



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 16 DECEMBER 2020

Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Dr Steve Aiken (Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister MLA
Mr Pat Catney MLA
Ms Jemma Dolan MLA
Mr Maoliosa McHugh MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

Apologies: Mr Paul Frew MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Philip McGuigan MLA

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
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)

The meeting commenced at 14:02 in public session

1. Apologies

As above.

The Committee noted that notice has been received from Philip McGuigan MLA to delegate authority to Maoliosa McHugh MLA to vote under Temporary Standing Order 115(6) on any issue, if necessary.

2. Declaration of Interests

No declarations of Interests.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 9 December 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a minor amendment and the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 9 December 2020. The minutes were agreed subject to the amendment.

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 9 December 2020 were agreed.

4. Matters Arising

Amendment to the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

The Committee discussed the departmental evidence session on the Amendment to the Building Regulations (NI) 2012.

Agreed: To write to the Department to request a response to a number of issues raised.

Agreed: To receive oral evidence from Building Control NI.

5. Oral Evidence: Department of Finance - January Monitoring Round: Departmental Position

Officials joined the meeting by at 14:09

- Stewart Barnes, Finance Director, Department of Finance

- Janis Marynowski, Head of Financial Management Branch, Department of Finance

Issues discussed included: the reasons for the easement of almost £800 million in respect of the refund by BT; the potential impact on the 2021 Census of the delays in recruiting staff; easements relating to reduced property maintenance costs; and allocations to support COVID-19-related financial assistance payments.

Officials left the meeting at 14:28

Agreed: To ask the Department to provide the Committee with an update on allocation of COVID-19 support scheme funding.

Agreed: To consider the response at the Committee meeting on 13th January 2021.

6. Oral Evidence: Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) - Dilapidation Payments

The Witness joined the meeting at 14:28

- Adrian Poucher, Partner of Hollis Real Estate Consultants, Chartered Building Surveyor and Fellow of the RICS.

Jim Wells joined the meeting at 14:29

Issues discussed included: Lack of Northern Ireland-specific guidance; the relationship between time taken to settle disputes and complexity of cases; the impact of long leases on costs due to the passage of time; the need to introduce appropriate legislation to facilitate an improved dilapidation process.

The Witness left the meeting at 15:15

Agreed: To ask the Department to examine how appropriate changes could be made to legislation relating to dilapidations.

7. Oral Evidence: Department of Finance – Budget Statement 2021-2022

The Committee considered a response from the Department to a Committee query regarding the timing of the Draft Budget. The Committee also considered a report from the Chairperson regarding a conference call with the Minister relating to the timing of a Draft Budget.

Agreed: To defer this item of business until a Draft Budget has been announced.

Pat Catney left the meeting at 15:16

8. SR 2020/308 The Rate Relief (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020 No. 308 The Rate Relief (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

Agreed: That the Committee for Finance has considered SR 2020 No. 308 The Rate Relief (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and, subject to the ESR's Report, has no objection to the rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to agenda item 15.

Pat Catney returned to the meeting at 15:20

15. SL1: Financial Assistance (Airports) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Official joined the meeting by teleconferencing at 15:17

- Aidan McMahon – Principal Economist, DoF
- Bill Pauley – Director, Strategic Policy & Reform Directorate, DoF

The Committee considered the SL1 – Financial Assistance (Airports) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020. The purpose is to allow for the provision of up to £7.8m (in total) of temporary financial support to Belfast International Airport (BIA) (up to £3.7m) and Belfast City Airport (BCA) (up to £4.1m) in light of the significant financial difficulties these organisations continue to face as a result of COVID-19.

The rule is subject to Negative Resolution Assembly procedure.

Agreed: That the Committee has considered Department of Finance's proposal for subordinate legislation Financial Assistance (Airports) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the policy implications of the of the proposed legislation at this stage.

Officials left the meeting at 15:23

Agreed: To ask the Department to inform the Committee for Finance in the future of instances where there has been a Ministerial Direction.

9. Written Evidence: Department of Finance – Public Procurement Common Frameworks

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance the details of all organisations that it issued a Summary Framework to and copies of all responses received.

The Committee noted that there had been a Ministerial Direction in relation to the SL1.

Agreed: To invite oral evidence on this matter from Construction Employers' Federation and Social Enterprise NI.

Agreed: To ask the Social Enterprise NI to provide a written briefing on the Public Procurement Common Framework, the Procurement Board and the Dormant Accounts Fund.

10. Chairperson's Business

The Committee considered a request to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to consider any non-routine contentious FoI requests.

Agreed: To delegate authority to consider any non-routine contentious FoI requests to the chairperson and deputy chairperson during the recess period.

11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered Departmental response to Committee questions on the Departmental Progress Report to the Equality Commission.

Agreed: To consider the response during the Committee's consideration of NICS reform.

- ii. The Committee considered the Departmental update regarding Localised Restrictions Support Scheme.

Agreed: To ask the Department to return to the system where LPS could be contacted directly.

- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from Bus and Coach NI regarding Financial Support Scheme for Coach and Bus Operators.

Agreed: To inform the Minister of Finance that the Committee for Finance would support appropriate proposals from the Department for the Economy or the Department for Communities to provide additional assistance to the sector.

Agreed: To inform Bus & Coach NI of the Committee's agreed approach.

- iv. The Committee considered a response from the Department to a Committee request for a written briefing regarding questions raised by the Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA) on building regulations for Nearly Zero-Energy Buildings.

Agreed: To forward the Department's response to the RSUA for information.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice regarding the Health Protection Regulations and the Department for Justice not engaging with Committees.

- vi. The Committee considered a response from the Minister for the Economy regarding Financial Support for Travel Agents.

Agreed: To ask the Department to provide details of the proposed actions on which the Minister has been asked to respond following the meeting with the Association of Northern Ireland Travel Agents and to provide a copy of the response to the Committee.

- vii. The Committee considered the Departmental response regarding the Procurement Board Terms of Reference.

Agreed: To schedule oral evidence on the Procurement Board from the Minister and representative board members.

- viii. The Committee considered a Departmental update regarding North/South Ministerial Council: Special EU Programme

Agreed: To forward the response to the cross-border bodies for information.

- ix. The Committee considered a response from the Minister to a query from the Committee for the Economy regarding VAT payable on PPE imported from the EU to Northern Ireland.

Agreed: To write to Minister of Finance & Minister of Health for clarification regarding payment of VAT on PPE from the date identified.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from Committee for the Economy to the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding the TEO Taskforce and taxi and coach operators being excluded from the COVID Restrictions Business Support Scheme Part 2.

Agreed: To note the correspondence from the Committee for the Economy to First Minister and deputy First Minister re student mental health, welfare and well-being.

The Committee noted the Information Request to the Department.

The Committee considered the routine papers circulated on 11 December 2020.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme.

The Committee noted UKAS' agreement to provide oral evidence alongside the Fire Safety Engineering Research & Technology (FireSERT) on 13 January 2021.

Agreed: To schedule oral evidence from the Department on the Dormant Accounts Fund.

Agreed: To schedule oral evidence from the National Lottery Community Fund.

Agreed: The Committee is content with the draft Forward Work Programmes for January – April 2021.

13. Any Other Business

There were no additional items of business.

14. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting is on **Wednesday 13 January 2021 at 2:00pm** in the **Senate Chamber**.

The meeting adjourned at 15:49

Dr Steve Aiken MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance
13 January 2021