considered the response from the Minister regarding the joint order for PPE between the Department of Finance and the Irish Government. It was agreed to delay any decision until the Committee could see and agree a draft letter on the proposal at this meeting.

The Committee considered a proposal by Dr Steve Aiken

Proposed:

“To finalise the letter and forward to the Minister to seek clarity on the issues raised.”

The Committee divided: Ayes 6; Noes 2; Abstain 0.

AYES

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

NOES

Seán Lynch MLA
Maolíosa McHugh MLA

Agreed: To finalise the letter and forward to the Minister seeking clarity the issues raised.

The Committee considered the draft response to the Committee on Procedures on the review of Legislative Consent Motions being undertaken by the Committee on Procedures.

Agreed: To forward the response to the Committee on Procedures

The Committee noted the response from CPD accepting the offer to engage with NICTS and confirming that CPD will keep the Committee informed on progress.

4. Oral Evidence: DoF Public Spending Directorate - An overview of Budget Allocations and Priorities

The following officials joined the meeting at 14.35pm

- Jeff McGuinness, Head of Central Expenditure Division, DoF
- Joanne McBurney, Budget Director, DoF who will be joining the meeting through teleconferencing
- Barry Armstrong, Supply Officer, DoF

Issues considered included Vote on Account and Budget (No. 2) Bill, estimated timeline for Main Estimates, allocation of Covid-19 funding and the cost of Brexit for departments.

Jim Wells left the meeting at 15.48pm

Agreed: To forward the Minister's letter regarding the need for additional Vote on Account to RaISe for inclusion on its overview briefing paper on the Budget.

Agreed: To publish the RaISe paper on the Committee's webpage for information.

Agreed: To forward the RaISe paper to the Department for a response to the scrutiny points.

Officials left the meeting at 15.54pm

The following officials joined the meeting at 15.55pm

5. Oral Evidence: DoF Supply Division – An overview and Sole Authority in Budget Act

- Emer Morelli, Head of Supply, Public Spending Directorate, DoF
- Joanne McBurney, Budget Director, DoF who will be joining the meeting through teleconferencing
- Barry Armstrong, Supply Officer, DoF

Issues considered included sole authority of the Budget Act and double accounting of the Black Box

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 16.13pm

Agreed: To establish for the Committee how NI Screen was established without appropriate legislation for the establishment of Arms-Length-Bodies having been put in place.

Agreed: To identify and provide a breakdown of any future Black Box issues.

Officials left the meeting at 16,25pm

6. Chairperson's Business

The committee considered a scheduled meeting with NCA on 12 May 2020 relation to Sales of the National Asset Management Agency Loans portfolio NI

Agreed: To inform NCA that the Committee still wants the meeting to proceed on 12 May 2020 and that social distancing measures would be put in place to allow the meeting to be conducted face to face.

7. Correspondence

- i. Department of Justice response to the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

Agreed: To forward the response from Department of Justice to the Committee of Justice.

- ii. Departmental response to the call for evidence on the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

Agreed: To forward the Department of Finance response to the Committee for The Executive Office, the Committee for Justice, Assembly and Executive Review Committee and the Committee for Standards and Privileges.

- iii. The Committee noted the Departmental response to the request for information on the guidance and processes on coronavirus (COVID-19) regarding health and safety and social distancing.

Jim Allister left the meeting at 16.04pm

- iv. From the Committee for the Executive Office a document setting out the reference in the New Decade, New Approach document.

Agreed: To include this again when the Committee considers Public Sector Reform as part of its strategic plan.

- v. From the Northern Ireland Leisure and Entertainment Forum regarding the current issues.

Agreed: To write to the Department to request that its response to the Forum is copied to the Committee and to ask if there are any specific measures being considered either at UK or NI level for further support to businesses with a NAV above £51,000 and what consideration is being given to extending the rates holiday beyond 3 months should the current lockdown continue beyond that period.

Agreed: To write to the Forum to inform them that this has been done and that the Committee will respond following an update from the Department.

- vi. The Committee noted the letter from the Minister to Hospitality Ulster in relation to the impact on COVID-19 on the hospitality sector in Northern Ireland

The Committee noted the information request to the Department.

8. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme for April to July 2020

Members noted the Revised Guidance for Assembly Committees from the Chairperson of the Chairpersons' Liaison Group during the public health crisis.

Agreed: To advise the Department that the focus of the Committee for Finance in the period ahead will be on the Covid-19 response and other essential business and, that as a result, non-essential business should be avoided if possible.

Agreed: To receive oral evidence on two SLIs at the meeting 6 May 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

9. Any Other Business

The Committee noted the high spend on legal fees in the Department for Communities.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 6 May at 2.30pm in the Senate Chamber.

The meeting was adjourned at 16.45pm

Dr Steve Aiken, OBE MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance
[DATE]