



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

6 December 2021

Meeting Location: The Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Keith Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
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: Mr Steve Aiken MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister MLA

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



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Proceedings commenced at 2:15pm in public session.

In the absence of the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson assumed the Chair.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

Jim Allister delegated authority to vote on his behalf to Jim Wells under Temporary Standing Order 115(6).

Jemma Dolan delegated authority to vote on her behalf to Maolíosa McHugh under Temporary Standing Order 115(6) in the event of her absence or non-attendance.

Philip McGuigan delegated authority to vote on his behalf to Maolíosa McHugh under Temporary Standing Order 115(6) in the event of his absence.

2. Declaration of Interests

Maolíosa McHugh declared an interest as a member of the Gaelic Athletic Association.

Philip McGuigan declared an interest as a member of the Gaelic Athletic Association and a member of Cycling Ireland.

Jim Wells declared an interest as a regular attendee at Windsor Park.

3. Non-Domestic Rates Valuations (Coronavirus) Bill – Written Briefing

The Committee noted papers relating to the Non Domestic Rates Valuations (Coronavirus) Bill and tabled correspondence from the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council.



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4. Non-Domestic Rates Valuations (Coronavirus) Bill – Oral Evidence – Hospitality Ulster and Northern Ireland Hotels Federation

The witnesses joined the meeting at 2:18pm.

- Mr Colin Neill, Chief Executive, Hospitality Ulster.
- Ms Janice Gault, Chief Executive, NI Hotels Federation.

The witnesses briefed the Committee.

Matthew O’Toole joined the meeting at 2:34pm.

Pat Catney joined the meeting at 2:45pm.

Jemma Dolan joined the meeting at 2:52pm.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

5. Non-Domestic Rates Valuations (Coronavirus) Bill – Oral Evidence – Retail NI and Federation of Small Business NI

The witnesses joined the meeting at 3:00pm.

- Mr Glyn Roberts, Chief Executive, Retail NI.
- Mr Roger Pollen, Head of Federation of Small Businesses NI.

The witnesses briefed the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Philip McGuigan left the meeting at 3:16pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.



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6. Non-Domestic Rates Valuations (Coronavirus) Bill – Oral Evidence – NILGA and SOLACE NI

The witnesses joined the meeting at 4:00pm.

- Ms Karen Smyth, Head of Policy and Governance, NILGA.
- Mr JJ Tohill, SOLACE NI.

The witnesses briefed the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 4:22pm and delegated authority to vote on his behalf to Pat Catney under Temporary Standing Order 115(6).

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

7. Non-Domestic Rates Valuations (Coronavirus) Bill – Oral Evidence – Sporting Organisations

The witnesses joined the meeting at 4:32pm.

- Patrick Nelson, Chief Executive, Irish Football Association.
- Graham Fitzgerald, Finance Director, Irish Football Association.
- Jonny Petrie, Chief Executive, Ulster Rugby.
- Audrey Robinson, Head of Finance and Operations, Ulster Rugby.
- Brian McAvoy, Provincial Secretary and CEO, Gaelic Athletic Association.
- Stephen McGeehan, Gaelic Athletic Association.
- Brian Mallon, Head of Finance, Human Resources and Business Development, Gaelic Athletic Association.

The witnesses briefed the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.



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The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Pat Catney left the meeting at 4:46pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking:

- an explanation in respect of the rates valuation methodology for pubs, hotels and sporting stadii which appears to differ from the empty premises/hypothetical rent process which the Department previously explained.
- clarification as to whether the rates revaluation process will take account of recently reduced rents in the hospitality sector and improvements made to premises in response to covid restrictions including e.g. new beer gardens and additional pavement café seating.
- commentary on the proposals from stakeholders that the £50m Barnett consequential be targeted at particular sectors (possibly including district councils) with clearly defined criteria and scaled payments and that this would be made known prior to the passage of the Bill.
- commentary on the proposals from stakeholders that the provisions of the Bill be time bound or subject to a sunset clause so as to allow for changes to the valuation methodology in line with the evolving post-covid economic situation.
- clarification as to how the Department will distinguish between covid as a grounds for appeal and other matters including the impact on supply chain businesses which were not directly affected by covid restrictions and those businesses subject to wider covid economic impacts including e.g. reducing city footfall etc.
- commentary on the suggestion that the Bill might be amended such that the covid grounds for appeal would be removed only for those businesses that had been in receipt of substantial covid financial support in recent years.
- confirmation that the Department will improve its communications on covid and rates valuation issues to stakeholders including the provision of further



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information to district councils on the breakdown of the estimated £255m loss of rates income.

- an update on the numbers of non-domestic rates appeals.
- confirmation that the Bill will apply to the current coronavirus pandemic only and not any other pandemic including e.g. bird flu or other SARS infections.

8. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

9. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next regular meeting of the Committee for Finance will be at 2pm on Wednesday 8 December 2021 in the Senate and on Starleaf.

The next additional meeting of the Committee for Finance will be agreed at the meeting of Wednesday 8 December 2021.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:08pm.

Mr Steve Aiken MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Finance
15 December 2021