



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 22 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
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 14.34pm in public session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

A Member declared the following interest:

Mr Jim Allister MLA – Agenda Item 6 –The Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

2. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 25 March 2020

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 25 March 2020.

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 8 April 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 8 April 2020.

3. Matters Arising

The Committee considered the response from the Minister of Finance with regards to the joint order for personal protection equipment (PPE) between the Department of Finance and Government of the Republic of Ireland.

The Committee considered a proposal from Matthew O'Toole MLA.

Proposed:

“To delay any decision on to responding to the Minister in relation to his correspondence on the Joint order for PPE until the Committee can see and agree a draft letter on the proposal at next week’s meeting.”

The Committee divided: Ayes 6; Noes 3; 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
Jemma Dolan MLA

Agreed: To delay any decision on to responding to the Minister in relation to his correspondence on the Joint order for PPE until the Committee can see and agree a draft letter on the proposal at next week’s meeting

4. Written Evidence: Department of Finance, Finance Division – Budget 2020-2021

The Committee considered the written evidence including the Department of Finance Budget 2020-2021, the Assembly’s Research and Information Services (RaISe) paper co-

ordinating Assembly scrutiny of the Executive Budget 2020-2021 and the allocation of resources with regards to Covid-19.

Agreed: To ask the Department to respond to questions raised in the Clerk's brief in relation to the 2020-2021 Budget and funding in response to Covid-19 for circulation and inclusion in papers for the next Committee meeting.

Agreed: To forward the research paper from RaISe to the Department asking for a response to the questions which relate to the Department's remit either in writing or at next week's oral evidence session with the Public Spending Directorate as appropriate.

Agreed: To circulate a response from the Department of Finance to a Committee for Finance's request for information regarding the allocation of resources for Covid-19 to all statutory committees.

Agreed: To circulate the additional update received from the Department on the Budget 2020-2021 Covid-19 to all statutory committees.

5. Written Briefing: Department of Finance, Public Sector Reform Division, Voluntary Exit Scheme

The Committee considered the written evidence including the evidence provided by Public Sector Reform Division and the Department's breakdown of the age profile of the NICS.

Agreed: To receive a breakdown from the Department of recruitment costs of agency staff by year from 1 April 2015 to 2020 and to include agency costs.

Agreed: To ask the Department for the salary costs with a breakdown by grade for the NICS and agency from 2015 -2020

Agreed: To ask the Department for its assessment of what the VES achieved considering the number of agency staff employed and the number of existing vacancies.

Agreed: To ask the Department to provide a breakdown of the age profile of staff who left the NICS under the VES

Agreed: To address the Committee's scrutiny of the Voluntary Exit Scheme in detail once the Assembly has returned to normal business.

6. The Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

The Committee considered a motion under Standing Order 33(4), to extend the Committee Stage of the Bill until 2 December 2020.

The Chairperson proposed that, “in accordance with Standing Order 33 (4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33 (2) be extended to 2 December 2020, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (NIA Bill 01/17-22).”

Agreed: That, in accordance with Standing Order 33 (4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33 (2) be extended to 2 December 2020, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (NIA Bill 01/17-22)

7. SR: 2020/29: The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/29: The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2020. The Order will be used by schemes which require an annual revaluation by reference to a change in prices or earnings, in line with the revaluation process set out in scheme regulations, to revalue active members’ benefits accrued in CARE schemes as at 1 April 2020.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/29: The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the Rule.

8. SR 2020/43: The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/43: The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020. The legislation is being made to designate bodies, for the financial year ended 31 March 2020, for the purposes of section 15 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/43: The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the Rule.

Agreed: To ask the Department to clarify the inclusion of ILEX Urban Regeneration Company Limited in the list of scheduled designated bodies.

9. SR 2020/59: The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR2020/59: 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 considered SR 2020/59: The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 and recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

10. SR 2020/47: The Pensions Increase (Review Order) (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee noted SR 2020/47: The Pensions Increase (Review Order) (Northern Ireland 2020)

11. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed the Committee of the death of the mother of Phil Pateman, Assistant Assembly Clerk to the Committee for Finance.

Agreed: To send a letter of condolence on behalf of the Committee to Mr Pateman on the death of his mother.

12. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following correspondence:

- i. Response to the Committee from the Department regarding the number of 16 exit properties are outstanding dilapidation payments for the last 3 years

Agreed: To ask the Department to provide clarity on a number of issues in relation to the 16 exit properties which are outstanding dilapidation payments for the last 3 years.

- ii. Response to the Committee from the Department regarding Accounting Officer Training

Agreed: To ask the Department when training for the remaining Accounting Officers was completed.

- iii. Response from the Department to a further request from Committee for Finance on level of RHI non domestic tariffs in the Regional Rates and Energy (No. 2) Act

Agreed: To ask the Department if a meeting took place in November regarding the level of RHI non domestic tariffs in the Regional Rates and Energy (No. 2)

Act and if so to provide the actual or draft minutes and to explain why, if a meeting took place, the minutes or draft minutes were not provided to the Committee in the response

- iv. A response from the Department of Justice in relation to Contractors taking legal challenges

Agreed: To forward the correspondence to CPD suggesting that CPD accepts the offer from NICTS to engage with them and to report any progress to the Committee for Finance.

- v. Letter from Hospitality Ulster in relation to the impact on COVID-19 on the hospitality sector in Northern Ireland

Agreed: To forward the letter from Hospitality Ulster to the Minister and to request a response on the issues raised.

Agreed: To seek the views of the Committee for the Economy on a proposal to explore opportunities for the two committees to work together to achieve a unified approach to the impact on businesses of the pandemic and the Executive's response.

- vi. The Committee noted a letter from NI Hotels Federation to the Chairperson in relation to the challenges posed by COVID-19 and the Hotel and Tourism sectors.
- vii. The Committee noted NI Tourist Alliance has shared a letter which was sent to the Minister with a number of key asks of government to mitigate the economic impact of Covid-19 on Tourism
- xi. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the Law Society for Northern Ireland to Minister highlighting its concerns in relation to the absence of services provided by the Land Registers Northern Ireland during the ongoing Covid-19 crisis and the impact on both commercial lending and domestic property transactions.

Agreed: To seek clarification from the Land and Property Service as to what process they have in place to ensuring conveyancing can take place during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Agreed: To ask Minister to copy to the Committee the response to the Law Society for Northern Ireland in relation to the absence of services provided by the Land Registers Northern Ireland

- xii. Providers and Directors of Sanville Nursing Homes seeking support for home care sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department for information on funding allocated or planned to support the care home sector

- xiii. From the Committee for Infrastructure asking if the Department of Finance has had any engagement on the issues raised by the Freight Transport Association Limited on the financial pressures on the logistics sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department issues raised by the Freight Transport Association Limited to ask the if there has been any engagement on these issue raised by Freight Transport Association Limited.

- xiv. The Clerk's briefing paper in relation to the Review of Legislative Consent Motions being carried out by the Committee on Procedures

Agreed: The Committee agreed the approach outlined in the Clerk's paper to respond to the Review of Legislative Consent Motions

- xv. The Committee for Justice informed the Committee on a Legislative Consent Motion on the Private International Law (Implementations of Agreements) Bill and included a copy of the Legislative Consent Memorandum.

Agreed: To ask the Department for an initial view on the impact of the provisions in the Legislative Consent Motion on the Private International Law (Implementations of Agreements) Bill that relate to the Department of Finance remit.

The Committee noted the remaining items of correspondence including outgoing correspondence and routine papers issued 17 April 2020.

The Committee noted the information request to the Department.

13. Forward Work Programme

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

The Committee considered the RaISe research paper on the Preliminary Consideration of e-Government in Estonia.

Agreed: To schedule an oral briefing on the paper from RaISe for a future date.

Agreed: To forward the e-Government in Estonia research paper to the Department's Digital Shared Services asking for a response to a number of issues in relation to digital services provision in Northern Ireland in comparison to Estonia.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to offer an extended deadline for the response from Digital Shared Services considering the Department's priorities at present.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

14. Any Other Business

Members considered a reference in the template provided by the Department's Budget for 2020-2021 anticipating the sale of a property which would generate around £7m to £8m.

Agreed: To ask the Department to provide the name of the property which is mentioned in the Department's Budget for 2020-2021 which would generate £7-£8m.

15. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 29 April 2020 at 2.30pm in the Senate Chamber.

The meeting was adjourned at 16:00pm

Dr Steve Aiken, OBE MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance
29 April, 2020