



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

16 March 2022

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Keith Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister MLA
Mr Pat Catney MLA
Matthew O'Toole MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Jemma Dolan MLA
Mr Philip McGuigan MLA
Mr Maoliosa McHugh

Apologies: Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Jim Wells MLA

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

The meeting commenced at 2:03pm in open session.

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest at this time.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Accelerated Passage

The acting chairperson advised Members of correspondence from Mark Durkan MLA in respect of accelerated passage for The Emergency Exceptional Circumstances (Energy Prices and Other Contingencies) Bill.

Members expressed differing views in respect of the efficacy of the Bill and the use of accelerated passage.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, as the appropriate committee in respect of Standing Order 42(3) was likely to be the Committee for the Executive Office, it would await feedback from that Committee on the Bill and subsequently decide if it was to express a related view.

3.2 Informal Meeting with Scottish and Welsh Counterpart Committees

The acting chairperson advised the Committee of the Chairperson's informal meeting with counterparts from the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Senate, held on Monday 14 March 2022. Members were advised that the informal meeting included discussions on scrutiny matters of mutual interest such as: Levelling Up funds; replacement for EU funding; fiscal frameworks and national performance frameworks.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 9 March 2022.

5. Matters Arising

Members noted the latest report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules (ESR) and reference by the ESR to a number of drafting errors in SR 2021/299 The General Register Office (Fees) Amendment Order (Northern Ireland) 2021 and SR 2022/77 The Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the relevant aspects of the ESR's report.

6. Strategic Investment Board (SIB) work programme and social value in public procurement

Officials joined the meeting at 2.14pm.

- Brett Hannam, Chief Executive, SIB; and
- Lisa Beers, Senior Social Value Advisor, SIB.

The Committee noted a SIB brief.

The officials made their opening remarks to the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Matthew O'Toole joined the meeting at 2:26pm

The acting chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

7. Department of Finance (DoF) – 2022-2023 Spending Arrangements

Officials joined the meeting at 2.35pm.

- Joanne McBurney, Budget Director, DoF; and
- Jeff McGuinness, Head of Central Expenditure Division, DoF.

The Committee noted Departmental papers and a written Ministerial statement on the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Bill.

The officials made their opening remarks to the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The acting chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

Jim Allister left the meeting at 3:08pm

8. Nearly Zero Energy Buildings (NZEB) Guidance

Witnesses joined the meeting at 3.09pm.

- Sharon Smyth, Construction and Procurement Directorate, DoF;
- Ronan Casey, SPTO and Part F Policy Lead, DoF;
- David Algie, Building Service, Engineering and Energy, NIBRAC;
- Jason Hewins, Technical sub-committee support, NIBRAC;
- Ronan McKeown, Customer and Market Services Director, NIE; and
- Chris Gamble, Connections Development Manager, NIE.

The Committee noted a Departmental paper and a NIE paper.

The witnesses made their opening remarks to the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The acting chairperson thanked the witnesses for their briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to indicate concern in respect of the general increase in related and unrelated building costs but support for the energy efficiency and carbon dioxide reduction measures set out in Option 3 of the NZEB guidance.

9. SR 2022/80 The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered SR 2022/80 The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

The Committee noted related Departmental correspondence.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Finance has considered SR 2022/80 The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule.

10. SR 2022/81 The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered SR 2022/81 The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Finance has considered SR 2022/81 The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule.

11. SR 2022/82: The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered SR 2022/82 The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Jim Allister rejoined the meeting at 3:33pm

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Finance has considered SR 2022/82 The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule.

12. SR 2022/90: The Rates Relief (Lone Pensioner Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered 2022/90: The Rates Relief (Lone Pensioner Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Finance has considered 2022/90: The Rates Relief (Lone Pensioner Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule.

13. SR 2022/92: The Rate Relief (Qualifying Age) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered SR 2022/92: The Rate Relief (Qualifying Age) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Finance has considered 2022/92: The Rate Relief (Qualifying Age) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

14. SL1 The Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered SL1 The Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (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.

15. Correspondence

15.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

15.2 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office to the Minister, seeking feedback on the Community Renewal Fund.

15.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly EU Affairs Office providing a copy of a House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee report, including reference to the potential impact of EU rules on minimum VAT levels on Northern Ireland owing to the Protocol.

Members exchanged views on the impact of the Protocol and the setting of VAT rates.

15.4 The Committee noted a response from the Minister for the Economy to the Committee on funding for the North West 200 and the Ulster Grand Prix.

15.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Head of the Civil Service on the reshuffle of Permanent Secretaries.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Head of the Civil Service asking: if the reshuffle was by direction or request; and if the reshuffle of Permanent Secretaries is considered best practice in this or other jurisdictions.

15.6 The Committee noted a call for submissions on the review of Invest NI.

15.7 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure to the Treasury on fuel duty rebates etc..

15.8 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the cost of living crisis and energy costs.

15.9 The Committee considered further correspondence from an individual regarding the monitoring of Section 75 controls in respect of departmental financial allocations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity as to its role in monitoring the application of Section 75 controls in other departments.

15.10 Composite Information Request

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

15.11 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department in respect of SR 2022/48 The Marriage, Civil Partnership and Civil Registration (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

15.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department in respect of SR 2022/76 The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 including a map of the ATMs that receive the exemption.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking a revised map which shows all rural ATMs including those which do not receive the rates exemption.

16. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

The Committee noted that the Northern Ireland Fiscal Commission has confirmed that its final report will not be produced until after the Assembly election in May.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to revise its Forward Work Programme and reschedule the related Fiscal Commission briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should contact Dr Brownlow QUB and determine if his related briefing should also be rescheduled until the next mandate.

17. Any Other Business

The Committee considered its motion on the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Non-Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) disciplinary process and NICS RHI Action Plan, scheduled for Tuesday 23 March 2022. The Committee noted related papers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to distribute the related papers to all MLAs in advance of the meeting and to publish them on the Committee webpage on the day of the debate.

18. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The final meeting of the Committee for Finance for the current mandate will be at 2.00pm on Wednesday 23 March 2022 in the Senate and on Starleaf.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.54pm

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