



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

6 October 2021

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Keith Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Pat Catney MLA
Mr Philip McGuigan MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:
Mr Jim Allister MLA
Ms Jemma Dolan MLA

Apologies: Jim Wells MLA

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stephen Magee (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
Eileen Regan (Senior Research Officer) - item 8 only



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Proceedings commenced at 2.00pm in closed session.

1. Legislative Consent Motion: Public Service Pensions and Judicial Offices Bill – written briefing

The Committee noted draft correspondence and a copy of the draft report on the proposed LCM.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Finance and to the House of Lords sponsor of the Bill indicating its concerns and seeking in the case of the former, assurances and in the case of the former and the latter, amendments to the primary legislation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include an excerpt from the minutes of the meeting of 6 October 2021 in its report and to order its report on the proposed LCM to be published as the Committee's 3rd report of this mandate.

Proceedings continued in open session from 2:03pm.

2. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above

No Members delegated authority to vote on their behalf for the duration of the meeting, under Temporary Standing Order 115(6).

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Chairperson's Business

4.1 RHI Disciplinary Issues



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The Chairperson reminded the Committee of its recent briefing on the RHI disciplinary process commenting on the notable absence of detail in respect of both individuals and the relevant decision-making processes for the review panels. The Chairperson also advised Members of a reference to “RHI Lessons Learned review papers” in a 2019 Departmental report into business cases and delegation limits.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking sight of the Terms of Reference for the RHI disciplinary review panels and all relevant documentation as well as the RHI Lessons Learned review papers.

Matthew O’Toole joined the meeting at 2:07pm

4.2 Multi-Year Budget Briefing

The Chairperson reminded Members that a 3 year Executive draft budget is being developed and is to be informed by the outcome of the Spending Review at the end of October 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Minister to brief the Committee on: the emerging budget development issues as soon as possible after the Spending Review outcome is known; and other relevant policy matters affecting the Executive.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 29 September 2021.

6. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

7. NICS Injury Benefit Scheme – oral Departmental briefing

Departmental officials joined the meeting at 2:10pm:



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Colette Heaney, Acting Director Pensions Division;

Margaret Coyle, Head of Policy and Legislation Branch; and

Finvola Harkin, Policy and Legislation Branch.

The Committee noted Departmental papers.

The Chairperson declared an interest as a member of Unite.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister indicating its concerns in respect of the lack of clarity in respect of the proposed changes to the NICS Injury Benefit Scheme including the definition of injury and seeking: further information on the suggestion that the Scheme was in some way not Section 75 compliant; information on the expected savings associated with proposed Scheme reforms; clarity on the number of claimants who are retired; and an explanation as to how and why Scheme costs were altered from AME to DEL in 2006.

**8. Financial Reporting (Departments and Pubic Bodies) Bill - Assembly
Research oral briefing**

Eileen Regan, Senior Research Officer joined the meeting at 3:10pm

The Committee noted the Assembly Research paper.

Jim Allister left the meeting at 3:44pm

The Chairperson thanked Eileen for her briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the Department for the Economy NDPBs that may be designated and the treatment of Translink. The Committee also agreed to forward the RalSe paper to the Department for comment.



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9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 The Committee noted the interim response from the Department on October Monitoring.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity as to whether approximately £11m of repaid rates rebates was lost to the Executive.

9.3 The Committee noted the September investing activity report for the Department.

9.4 The Committee noted the public income and expenditure account statement for 2020-21.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking: an explanation in respect of the increase to temporary investments and other capital payments; and sight of the Government Accounts Branch internal audit report.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to commission RaISe to brief on these matters as part of the consideration of the Budget (No.1) Bill in 2022.

9.5 The Committee noted a copy of the 2019 Departmental review report on business cases.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking: clarification in respect of the increase in delegation in respect of consultancy; and an explanation as to how the departments and business cases are selected for test drilling.

Philip McGuigan left the meeting at 4:00pm

9.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice to the Minister in respect of the Personal Injury Discount Rate.

9.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education in respect of the role of the Fiscal Council.



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9.8 The Committee noted a copy of the Fiscal Commission presentation on the devolution of tax-varying powers.

9.9 The Committee considered correspondence from the Finance and Public Administration Committee of the Scottish Parliament.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Clerk to make arrangements for co-operation between the Committee and its counterparts in Scotland and Wales.

9.10 The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence in respect of fire safety building legislation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department urging it to speedily bring forward building fire safety legislation.

9.11 The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence in respect of NICS recruitment and selection.

Mr O'Toole indicated concern that the process of revising NICS recruitment and selection was taking longer than expected.

9.12 The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence in respect of the Shared Prosperity Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to brief the Committee on the prospectus and investment framework document for the Shared Prosperity Fund.

9.13 The Committee noted Departmental correspondence regarding Unique Circumstances funding.

9.14 The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of a NISRA consultation on the publication of census data.

9.15 The Committee considered a revision to the code for Special Advisers.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the role of the Minister in respect of the application of the NICS disciplinary process for Special Advisers.

9.16 The Committee noted the Permanent Secretary's speaking notes for the deferred briefing on the Business Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to cancel the relevant Business Plan briefing.

9.17 The Committee noted a Chairpersons' Liaison Group paper on committee and plenary workloads.

9.18 The Committee noted a report by Pivotal.

9.19 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee on Procedures on the LCM process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee on Procedures indicating that the 15 working day time limit is insufficient for the consideration of LCMs.

9.20 The Committee noted correspondence from the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee on a proposed EU Energy Tax Directive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister seeking his commentary on the proposed EU Energy Tax Directive and its possible implications for domestic and commercial consumers in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee thanking it for providing this information and commending it for its work.

9.21 The Committee considered the composite information request.

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



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10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed to revise its forward work programme in order to reschedule a briefing from the Department on its annual report and accounts 2020-21 and to accommodate a briefing from HOCS on 17 November 2021.

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

11. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further information on covid support schemes for travel agents in Northern Ireland.

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Finance will be at 2pm on Wednesday 13 October 2021 in the Senate and on Starleaf.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:15pm.



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Dr Steve Aiken MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Finance
6 October 2021