



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 21 OCTOBER 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 Maoliosa 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)

The meeting commenced at 14.01pm in public session

The Committee considered a revised draft agenda to include an emergency SL1.

Agreed: To proceed with the revised agenda.

1. Apologies

None

Maoliosa McHugh MLA declared an interest at Agenda Item 6 as a member of a Credit Union.

Dr Steve Aiken MLA declared an interest at Agenda Item 8 regarding an immediate family membership of Girlguiding Ulster.

2. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 14 October 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 14 October 2020.

3. Matters Arising

Minutes 7 October 2020

The Committee agreed a minor amendment to minutes of 7 October.

Expenditure under the sole authority of the Budget Act

Agreed: to schedule oral evidence with officials on the matter following Halloween Recess.

Agreed: to ask the Department to provide details of all items for which sole authority of the Budget Act was granted in each of the last 10 years and copies of the written approval for each.

Agreed: to give the Department the opportunity to correct the assurance given by officials at the evidence session on 14 October that appropriate approvals were in place.

Outcome October Monitoring

The Committee noted a letter from the Minister informing officials would not be in a position to provide oral evidence to the Committee at this meeting as scheduled due to the focus on the COVID-19 situation.

4. The impact of the Chancellor's decision to cancel the UK Budget on the Assembly Budget for 2021-22: Minister of Finance

The Minister and official joined the meeting at 14.07pm

- Mr Conor Murphy MLA, Minister of Finance.
- Ms Joanne McBurney, Budget Director, Department of Finance.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Issues discussed included: Comprehensive Spending Review and one-year budget; expected timeline for the UK Budget of late November, consultation and agreement on the Northern Ireland Budget 2021-2022; Treasury discussions on the flexibility of transferring capital to resource; the impact of Brexit including, the Northern Ireland Protocol and the Internal Market Bill; October Monitoring Round; State Aid; funding business and individuals not in mainstream funding programmes; SIB support to department's to manage loans from Financial Transaction Capital projects; the need for greater budget transparency; procedures for granting expenditure under sole authority of a Budget Act; and the development of the Procurement Board and Fiscal Council.

Agreed: To provide the Committee with a response on a range of issues.

The Minister and official left the meeting at 15.34pm

5. SR 2020/221 The Financial Assistance (Coronavirus) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Ian Snowden, Chief Executive of Land and Property Services, Department of Finance joined the meeting at 15.35pm

Issues discussed: changes to the SR since the Committee considered the SL on 7 October 2020 and the background to the SL1 The Financial Assistance (Coronavirus) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

The Committee considered SR 2020/221 The Financial Assistance (Coronavirus) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and the written response by the Department to changes since it was considered by the Committee on 7 October 2020. The purpose of Rule will be to implement a scheme which the Department has been designated to enact. The scheme implemented by the proposed Rule will provide financial assistance to businesses whose ability to trade is directly affected by the COVID-19 restrictions. The Regulations are subject to the negative resolution.

The official left the meeting at 16.07pm

Pat Catney MLA left the meeting at 16.07pm

Agreed: That the Committee for Finance has considered, 2020/221 The Financial Assistance (Coronavirus) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report, has no objection to the rule

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to agenda item 13 to consider the urgent SL1.

13. SL1 – The Financial Assistance (Coronavirus) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered the SL1 –The Financial Assistance (Coronavirus) (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) 2020. The purpose of the draft Rule to which this SL1 letter refers, will be to implement the scheme which the Department has been designated to enact, and to revise the previous scheme to increase the level of assistance provided for the duration of the scheme. The rule is subject to Negative Resolution Assembly procedure.

Agreed: That the Committee has considered Department of Finance’s proposal for subordinate legislation The Financial Assistance (Coronavirus) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the policy implications of the of the proposed legislation at this stage.

6. SL1 Draft Administration of Estates (Small Payments) (Increase of Limit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020

Pat Catney MLA returned to the meeting at 16.09pm

The Committee considered the SL1 – Draft Administration of Estates (Small Payments) (Increase of Limit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020. The purpose of the draft Rule will increase the small payments limit, from £10,000 to £20,000, on the amount of money that may be released to the beneficiaries of a deceased person from that person’s estate by certain organisations without the need for a grant of probate. The rule is subject to subject to Affirmative Resolution Assembly procedure.

Agreed: That the Committee has considered Department of Finance’s proposal for subordinate legislation and Draft Administration of Estates (Small Payments) (Increase of Limit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 has no

objection to the policy implications of the of the proposed legislation at this stage.

7. RaISe paper – An overview of COVID-19 funding in NI and the economic implications

The Committee considered the RaISe paper – an overview of COVID-19 funding in Northern Ireland and the Economic Implications.

Agreed: To ask the Department for confirmation of the exact figure currently awaiting allocation/reallocated in-year for COVID-19.

Agreed: To ask the Department if there are any support schemes that are ready to go or in the advanced stages of development subject to receiving this funding.

8. Chairperson’s Business

The Committee considered the invitation to a Zoom event by Girlguiding Ulster on Wednesday 4 November 2020 to discuss barriers girls and young women experience.

Agreed: Dr Steve Aiken MLA would follow-up in his capacity as an MLA.

9. Correspondence

i. The Committee considered from the Committee for the Economy to the Minister of Finance regarding financial support for those who have to self-isolate.

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

ii. The Committee noted from the Committee for the Economy to the Minister of Finance regarding the impact of the new Covid-19 restrictions.

iii. The Committee noted from Committee for Communities to the Minister of Finance regarding Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) and impact of COVID-19.

iv. The Committee noted the Department’s response to the Committee for the Economy regarding Disposal of Public Funds.

Agreed: to note the following correspondence:

- v. From the Committee for Communities regarding Solace NI Briefing Update.
- vi. from the Health Committee regarding PPE ‘make and buy’ in Scotland.

- vii. Departmental response to the Audit Committee regarding Budget plans of NIAC, NIAO and NIPSO.
- viii. From the Committee for Communities to Minister of Finance regarding Retail NI briefing.
- ix. From the Committee for Communities to Minister of Finance regarding Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL) Briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the information request to the Department.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: to schedule into the Forward Work Programme for the 4 November the October Monitoring Round oral evidence session.

Agreed: to receive a presentation from the RaISe Public Finance Scrutiny Unit in advance of the oral evidence session in order to provide context.

Agreed: to consider the draft Report of the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill on 4 November.

Agreed: to locate a letter to the Bill sponsor from the Department of Justice in relation to the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

Agreed: to receive papers for the 4 November meeting on Friday 23 October.

Agreed: to receive the written analysis and RaISe presentation on the Forecast Outturn Quarterly Report on 2 December.

Agreed: to consider the Department's paper for the proposed PEACE PLUS programme at the meeting on 4 November and to schedule oral evidence from departmental officials on the proposals on 11 November.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

11. Any Other Business

There was no any other business.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 4 November 2020 at 2:00pm in the Senate Chamber.

The meeting adjourned at 16.20pm

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