



## COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 03 FEBRUARY 2021

Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Paul Frew MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Jim Allister MLA  
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA  
Mr Jim Wells MLA

Present by Video-conference:  
Mr Pat Catney MLA  
Ms Jemma Dolan MLA  
Mr Philip McGuigan MLA  
Mr Maoliosa McHugh MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Mr Jim McManus (Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Phil Pateman (Senior Assistant Clerk)  
Ms Kate McCullough (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Neil Sedgewick (Clerical Supervisor)  
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)  
Mr Jonathan McMillen (Head of Legal Services Office) (Agenda Item 6 only)  
Mr Colin Pidgeon, Researcher, RaISe (Agenda Item 9 only)  
Mr Aidan Stennett, Researcher, RaISe (Agenda Item 9 only)

*The meeting commenced at 2:05pm in public session.*

#### **1. Apologies**

There were no apologies

The Committee noted that notice had been received from Philip McGuigan MLA to delegate authority to Maoliosa McHugh MLA to vote under Temporary Standing Order 115(6).

## **2. Declaration of Interests**

The Chairperson declared an interest in respect of an item of correspondence due to be considered later in the agenda, stating his opposition to the Arc21 incinerator.

## **3. Chairperson's Business**

3.1 The Chairperson advised Members of a Ministerial Written statement on further allocations to departments for 2020-21.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the allocations and their compliance with HM Treasury's rules.

3.2 The Chairperson referred Members to issues relating to the Presbyterian Mutual Society and the reported losses to savers.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for the Economy seeking clarity on the reported credit loss and the current position in respect of Presbyterian Mutual Society savers.

3.3 The Chairperson referred Members to the recent launch of a consultation on a new Executive draft Programme for Government.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on its role in supporting a number of draft Programme for Government outcomes.

3.4 The Chairperson advised Members that he had been invited to attend a meeting with the House of Lords European Union Select Committee to discuss matters relating to the NI Protocol.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that the Chairperson could attend the meeting on behalf of the Committee and report back any findings thereafter.

## **4. Draft Minutes**

The Committee considered the revised minutes, in tabled items, of the meeting held on Wednesday, 27 January 2021.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 27 January 2021.

## **5. Matters Arising**

The Committee considered a draft letter to the Minister regarding a review by the OECD of the Executive's implementation of previous OECD recommendations on governance.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the draft letter as amended.

*Mr Allister and Mr Wells expressed their dissent to the letter, as amended.*

*The Committee moved into closed session at 2:20pm.*

## **6. Confidential Oral Briefing - Assembly Legal Services – Legal Advice on the Budget Process**

*The following joined the meeting at 2:20pm.*

- Jonathan McMillen, Head of Legal Services Office, Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Committee noted the legal advice provided regarding the budget process.

## **7. Confidential Oral Briefing - Procedural Advice on the Budget Process**

The Committee noted written procedural advice from the Clerk to the Committee.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to defer consideration of this item to 10 February 2021.

*The meeting moved into public session at 2:49pm*

## **8. Oral Evidence: Building Control NI – proposed amendments to Building Regulations**

*The witnesses joined the meeting at 2:49pm by videoconference.*

- Tom Lavery, Chair, Building Control Northern Ireland, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council;
- Martin McCook, Member, Building Control Northern Ireland, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council;
- Sean McConville, Member of Building Control Northern Ireland Fire Safety Panel, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council; and
- Alan Mayrs, Member of Building Control Northern Ireland Fire Safety Panel, Belfast City Council

The oral evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Committee noted papers from Building Control NI relating to the proposed changes to building regulations.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to Building Control NI to establish what changes it considers necessary in order to improve compliance with fire safety regulations and associated guidance.

## **9. Oral Briefing – Assembly Research and Information Services (RaISe) – Freeports and State Aid**

*The following researchers joined the meeting at 3:21pm by videoconference.*

- Colin Pigeon, Researcher, RaISe
- Aidan Stennett, Researcher, RaISe

The Committee noted the RaISe papers covering Freeports and State Aid.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to ask RaISe to provide clarification as to whether the port of Shannon is a designated Freeport and on how the permissible amounts of State Aid may be used.

