



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

8 December 2021

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 Matthew O'Toole MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

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

Apologies: None

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 2:03pm in public session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

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 1 December 2021.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Matthew O'Toole joined the meeting at 2:03pm.

6. Defamation Bill – Committee Stage – Oral Evidence from National Union of Journalists (NUJ)

The witness joined the meeting at 2:03pm.

- Professor Chris Frost, National Union of Journalists.



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The Committee noted the National Union of Journalists' submission to the Committee Stage of the Defamation Bill.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as Chairperson of the All Party Group on Press Freedom and Media Sustainability.

Professor Frost briefed the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Jemma Dolan joined the meeting at 2:15pm.

Jim Allister left the meeting at 2:36pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witness for his briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) seeking clarification on: the level of Independent Press Standards Organisation membership for Northern Ireland media organisations; changes (if any) to the insurance premiums for media organisations since the passage of the Defamation Act 2013; and the level of the Northern Ireland membership of NUJ and the number of complaints and sanctions for its Northern Ireland membership in respect of the NUJ code.

7. Defamation Bill – Committee Stage – Oral Evidence from Index on Censorship and English PEN

The witnesses joined the meeting at 2:54pm.

- Ms Jessica Ní Mhainín, Policy and Campaigns Manager, Index on Censorship.
- Mr Charlie Holt, UK Campaigns Advisor, English PEN.

The Committee noted a joint submission from the Index on Censorship and English PEN (Poets, Essayists and Novelists) to the Committee Stage of the Defamation Bill.



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The witnesses briefed the Committee.

Jim Wells joined the meeting at 3:11pm.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Jim Allister rejoined the meeting at 3:33pm.

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 3:36pm.

The session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

8. Defamation Bill – Committee Stage – Oral Evidence

The witness joined the meeting at 3:44pm.

- Mr Peter Girvan, Barrister.

The Committee noted Mr Girvan's submission to the Committee Stage of the Defamation Bill.

The witness briefed the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence

9.2 The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Finance advising Members that he will not be bringing forward a Legislative Consent Motion to the Assembly on the Westminster Commercial Rent



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(Coronavirus) Bill relating to mandatory mediation in respect of unpaid commercial rents.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce to seek comment on this response from the Minister for Finance.

9.3 Members considered correspondence from the Minister of Finance providing a copy of a report on a longitudinal study on the Public Sector Transformation Fund – i.e. the Public Sector Voluntary Exit Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss this correspondence with the Minister of Finance during his briefing to the Committee on 15 December 2021.

9.4 Members considered a response from the Department of Finance to the Committee's request for clarity on issues regarding the funding and governance of City Deals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share this response with the Committee for the Economy; the Committee for Infrastructure; and the Committee for Communities.

9.5 Members considered correspondence from the Minister of Finance sharing the Public Procurement Common Framework with the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the Public Procurement Common Framework at the Procurement Board briefing scheduled for February 2022.

9.6 Members considered correspondence from the Department of Finance providing an update on the banking forum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share this response with the Committee for the Economy and suggest that it engages with the All Party Group on Fair Banking and Finance.

9.7 Members considered the monthly spending outturn and forecast performance report for October 2021.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance seeking further information on the RHI closure fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the monthly spending outturn and forecast performance report for October 2021 with Assembly Research.

9.8 Members noted the Department of Finance capital activity report for November 2021.

9.9 Members considered correspondence from the Department of Finance providing further information on Financial Transactions Capital (FTC).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to the Department seeking information on the actual amounts of FTC paid to the actual projects.

9.10 Members noted a copy of a letter from the Audit Committee to the Department of Finance in respect of 2022-25 budgets for NIAO, NIPSO and NI Assembly Commission.

9.11 Members noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy to the Department of Finance seeking information on UK Government measures to tackle fuel poverty.

9.12 Members noted correspondence from the House of Lords European Affairs Sub-Committee on the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury regarding a proposed EU Directive and the interaction of the Protocol with the Emissions Trading Directive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to: the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs; the Committee for Infrastructure; and the Committee for the Economy advising of the useful information that the House of Lords Sub-Committee on the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland is supplying in relation to the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland.



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9.13 Members noted correspondence from Dr Mark Hanna commenting on evidence-taking by the Committee as part of the Committee Stage of the Defamation Bill.

9.14 Members noted correspondence from the Committee and Members Support Office providing notice of deaf awareness training for Members and party staff on 17 December 2021 and 22 January 2022.

9.15 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.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft of its Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to undertake an additional meeting on Monday 13 December 2021 to consider the Non-domestic Rates Valuations (Coronavirus) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee noted that the Budget Bill 2022 and Spring Supplementary Estimates papers are expected to be received by the Committee in early February 2022.

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

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.



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12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Finance will be an additional meeting at 2:15pm on Monday 13 December 2021 in the Senate and on Starleaf.

The next regular meeting of the Committee for Finance will be at 2pm on Wednesday 15 December 2021 in the Senate and on Starleaf.

The meeting moved into closed session at 4:43pm.

13. RHI Disciplinary Process – Written Briefing

The Committee noted restricted Department of Finance correspondence in relation to the RHI Disciplinary Process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (HOCS) seeking an update on the review of disciplinary processes which was instigated by the previous interim HOCS.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Finance: seeking unredacted versions of the information, previously provided; asking if the adapted disciplinary process had Ministerial/Executive approval; asking for the identity of the senior legally qualified person mentioned in the correspondence; seeking an oral briefing with the internal panel and the Department of Finance on the process.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00pm.

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