



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 11 NOVEMBER 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 Philip McGuigan MLA
Mr Maolíosá McHugh MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

Apologies:

In Attendance: Mr Jim McManus (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Kate McCullough (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Neil Sedgewick (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
Mr Colin Pidgeon (Researcher, RaISe) through teleconferencing for
(Agenda Item 6)

The meeting commenced at 14:02 in public session

1. Apologies

None

2. Declaration of Interests

Maoliosa McHugh declared an interest as a ratepayer.

Pat Catney joined the meeting at 14:02

3. Draft Minutes

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

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

4. Matters Arising

Letter to HM Treasury

The Committee considered a draft letter from the Chairperson on the impact of HM Treasury's decision not to produce an Autumn Budget.

Agreed: To issue the letter.

Capital to Resources Transfer

The Committee noted a response from the Department on what the transferred funding was used for and whether there were any prior examples in the past ten years.

5. Oral Evidence: European Division & SEUPB - PEACE PLUS Programme

Officials and SEUPB witnesses joined the meeting at 14:05

Paul Frew joined the meeting at 14:06

Jim Wells joined the meeting at 14:32

- Dominic McCullough, Head of European Union Division, DoF
- Gina McIntyre, Chief Executive of the Special EU Programmes Body
- Laura McDonald, Head of Future Funding and Brexit Co-ordination (DoF) – by teleconferencing
- Declan McGarrigle, PEACE PLUS Programme Manager, DoF – by teleconferencing

Issues discussed included: Discussions with the NIO on new working arrangements; SEUPB administration costs; cross-community projects; flexibility within the programmes for the impact of the EU Exit and COVID-19; Themes 1 & 6 providing

smaller projects with better access to programmes; the UK Internal Market Bill and issues relating to State Aid.

Agreed: In view of the cross-cutting nature of PEACE PLUS programmes, to write to statutory committees to inform them that, as the Department of Finance is the lead Department, the Committee is content to co-ordinate scrutiny of the programme across Assembly Committees.

Agreed: To receive regular update reports on the PEACE PLUS programme.

Officials and SEUPB witnesses left the meeting at 14:51

6. RaISe Oral Presentation - Presentation Fiscal Council Research Paper

The Researcher joined the meeting at 14:51 by teleconferencing

- Mr Colin Pidgeon, Researcher, RaISe.

The Committee considered a presentation by Mr Pidgeon on the Roles and Responsibilities of Independent Fiscal Institutions: UK and Ireland.

Jim Wells left the meeting at 15:38

The Researcher left the meeting at 15:41

Agreed: To forward a RaISe research paper Roles and Remits of Independent Fiscal Institutions: United Kingdom and Ireland to the Department for information and to ask for a detailed response on the scrutiny points raised in the research.

Agreed: To write to the Chairpersons of the equivalent committees in Scotland and Wales seeking their views on the adequacy of the sub-contracting of the Welsh OBR and the Scottish Fiscal Commission.

7. Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill – Consideration and Approval of Committee Report

This session was reported by Hansard.

Maoliosa McHugh left the meeting at 15:41

The Committee considered the final draft report on the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill – Consideration and Approval of Committee Report.

Title Page, Committee Membership and Powers Page, Table of Contents Page and Abbreviations Page

The Committee considered the Title Page, Committee Membership and Powers Page, Table of Contents Page and Abbreviations Page.

Agreed: That the Title Page, Committee Membership and Powers Page, Table of Contents Page and Abbreviations Page stand part of the Report.

Executive Summary – paragraphs 1-7

The Committee considered the Executive Summary (paragraphs 1 to 7).

Agreed: That the Executive Summary stands part of the Report.

Introduction – paragraphs 8–15

The Committee considered the Introduction (paragraphs 8 to 15).

Agreed: That the Introduction stands part of the Report.

Jim Wells returned to the meeting at 15:43

Summary of the Bill as presented at Committee Stage – paragraphs 16-31

The Committee considered Summary of the Bill as Presented at the Committee Stage (paragraphs 16-31).

Agreed: That the Summary of the Bill as presented at Committee Stage stands part of the Report.

Summary of Consideration – paragraphs 32-338

The Committee considered Summary of Consideration, (paragraph 32-338).

Agreed: That the Summary of Consideration stands part of the Report.

Committee Consideration of Other Issues – paragraphs 339-348

The Committee considered Committee Consideration of Other Issues, (paragraphs 339-348).

Agreed: That the Committee Consideration of Other Issues stands part of the Report.

