



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

2 March 2022

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Keith Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Pat Catney MLA
Ms Jemma Dolan MLA
Ms Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Philip McGuigan MLA

Apologies: Dr Steve Aiken MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stephen Magee (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Angela McParland (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2:30pm in open session

Keith Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson) chaired the Committee meeting.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

Matthew O'Toole delegated his vote to Pat Catney, under Temporary Standing Order 115(6).

Philip McGuigan had indicated that, should he have to leave the meeting early, he would delegate his vote to Maolíosa McHugh, under Temporary Standing Order 115(6).

Philip McGuigan joined at 2:32pm

2. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest at this time.

3. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 23 February 2022.

5. Matters Arising

There were no Matters Arising.

6. Construction Employers Federation (CEF) - Nearly Zero Energy Buildings (NZEB)

The representatives joined the meeting at 2.34pm.

- David Fry, Director of External Affairs, CEF; and
- David Magee, Antrim Construction.

The Committee noted the CEF response to the Department for Finance consultation on the uplift to relevant standards of Part F of the Building Regulations.

The representatives made their opening remarks to the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The chairperson thanked the representatives for their briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to NIE Networks seeking clarity on the reported 80% increase in single house connection costs and an explanation as to why grid connections for small-scale domestic exports require upgrades.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive a joint oral briefing from the Department and the Northern Ireland Building Regulations Advisory Committee (NIBRAC) at its next meeting, on 9 March 2022.

7. SL1 The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered SL1 The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department, suggesting it explores a means of targeting resources away from those businesses which had seemingly benefited during the pandemic, e.g. off-licences and take-away businesses and redirecting additional support to those other businesses which had been badly impacted e.g. in the hospitality sector etc..

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the policy intention and for the Department to make the rule.

8. SL1 The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered SL1 The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the policy intention and for the Department to make the rule.

9. SL1 The Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered SL1 The Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity as to how a 'new business' is to be defined and whether existing businesses which relocated to vacant premises would be eligible for the support.

Agreed: Notwithstanding the above, the Committee agreed that it was content with the policy intention and for the Department to make the rule.

10. SL1 The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022

The following official joined the meeting at 3.02pm:

- Sharon Magee, Director of Rating Policy, LPS.

The official made an opening statement to the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The chairperson thanked the official for her briefing.

The Committee noted with surprise that the number of Automatic Telling Machines (ATMs) benefiting from the exemption was less than 50 and was subject to downward revision. The Committee also noted the vital importance of ATMs in rural areas where other banking services have been lost.

Jim Wells left the meeting at 3:20pm

The Committee considered SL1 The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister:

- indicating its concerns in respect of the rating valuation changes which are greatly reducing the number rural ATMs which benefit from the rating exemption;
- seeking a short written briefing explaining the criteria for ATMs that would or wouldn't be eligible for the exemption;
- seeking an up-to-date map showing the approximate location of rural ATMs which are/aren't eligible for the exemption; and
- suggesting that consideration be given to altering the definition of "rural" in order to ensure wider provision of these vital banking services.

Agreed: Notwithstanding the above, the Committee agreed that it was content with the policy intention and for the Department to make the rule.

11. SL1 The Rate Relief (Qualifying Age) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.05pm:

- Sharon Magee, Director of Rating Policy, LPS; and
- Teresa Murray, Rating Policy Division, LPS.

The officials made an opening statement to the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

The Committee considered SL1 The Rate Relief (Qualifying Age) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the policy intention and for the Department to make the rule.

12. SR The Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspections) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered the draft SR The Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspections) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Finance has considered the draft SR The Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspections) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

13. Chairpersons' Liaison Group (CLG) Report on Strengthening Committee Scrutiny

The Committee noted the CLG Report on Strengthening Committee Scrutiny.

Jim Wells rejoined the meeting at 3:29pm

14. Correspondence

- 14.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.
- 14.2 The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence providing information on Strategic Investment Board secondments to the Department and the related costs.
- 14.3 The Committee noted a Departmental response regarding Omicron support measures, advising that it believed that there are no non-Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) certified hotels. The Department clarified that it is for the Department for the Economy to bring forward a case for supporting B&Bs and guesthouses.
- 14.4 The Committee noted a Ministerial response stating that Casement Park and the sub-regional stadia are Executive flagship projects which will be the recipient of ring-fenced funding. The Minister declined to provide further information on Casement Park, as this is the subject of a judicial review.
- 14.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department for the Economy stating that a policy decision on the closure or otherwise of the Non-Domestic RHI scheme requires Executive agreement.
- 14.6 The Committee noted a response from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which reiterated a previous NIO statement and in which he declined to provide further information on Unique Circumstances funding.
- 14.7 The Committee noted a copy of a Ministerial response to the Committee for the Economy confirming that no new Levelling Up money for Northern Ireland has been identified and indicating limited progress in respect of the establishment of freeports.
- 14.8 The Committee considered its composite information request.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the composite request was an accurate and complete record of the Committee's outstanding information requests.

15. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme, as drafted.

16. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

17. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Finance will be at 2.00pm on Wednesday 9 March 2022 in the Senate and on Starleaf.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.33pm

**Dr Steve Aiken MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Finance
9 March 2022**