*Mr Allister left the meeting at 4:00pm.*

## **10. Correspondence**

10.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

10.2 The Committee considered a written submission on the draft Budget 2021-22 from the Construction Employers' Federation (CEF).

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to receive oral evidence from CEF on the draft Budget 2021-22.

10.3 The Committee considered restricted correspondence from a member of the public regarding a Covid support scheme for Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) who are unable to work.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health and seek clarity on the timescales by which CEV individuals will be vaccinated and will be able to return to work safely.

10.4 The Committee considered a response from the Department for the Economy regarding covid-19 Business Support Schemes and correspondence from Abba Driving School with regards to the absence of support for driving schools.

*Agreed:* The Committee also agreed to seek commentary from the Department of Finance and the Department for the Economy on the reported absence of support for businesses such as the Abba Driving School and clarification as to whether the Departments are seeking

to bring forward a support scheme in order to address this gap in provision. The Committee also agreed to write to the Department for the Economy to seek clarity on: the lessons learned from the underspent schemes and again seeking clarity on the way forward for the high street voucher scheme.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to suggest that it commissions the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre to undertake a feasibility study to identify possible mechanisms to support businesses who have not been eligible for support under the various covid-related schemes and how improved linkage can be achieved with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to support this.

10.5 The Committee noted the response from the Department regarding SR2020/332 relating to the Committee's suggestion to extend the restriction of forfeiture provisions for the first quarter of 2021/22.

10.6 The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding the monitoring round and seeking clarity in respect of the timescales for the repayment of rates relief by supermarkets as identified during the January Monitoring Round.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department in order to request a list of transaction types that would not require detail to be specified by departments when completing returns as part of the monitoring round process.

*Mr Frew left the meeting at 4:25pm.*

10.7 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding details of bids submitted for the January Monitoring Round.

10.8 The Committee noted a response from the Minister for Infrastructure regarding a January Monitoring briefing to the Committee for Infrastructure.

10.9 The Committee noted a response from the Department detailing the Terms of Reference for the Procurement Board and its membership.

10.10 The Committee noted a response from the Clerk to the House of Lords EU Select Committee in respect of issues relating to the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol.

10.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office detailing the Terms of Reference for the Executive Committee dealing with EU Exit matters.

10.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office indicating that Junior Ministers had undertaken to provide further information on the Joint Consultative Working Group and that information is also sought on the Shared Prosperity Fund.

*Mr Frew rejoined the meeting at 4:26pm.*

10.13 The Committee considered correspondence received from the acting Chief Executive of Arc21 sent to the Executive Ministers regarding green growth.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking sight of its response to Arc21.

10.14 The Committee noted the weekly composite information request to the Department of Finance.

## **11. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to reschedule evidence session on Public Sector Reform from the Institute for Government, Pivotal and the Northern Ireland Public Sector Alliance (NIPSA) to 24 March, 14 April and 21 April 2021 respectively.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to reschedule the CEF briefing on the PAC report into capital projects for 28 April 2021.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to schedule oral evidence on the draft Budget 2021-22 from the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU) and the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) on 17 February 2021.

*Agreed:* The Committee noted that it may be asked to give formal consideration as to whether to grant accelerated passage for the Budget Bill on 24 February 2021.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme, as amended.

## **12. Any Other Business**

Mr O'Toole referenced an extract of the Department of Finance's consultation on the Draft Budget 2021-21 relating to the continued liaison with HM Treasury, the banking sector and other financial services providers.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to establish the specific matters being addressed through this continued liaison with HM Treasury, the banking sector and other financial service providers.

## **13. Date, time and place of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on **Wednesday, 10 February 2021** at **2:00pm** in the **Senate Chamber**.

*The meeting moved into closed session at 4:38pm.*

#### **14. RHI Disciplinary Process**

The Committee considered recent related correspondence from the Department.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting that it be kept informed of any developments in respect of the RHI disciplinary process.

*The meeting was adjourned at 4:45pm.*

**Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA**  
**Chairperson**  
**Committee for Finance**  
**10 February 2021**