

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY, 3 OCTOBER 2012
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs MLA
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE MLA
Ms Megan Fearon MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr David McIlveen MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
Mr Gavin Moore (Bursary Student)
Mr Michael Potter (Assembly Researcher) (Agenda Item 10 only)

The meeting opened at 10.05am in public session.

Mr McQuillan left the meeting at 10.05am.

Agreed: that Agenda items 4, 5, 6 & 7 are recorded by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly website.

The Chairperson welcomed two new members to the Committee: Mr David McIlveen and Mr Peter Weir and their declaration of interests were noted.

Agreed: to write to Mr David Hilditch and Mr William Humphrey to thank them for their contribution to the work of the Committee.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Draft Minutes of Proceedings of 26 September 2012

Agreed: that the minutes are published on the Assembly website.

3. Matters Arising

Table of Requests for Information from the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP)

The Committee noted the table of requests for information from DFP which provided an update on any matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

Mr McQuillan joined the meeting at 10.09am.

Proposed Amendment to Superannuation Bill

The Committee considered a letter from the Department confirming that it is content to accept the principle of the Committee's proposed amendment to the Superannuation Bill and suggesting an alternative wording to that previously agreed by the Committee but which would achieve the same result.

Agreed: to change the wording of the proposed Committee amendment to read as follows:

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 32

Leave out "Before" and insert "The scheme shall be subject to negative resolution and before".

Rating Debt and Preferential Creditors

The Committee considered a letter from the Department on this subject.

Agreed: to commission research examining rating debt as a reason for insolvency and the merits of establishing rating debt as a preferential creditor.

Agreed: to consider scheduling an oral briefing from DFP on this subject in light of the research findings.

Mr McIlveen joined the meeting at 10.10am

NI Place Names Project

The Committee considered a secretariat paper on the request for the Committee to host the launch of a new version of the NI Place Names Project database which will be available online with the support of DFP's Land & Property Services (LPS).

Mrs Cochrane joined the meeting at 10.15am.

Agreed: to host the launch event as outlined in the secretariat paper.

It was agreed to consider agenda item Correspondence next.

4. Correspondence

Members noted the following items of correspondence:

- DFP: Update on the Public Service Pensions Bill;
- Assembly Research & Information Service paper on Shared Services (updated);
- Assembly Research & Information Service paper on The Quality of Financial Forecasting and improving Spending Control

Agreed: to forward this paper to the Department in advance of next week's session on this issue.

- NI Audit Office: Executive Summary of Report entitled "Collaborative Procurement and Aggregated Demand";

Agreed: that the Committee would be interested in pursuing this matter if the Public Accounts Committee decides not to include the issue within its work programme.

5. DFP Response to Committee Report on Devolution of Air Passenger Duty – Ministerial Evidence Session

The Committee took evidence from the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Sammy Wilson, MP MLA and the following DFP official: Mr Bill Pauley, Head of Strategic Policy, Central Finance Group. The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Committee noted the correspondence from the Department.

Mr McQuillan left the meeting at 10.37am

Mr McLaughlin left the meeting at 10.42am

Ms Fearon left the meeting at 10.42am

Mr McLaughlin joined the meeting at 10.44am

Ms Fearon joined the meeting at 10.45am

Mr McQuillan joined the meeting at 10.47am

Mr McIlveen left the meeting at 10.52am

Mr McIlveen joined the meeting at 10.58am

Agreed: that the Department will provide additional information as requested.

6. Air Passenger Duty (Setting the Rate) Bill – Pre-introductory Briefing and Request for Accelerated Passage - Ministerial Evidence Session

The Committee took evidence from the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Sammy Wilson, MP MLA and the following DFP official: Mr Bill Pauley, Head of Strategic Policy, Central Finance Group. The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

The Committee noted the copy of the Bill and Explanatory and Financial Memorandum provided by the Department. The Minister explained the reasons why accelerated passage was being sought for the Bill.

Mr Weir left the meeting at 11.15am

Agreed: that the Department would confirm the availability of figures for the likely amount of revenue that would be lost to the Executive as a result of the Bill also setting the rate of duty for private jets at zero.

7. Update on the Devolution of Corporation Tax Powers – Ministerial Evidence Session

The Committee took evidence from the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Sammy Wilson, MP MLA and the following DFP official: Mr Bill Pauley, Head of Strategic Policy, Central Finance Group. The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

Mr Weir joined the meeting at 11.18am

Mr Bradley left the meeting at 11.54am

Mr McIlveen left the meeting at 11.58am

Mrs Cochrane left the meeting at 12noon

Ms Fearon left the meeting at 12.01pm

8. Accelerated Passage for the Air Passenger (Setting the Rate) Bill

Agreed: that the Committee is content that the Air Passenger Duty (Setting the Rate) Bill proceeds by accelerated passage, having been satisfied with the explanation and assurances provided by the Minister of Finance and Personnel in this regard.

Agreed: to commission research into the Coalition Government's plans for regionalised enterprise zones in GB, including whether any provision for fiscal concessions to such enterprise zones could have application to the considerations on devolving corporation tax in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: that members will be provided with a copy of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee report on fuel duty.

9. October Monitoring Round: Departmental Position – DFP Evidence Session

The Committee took evidence from the following DFP officials: Brigitte Worth, Acting Head, Finance Division and Preeti Miller, Finance Division. The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

Mr Bradley joined the meeting at 12.05pm

Agreed: to write to the Minister highlighting concerns regarding the significant reduced requirement declared by LPS in the context of concerns at the Agency's performance in rate/debt collection.

10. Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill – Assembly Research Briefing

The Committee received a briefing from Assembly Research on the Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill.

The Committee noted that the call for written evidence on the Bill was published in newspapers on Monday 1 October 2012. Members were reminded that they should provide Committee staff with details of any stakeholders they wish to be notified about the opportunity to respond to the Bill or, alternatively, that they could do this directly.

Agreed: to commission further research to (a) examine how employers take OFMDFM guidance on conflict-related convictions into consideration, and (b) provide background information on the contributions of government and political parties to the discussions on the release and reintegration of paramilitary prisoners in the lead up to the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

Agreed: to schedule oral evidence from human rights academics identified in the research paper.

The Committee moved into closed session at 12.30pm

11. End of Session Report 2011-12 – Final Consideration of Draft Committee Report

The Committee considered a draft End of Session Report 2011-12.

Mr Weir left the meeting at 12.31pm

Agreed: that paragraphs 1-9 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 10-20 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 21-28 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 29-39 (as amended) stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that paragraphs 40-44 stand part of the Report.

Agreed: that the report as amended be the End of Session report of the Committee for Finance and Personnel 2011-12.

The meeting moved to open session at 12.33pm.

12. Correspondence (cont'd)

Members noted the following items of correspondence:

- DFP: Public Procurement response to the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment;

Agreed: to forward this response to the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

- DFP: Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service; and
- Flyer on Mental Health Event on 9 October in the Long Gallery, Stormont Estate.

13. Committee Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft of the Committee work programme.

Agreed: that the Committee work programme is amended to reflect decisions made today, and that the revised programme is published on the Assembly website.

Mr Weir joined the meeting at 12.36pm.

Members were reminded of next week's concurrent meeting with the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment on Thursday 11 October 2012 at 10am in the Senate Chamber.

14. Any Other Business

Mr Cree MBE sent apologies for the Committee meetings on 10 and 11 October 2012.

15. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 10 October 2012 at 10.00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.36pm.

Mr Daithí McKay MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance and Personnel
10 October 2012