



**COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

WEDNESDAY 7 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 Maolíosa 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 Aidan Stennett (Research Officer, RaISe) (for Agenda Item 4 only  
by teleconferencing)  
Ms Eileen Regan (Senior Research Officer, RaISe) (For Agenda Item 5  
only)

*The meeting commenced at 14.02pm in public session*

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. Philip McGuigan to the Committee.

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

*Agreed:* To proceed with the revised agenda.

### **1. Apologies**

There were no apologies.

The Committee noted that Jim Allister indicated that he may be late.

The Committee noted that, under Temporary Standing Order 115(6) – Jim Allister MLA delegated his authority to vote to Dr. Steve Aiken MLA.

### **2. Draft Minutes**

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 30 September 2020.

*Agreed:* Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 30 September 2020.

### **3. Matters Arising**

The Committee considered the draft letter to Executive Ministers regarding Departmental Bids for Capital and Resource Funding during pandemics

*Agreed:* To make a minor amendment to the draft letter and to issue the amended letter and template to all ministers.

### **4. Oral Presentation: e-Estonia Report, Research & Library Services**

*The researcher joined the meeting at by teleconferencing at 14.06pm*

The Committee received a presentation from Mr Aidan Stennett, Researcher, RaISe, based on the paper the Preliminary Consideration of e-Government in Estonia. The Committee also considered an e-Estonia Report from the Enterprise Shared Services (ESS), Department of Finance.

Issues discussed included: cyber security, digital identity cards, data ethnics, rural connectivity, economic benefit/costs and digital divides.

*Jim Allister joined the meeting at 14.37pm*

*The Researcher left the meeting at 14.51pm*

*Agreed:* To investigate opportunities to engage with the Estonia Government and businesses on the electronic delivery of public services.

*Agreed:* To ask the Department to provide information on what assistance was provided to Northern Ireland and Ireland to develop online material and resources that were used to help older people get online, and to assist those in rural areas.

## **5. Oral Presentation: Dilapidation Payments, Research & Library Service**

*The Senior Researcher joined the meeting at 14.51pm*

The Committee received a presentation by Ms Eileen Regan, Senior Researcher, RaISe, on a RaISe paper on the Department of Finance and Dilapidations Claims – An Overview.

Issues discussed included: the complexity of the dilapidation process, the Lease Management Working Group, the role of Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and the need for legal and expert opinion.

*The Senior Researcher left the meeting at 15.36pm*

*Agreed:* To schedule oral evidence from the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors in the Forward Work Programme

## **6. SR 2020/209: The Business Tenancies (Coronavirus) (Restriction on Forfeiture: Relevant Period) (Northern Ireland) (Amendment (No.2) Regulations 2020**

The Committee considered the SR 2020/209 – The Business Tenancies (Coronavirus) (Restriction on Forfeiture: Relevant Period) (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020. The purpose of the draft Rule is Section 83 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 provides that a right of re-entry or forfeiture, under a relevant business tenancy, for non-payment of rent may not be enforced, by action or otherwise, during the relevant period. “Relevant period” is currently defined in subsection (7) as the period starting with Royal Assent and ending with 30th September 2020. This Draft rule would extend the “relevant period”, for the purposes of section 83 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, to 31st December 2020.

*Agreed:* “That the Committee for Finance has considered SR 2020/209: The Business Tenancies (Coronavirus) (Restriction on Forfeiture: Relevant Period) (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 and, subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule’

#### **7. Written Evidence: Main Estimates and Budget (No.3) Bill**

The Committee noted the written evidence on Main Estimates and Budget (No.3) Bill.

#### **8. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) Annual Report and Accounts 2019-2020**

The Committee considered the Annual Report and Accounts 2019-2020 from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)

*Agreed:* To ask NISRA to provide a written response regarding a number of issues raised on the Annual Report and Accounts 2019-2020

#### **9. Department of Finance - Public Income and Expenditure Account for year ended 31 March 2020**

The Committee noted the Public Income and Expenditure Account for year ended 21 March 2020

#### **10. Chairperson’s Business**

The Committee noted that Mr Seán Lynch MLA has left the Committee for Finance.

*Agreed:* The Chairperson to write to Mr Lynch to thank him for his contribution to the Committee for Finance.

The Committee noted a letter and Ministerial Statement from the Minister regarding upcoming spending review and fiscal flexibilities

## **11. SL1 – The Financial Assistance (Coronavirus) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

*The Official joined the meeting at 15.41pm*

- Mr Ian Snowden, Chief Executive, Land & Property Services, DoF

Issues discussed included: the urgency of the subordinate legislation, the role of the Department of Finance in administering the financial assistance and the success of Land & Property in administering previous funding, the cost and awareness of the subordinate legislation is subject to change.

