



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 18 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
Mr Philip McGuigan MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

By Teleconference: Ms Jemma Dolan 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)

The meeting commenced at 14:02 in public session

1. Apologies

None

2. Declaration of Interests

Dr Steve Aiken declared an interest as a ratepayer.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 11 November 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 11 November 2020.

4. Matters Arising

Amendment to the Building Regulations (NI) 2012 - Expert Witnesses

The Committee considered a proposal to contact a number of additional witnesses to ask them to provide oral evidence.

Agreed: To approach additional witnesses to ask if they are able to give oral evidence on 25 November.

Agreed: To commission research from RaISe to establish what the governments of England, Scotland and Wales are proposing or have been undertaking with regards to amendments to equivalent building regulations.

VAT payable on PPE imported from the EU

The Committee considered the correspondence to the Minister of Finance from the Committee for the Economy with regards to this matter.

Agreed: As a matter of urgency, to ask the Department to provide details of any other sectors that are likely to attract VAT when brought to Northern Ireland from GB.

Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill Notice of Amendments

The Committee noted an amendment to the Bill for Consideration Stage

5. SL1 The Rate Relief (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulation (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Official joined the meeting at 14:11

- Ian Snowden, Chief Executive of Land and Property Services, DoF.

Issues discussed included: the number of winners/losers with this scheme; the uniqueness to Northern Ireland; other outside influences that impact on this rebate.

The Committee considered the SL1 –The Rate Relief (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) 2020. The purpose of the draft Rule to which this SL1 letter refers, will be to amend the Rate Relief Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 (“the principal Regulations”) to provide that one-off payments (payments in lieu of notice and holiday pay) are disregarded when Rate Rebate awards are being determined. The proposed rule provides that one off payments, for payments in lieu of notice and/or holiday pay in lieu of holidays not taken, will be disregarded for claimants. The rule is subject to Negative Resolution Assembly procedure.

Agreed: That the Committee has considered Department of Finance’s proposal for subordinate legislation The Rate Relief (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the policy implications of the of the proposed legislation at this stage.

Philip McGuigan declared an interest through engagement with the LPS with regards to constituency work

6. Oral Evidence: Land and Property Services, Department of Finance

The Officials joined the meeting at 14:18

- Ian Snowden, Chief Executive of Land and Property Services, DoF.
- Christine Farrell, The Registrar of Titles (for Fees Order only)
- Judith Andrews, Director of Revenues and Benefits, Land & Property Service, DoF

Issues discussed included: Fees Order not linked to contracts; 14 contenders for the new contract; unknown until the stages of the process, the activity in the market and analysis is complete; buoyancy is down around £4m compared to 2019; the extent of the surplus; and the allocation of surplus funds.

Christine Farrell left the meeting at 14.43

Judith Andrews joined the meeting 14.43

Issues discussed include: background to the scheme; the roles played by Department of Finance and Department for the Economy; complexities associated with businesses with more than one property; payments made to Landlords and not to tenants; third-

party authorisation form; issues relating to rating of renewable energy installations; reasons for ineligible payments; and steps being taken to recover ineligible payments.

Agreed: The Department to provide additional information on a range of related issues.

Maoliosa McHugh left the meeting at 15:52

Agreed: The Committee to consider further the process which permits businesses such as renewable energy generators to avail of the Small Business Rate Relief.

Agreed: To schedule oral evidence from Land and Property Services (on the scope of the policy of the Small Business Rates Relief Scheme with LPS to assist the Committee in considering how such relief is calculated for recipients operating profitable energy efficient equipment such as wind turbines or anaerobic digesters.

The Committee moved into closed session at 15:55

The Committee considered the issues relating to Fraud within LPS.

The Committee moved into public session at 16:20

Issues discussed included: staffing levels in LPS; impact of the Voluntary Exit Scheme on LPS; difficulties in recruiting permanent staff at some grades; staff shortages in ICT and digital services.

The Officials left the meeting at 16:28

7. Written Evidence: Department of Finance Superannuation and Other Allowances Pension Schemes Statement for the year ended 31 March 2020

The Committee noted the Superannuation and Other Allowances Pension Schemes Statement.

8. Written Evidence: Westminster Hansard Report - International Trade Committee Oral evidence - UK Freeports

The Committee noted the Hansard Report for the International Trade Committee's oral evidence session regarding UK Freeports.

Agreed: To commission RaISe to undertake research to establish which jurisdiction, the UK or the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol, would be likely to have primacy should Northern Ireland apply for Freeport status.

9. Chairperson's Business

The Committee noted the Minister of Finance's Oral Statement (NSMC) on SPECIAL EU Programmes.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a response from NISRA regarding Annual Report and Accounts.

Agreed: To forward the relevant points raised by NISRA to the Northern Ireland Civil Service Human Resources (NICSHR) team for a response to the relevant issues highlighted.

Agreed: To seek the Department's assessment of how the RAG status guidance can be strengthened to provide a clear and unambiguous differentiation between the red, amber and green statuses.

Agreed: To note the remaining items of correspondence

- ii. From the Committee for the Executive Office regarding Brexit – Future Relationship with the European Union
- iii. From the Committee for Infrastructure regarding Wrightbus and Ryse Hydrogen Briefing
- iv. From the Committee for the Economy to Department of Finance regarding TUI dispute around the extension of furlough
- v. From Committee for Communities to Department of Finance regarding Ulster Orchestra

Agreed: To note the information request to the Department and the Routine Papers circulated on Friday 13 November 2020.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme.

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

12. Any Other Business

None.

13. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting is on **Wednesday 25 November 2020 at 2:00pm in the Senate Chamber**

The meeting adjourned at 16.33

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