



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Finance

### Minutes of Proceedings

9 February 2022

**Meeting Location:** The Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

**Present:** Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Keith Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Pat Catney MLA  
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA  
Mr Jim Wells MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Mr Jim Allister MLA  
Mr Philip McGuigan

**Apologies:** Ms Jemma Dolan MLA  
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

**In Attendance:** Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)  
Ms Carla Campbell (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Stephen Magee (Clerical Supervisor)  
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

*The meeting commenced at 2:00pm in public session*

## **1. Apologies**

Apologies were as indicated above.

Jemma Dolan delegated her vote to Maolíosá McHugh, under Temporary Standing Order 115(6).

## **2. Declaration of Interests**

Steve Aiken declared an interest indicating that Agenda Item 9 referred to an issue raised with him by a constituent.

There were no other 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 2 February 2022.

## **5. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **6. Oral Evidence – Budget Bill, Spring Supplementary Estimates – Department of Finance**

Departmental officials joined the meeting at 2:02pm.

- Joanne McBurney, Budget Director, Public Spending Directorate.
- Barry Armstrong, Head of Supply Division, Department of Finance.
- Roisin Kelly, Supply Officer, Department of Finance.

The Committee noted the Departmental briefing paper; the Spring Supplementary Estimates; the Vote on Account Estimate; the Estimates Memoranda; the Budget Bill and Explanatory and Financial Memorandum; and the January forecast and outturn information.

Pat Catney joined the meeting at 2:04pm.

The officials briefed the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance seeking clarity on any previous building cladding Barnett consequential and the aspects of the Hart report on Historical Institutional Abuse which require sole authority of the Budget Act.

## **7. Oral Evidence – 2021-22 Spending and 2022-25 Draft Budget – Department of Finance**

Departmental officials joined the meeting at 2:43pm.

- Stewart Barnes, Finance and Corporate Services Director, Department of Finance.
- Janis Marynowski, Head of Financial Management Branch, Department of Finance.

The Committee noted the Departmental briefing paper and Estimates Memorandum.

The officials briefed the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance seeking clarity on the status of Stormont House; the timeline for its return to the NICS Estate; and the use to which it will be put by departments.

## **8. 2022-25 Draft Budget – Motion for Plenary Debate**

The Committee considered the following motion for debate in the Assembly:

*“That this Assembly takes note of the Committee for Finance and NI Fiscal Council reports on the 2022-25 draft budget; and calls on the Minister of Finance to give due regard to their findings”*

The Committee considered amending the motion to add:

*“and also condemns recent actions of the DUP in collapsing the Executive, which jeopardises the passage of the multi-year budget and fails to deliver on Executive commitments to prioritise health, including fully funding elective care, rebuilding cancer care and mental health strategies”.*

The Committee divided on the amendment to the motion.

AYES	NOES	ABSTAINED
Jemma Dolan	Steve Aiken	Pat Catney
Philip McGuigan	Jim Allister	
Maolíosa McHugh	Keith Buchanan	
	Jim Wells	

*Jemma Dolan’s vote was cast on her behalf by Maolíosa McHugh under Temporary Standing Order 115(6).*

The amendment was negatived.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the motion as drafted.

The Committee noted that Members were free to submit their own amendments to the motion to the Business Office.

## **9. Written Briefing – Subordinate Legislation – Hospitality Support**

The Committee noted that the Department proposed to bring forward a statutory rule on Financial Assistance (Coronavirus: Hospitality) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Steve Aiken declared an interest as he had been lobbied on this issue.

Maolíosa McHugh declared an interest as he had been lobbied on this issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance seeking clarity on the treatment of non-Northern Ireland Tourist Board certified hotels and all guesthouses and Bed and Breakfasts.

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

## **10. Correspondence**

### 10.1 Correspondence Index

The Committee noted the index of the 11 received items.

### 10.2 Impact of Executive Collapse

The Committee noted a Departmental response providing some clarity in respect of the impact of the resignation of the First Minister. The Committee noted that: the drafting of the Fiscal Council legislation can not commence; an investment strategy can't be agreed for the Shared Prosperity Fund; the settling of PSNI holiday pay disputes may not be agreed; and the "back in business" scheme (where businesses enjoy a rates holiday if they occupy vacant premises) may also be delayed. The Committee also noted that the Architects Act LCM can also not progress. However, it was also noted that it appeared the Regional Rates for 2022 can be set and the rates holiday in 2022-23 will also go ahead, as planned subject to Assembly approval.

### 10.3 NICS Code of Ethics

The Committee noted a copy of the revised NICS code of ethics which was published on 1 February 2022.

### 10.4 Charitable Rates Exemption

The Committee noted a Departmental response to Committee queries regarding the treatment of the Reserve Forces and Cadet Association in NI in respect of charitable rates exemptions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this response to the original correspondent.

### 10.5 Legal Services Oversight Commissioner

The Committee noted a Departmental response to Committee queries regarding delays in secondary legislation to establish the Legal Services Oversight Commissioner. The Committee noted that relevant legislation was expected to be brought forward in the autumn of 2022.

Steve Aiken declared an interest as he was to meet with the Law Society NI and Bar Council NI in the coming days.

### 10.6 Deaths Abroad

The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Justice to the Finance Minister calling for the establishment of a central register of NI overseas deaths.

#### 10.7 ESF Match Funding Shortfall

The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for the Economy to the Finance Minister calling for £8m of unspent January Monitoring money to be used to provide matching funding for European Social Fund projects.

#### 10.8 Pork Processing Compensation

The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Agriculture, the Environment and Rural Affairs to the AERA Minister calling for compensation for farmers and processors owing to staff shortages in the pork processing industry.

#### 10.9 Period Poverty

The Committee considered a copy of a response from the Minister of Finance to the Committee for Education regarding a Ministerial Direction relating to the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill.

Pat Catney declared an interest as the sponsor of the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek sight of the original correspondence that the Minister of Finance was replying to.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Bill Sponsor should seek clarity on the response from the Minister for Education in respect of meeting the costs of the free provision of period products.

#### 10.10 EU Energy Taxation Directive

The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to the House of Lords Committee indicating that in respect of the energy taxation directive, no formal update was available.

#### 10.11 UK in a Changing Europe Report

The Committee noted a copy of a report on UK Government policy post-Brexit.

#### 10.12 Census 2021

The Committee noted notice from NISRA that key statistics from the census will be published in autumn 2022.

#### 10.13 Composite Information Request

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

## **11. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered a draft of its Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give further consideration to a motion on RHI at its meeting of 23 February 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek to schedule briefings on: social value in procurement and the work programme of the Strategic Investment Board; and in respect of the devolution of further tax varying powers to NI.

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

## **12. Any Other Business**

Philip McGuigan raised issues in relation to the ban on the use of red diesel in agriculture.

Members recorded considerable concerns on the impact on charitable events; ploughing championships; the construction industry; and red diesel reserves at power stations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Finance seeking an update on the ban on the use of red diesel and calling for appropriate mitigations.

The was no other business.

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

The next meeting of the Committee for Finance will be at 2pm on Wednesday 16 February 2022 in the Senate and on Starleaf.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40pm.

**Dr Steve Aiken MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Finance**  
**16 February 2022**