Clause by Clause Scrutiny of the Bill – paragraphs 34-412

The Committee considered Clause by Clause Scrutiny of the Bill, (paragraphs 349-412).

Agreed: That the Clause by Clause Scrutiny of the Bill stands part of the Report.

Links to and List of Appendices

The Committee considered the links and list of appendices.

Maoliosa McHugh returned to the meeting at 15:44

Agreed: That the Links and List of Appendices stand part of the Report.

Agreed: To include the appropriate section of the unapproved minutes in the appendices.

Agreed: The Report on the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill be published and issued to all MLAs.

Agreed: That an electronic copy of the Bill report should be sent to all organisations and individuals who provided evidence to the Committee on the Bill.

The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 15:44

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 15:44

8. Written Evidence: Land & Property Services – Fraud and other matters

The Committee considered the written evidence from Land & Property Services regarding Fraud and other matter.

Agreed: the oral evidence session with LPS will be in public session and to move to consider the sensitive matters outlined in closed session at next week's meeting.

The Committee moved into public session at 15:46.

9. Written Evidence: Amendments to The Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 – Expert Witnesses

Paul Frew declared an interest as a close family member is employed in one of the companies which wrote to the Committee.

The Committee considered a RaISe paper identifying cladding and fire safety experts.

Agreed: To invite NIFRS, the four identified experts and the companies which contacted the Committee to give evidence to the Committee on the Amendments to the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.

Agreed: To schedule into the Forward Work Programme an oral evidence session with the NI Fire and Rescue Service and the four identified experts on 25 November, and the above companies on 2 December.

Agreed: As the NIFRS falls within the remit of the Committee for Health, to advise the Committee for Health that the Committee intends to schedule oral evidence from NIFRS.

10. Written Evidence: Department of Finance Annual Progress Report to Equality Commission

The Committee considered the Department of Finance's Annual Progress Report to the NI Equality Commission.

Agreed: To ask the Department to respond to a number of issues raised by members.

Agreed: to include a number of further raised questions to the brief.

Matthew O'Toole returned to the meeting at 16:01

11. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding General Register Office letter to Churches.

Agreed: The Chairperson to write to the Minister asking for details of the processes that have been put in place and to seek assurance of the effectiveness of these new processes to ensure this incident does not occur again.

ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding Digital Inclusion.

iii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for the Economy to Minister of Finance regarding NI Chamber of Commerce - New Restriction.

Agreed: to ask the Department to copy the response to the Committee for the Economy to the Committee for Finance.

iv. The Committee considered correspondence from Minister in response to Sole Authority of the Budget Act.

Agreed: To write to the Department offering a 2-week extension to the Department in providing the information requested.

v. The Committee considered correspondence from the EU Affairs Manager regarding NI Affairs Committee and the Shared Prosperity Fund.

Agreed: To forward the information to the Department and to ask for clarification on this matter.

vi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Communities regarding Dormant Accounts Fund.

Agreed: To ask the Department to keep the Committee informed on the progress regarding Dormant Accounts Fund.

Agreed: to note the remaining item of correspondence.

vii. Response from Minister of Finance to Committee for the Executive Office regarding HIA Redress Board.

viii. From the Committee for the Economy Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications.

ix. Departmental response to Committee for Communities regarding NIPSA correspondence.

x. Departmental response to Committee for Communities regarding Retail NI - High Street Vacancy Strategy

xi. From the Committee of the Economy to the Department regarding Extension of the 'Furlough Scheme'.

Agreed: to note the information request to the Department and the Routine Papers circulated on Friday 6 November 2020.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: To receive evidence from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors regarding Dilapidation Payments

Agreed: To consider the Westminster Hansard Report on the International Trade Committee oral evidence on UK Freeports at next week's meeting.

Agreed: To schedule oral evidence from both Pivotal and the Institute for Government as witnesses on public sector reform

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 16:13

Agreed: The Committee is content with draft Forward Work Programme for September-December 2020.

13. Any Other Business

The Committee considered information provided by the EU Affairs Manager on the VAT rating for PPE for use to protect from COVID-19.

Agreed: To forward to the Department to seek clarification.

14. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting is on **Wednesday 18 November 2020 at 2:00pm in the Senate Chamber**

The meeting moved into closed session at 16:17

Philip McGuigan left the meeting at 16:17

15. Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Disciplinary Process

The Committee considered the response from the Department in relation to the RHI Disciplinary Process.

Agreed: The Chairperson to write to the Minister seeking further clarification on particular issues raised in the closed session.

The meeting adjourned at 16:23

Dr Steve Aiken, OBE MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance
18 November 2020