*The official left the meeting at 16.10pm*

The Committee considered the SL1 – The Financial Assistance (Coronavirus) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020. The purpose of the draft Rule will be to implement the scheme which the Department has been designated to enact and the proposed scheme implemented by the new draft Rule will provide financial assistance to businesses whose ability to trade is directly affected by the restrictions

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

## **12. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted the letter from Dr. Steve Aiken to the Speaker and Chairs of other Assembly statutory committees regarding UK Internal Market Bill.
- ii. The Committee considered the response by the Department to General Register Office NI letter to Churches.

*Agreed:* To seek a more complete explanation from the General Register Office NI including how and why the letter was sent to churches.

*Agreed:* To receive a copy of the follow-up letter to Churches apologising for the mistake.

- iii. The Committee considered a response from Committee for the Economy and Minister for the Economy regarding Travel Industry & COVID-19 financial support.

*Agreed:* To write to the First and deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy to ask if there have been any bids for funding for travel agents.

- iv. The Committee considered response from the Department in relation to financial support to the Association of Northern Ireland Travel Agents.

*Agreed:* To ask the Minister for a transcription of the meeting with the Association of Northern Ireland Travel Agents.

*Agreed:* To inform the Minister that the First and deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy have been asked if any bids for funding for travel agents have been made.

- v. The Committee considered response from the Northern Ireland Audit Office on its Northern Ireland Budget Process report.

*Agreed:* To forward to the Department in order to inform the development of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the budget process.

- vi. The Committee noted from the Committee of the Economy regarding Personal Protective Equipment 'Make and Buy' in Scotland.

- vii. The Committee considered response from the Department to the request for information on the review of Arm's Length Bodies.

*Agreed:* To ask the Department to provide oral evidence on the outcome of the review as soon as it becomes available.

- viii. The Committee considered from Kingspan Insulation Limited regarding the Department for Finance's consultation on amending The Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

*Agreed:* To receive copies of all consultation responses immediately after the closing date; to commission research to identify an academic expert; to seek the views of expert bodies; and to schedule evidence sessions post consultation and inform those who have written what the Committee of the Committee's approach.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the following:

- ix. Departmental response regarding consultation timescale on amending building regulations
- x. Departmental response regarding Department's Main Estimate Position
- xi. From the Department regarding Main Estimates and Budget (No. 3) Bill
- xii. From the Committee for the Economy to Department of Finance regarding Disposal of Public Funds

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the information request to the Department and routine papers circulated on 25 September and 2 October 2020.

### **13. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a future oral evidence session with Land & Property Services (LPS)

*Agreed:* To ask the Department to provide a written response on issues raised in advance of an oral evidence session with Land & Property Services

The Committee considered the Minister's response to the request for information on EU exit related matters which may impact on the Committee's work programme

*Agreed:* To forward to the EU Affairs Manager and the Committee for the Economy.

The Committee considered the Commons International Trade Committee is taking evidence on free ports from the Strategic Policy Division, Department of Finance and the Federation of Small Businesses.

*Agreed:* To receive the Hansard report of the evidence session for consideration.

The Committee noted the Minister would be attending the meeting on 21 October to provide oral evidence on details of the impact of the cancellation of the UK Budget on the timing, content and opportunity for Committee for Finance scrutiny and consultation on the Assembly Budget for 2021-22.

The Committee considered oral evidence sessions in relation to public sector reform and other Future Items of the Forward Work Programme.

*Agreed:* To start scheduling oral evidence sessions on civil service reform as outlined in the Committee's operational plan.

The Committee considered a workshop on Effective Questioning/Questioning Skills.

*Agreed:* To receive more information on the outline and content.

The Committee considered the clause by clause stage of the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

*Agreed:* To schedule formal clause by clause on the Bill at next week's Committee meeting.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the forward work programme.



## **12. Any Other Business**

The Committee noted a forthcoming event shared by Mr Pat Catney.

## **14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 14 October 2020 at 2:00pm in the Senate Chamber.

*The meeting moved to closed session at 17.10pm*

*Philip McGuigan left the meeting at 17.10pm*

## **15. Renewable Heat Incentive Disciplinary Process – Department Response**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to defer this matter until a response has been received from the Department to previous requests for information.

*The meeting adjourned at 17:16pm*

**Dr Steve Aiken, OBE MLA**  
**Chairperson**  
**Committee for Finance**  
**7 October 2020**