



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 13 MAY 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
Ms Jemma Dolan MLA
Mr Seán Lynch MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

Apologies:

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

The meeting commenced at 2.32pm in public session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 6 May 2020.

Agreed: The Committee Agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 6 May 2020.

3. Matters Arising

Members considered a previous agreed action from the meeting of 6 May 2020 - to write to the Committee for Infrastructure in relation to the Taxi industry and the impact of Covid-19 pandemic.

The Committee noted the view of Matthew O'Toole that this was more a matter for the Department for the Economy than for the Department for Infrastructure.

4. Oral Evidence: The Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.34pm

- Mr Conor Murphy, Minister of Finance, Department of Finance
- Ms Sue Gray, Permanent Secretary, Department of Finance

This oral session was recorded by Hansard.

Items discussed included: the responsibility and accountability of ministers for the conduct of special advisers; the balance between the use of legislation and the use of codes of conduct within the unique circumstances in Northern Ireland; and the upgrading of the Private Secretary role to Grade 7.

Agreed: The Minister agreed to provide a copy of the paper to the Executive in relation to options and proposals for tailoring Rates support.

Agreed: The Department agreed to clarify the time limit for raising a matter for consideration by the Civil Service Commission as specified in the revised draft NICS Code of Ethics.

Agreed: To write to the Department asking for a response to a number of questions raised in relation to the Bill.

The Minister and Official left the meeting at 4.26pm

5. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

6. Correspondence

- i. Departmental response on the closure of Land Registry Offices due to Covid-19 and copy of Minister's response to the Law Society NI regarding this issue.

Agreed: To ask the Land & Property Services what their contingency plans are for the Northern Ireland property market re-opening and when do they see this taking place.

ii. Departmental response to issues raised in relation to the Voluntary Exit Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee noted the increase in cost of agency staff, the cost of Grade 7 to Senior Civil Service as an overall percentage of the pay bill and agreed to return to this response when re-considering Public Sector Reform.

iii. Departmental response regarding funding allocated or planned to support the care home sector.

Agreed: To forward the response to the Committee for Health for information.

iv. Departmental response regarding the LCM on Private International Law (Implementation of Agreements) Bill.

Agreed: To forward the response to the Committee for Justice for information.

v. Letter from Chair of Committee for the Economy regarding Covid-19 response co-operation with the Committee for Finance.

Agreed: Committee Clerks for Finance and Economy to meet to further consider.

vi. The Committee noted the Departmental response to issues raised by Committee for Infrastructure regarding Covid-19.

vii. The Committee noted the Committee for Justice revised arrangements for the In-Year Monitoring Process.

viii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy on its Energy Strategy Micro Inquiry.

The Committee noted the information requested to the Department and routine papers issued on Thursday 7 May 2020.

7. Draft Forward Work Programme

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

The Committee noted The NI Human Rights Commission and Mr Sam McBride are scheduled to provide oral evidence on the Bill on 27 May 2020

The Committee noted Mrs Felicity Huston is scheduled to provide oral evidence on 3 June 2020.

The Committee noted Research and Information Service has been asked to provide an oral briefing on its Research briefing paper on the Functioning of Government Bill on 10 June.

The Committee noted the Strategic Policy and Reform Division is scheduled to give oral evidence on the Bill on 17 June 2020.

The Committee considered the request to bring the In-Year Monitoring Guidelines received from the Department to the Committee next week and further actions in relation the Guidelines.

Agreed: To bring the In-Year Monitoring Guidelines from the Department to the meeting of 20 May 2020.

Agreed: To schedule into the Forward Work Programme oral evidence from Officials from DoF Finance Division on 3 June 2020 and Public Spending Directorate on 24 June 2020.

Agreed: The Clerk to develop with RaISe a standard line of questions to be issued to all Committees, seeking a response from departments in time for their oral evidence sessions that same week.

Agreed: To forward the In-Year Monitoring Guidelines to other statutory committees.

The Committee considered the work being undertaken by the University of Ulster Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) on tailoring Rates support to businesses.

Agreed: To write to the Head of the UUEPC asking to receive oral evidence on the report once it has been finalised.

Agreed: To ask the Department to provide oral evidence to the Committee on the options and proposals it is considering for tailoring Rates support following the evidence session with UUEPC.

Agreed: To include the Committee's draft Strategic Plan in the agenda for consideration on 20 May 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

8. Any Other Business

Agreed: To ask the Department to update the Committee on progress with the disciplinary process of the Investigative Independent Panel arising from the RHI Inquiry.

Agreed: The Department to clarify why civil servants who retire prior to the completion of investigations would not be made amenable to disciplinary matters arising from the RHI Report.

Agreed: To write to the Department seeking clarity if a paper was released by the Minister at the end of April outlining the Provision of Relief to Contracting bodies on existing contract and included the cost of PPE and social distancing measure and, if so, to provide a copy.

9. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 20 May at 2.30pm in the Senate Chamber.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.46pm

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