

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY, 09 JANUARY 2013
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

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

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Kathy O'Hanlon (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
Mr Gavin Moore (Bursary Student)
Mr Hugh Widdis (Director of Assembly Legal Services) (Agenda Item 4 only)

Apologies:

The meeting opened at 10.05am in public session.

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

1. Apologies

There were no apologies received.

Mr Weir joined the meeting at 10.06am.

2. Draft Minutes of Proceedings of 12 December 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.

The meeting moved into closed session at 10.06am.

4. Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill – Legal Advice

The Committee received legal advice from Hugh Widdis, Director of Assembly Legal Services on a number of issues relating to the Bill.

Mrs Cochrane joined the meeting at 10.06am.

Mr Girvan joined the meeting at 10.12am.

Mr Weir left the meeting at 10.14am.

Mr Weir returned to the meeting at 10.16am.

Mr Weir left the meeting at 10.20am.

Mr Weir returned to the meeting at 10.29am.

Mr McLaughlin left the meeting at 10.50am.

Mr McCallister joined the meeting at 10.51am.

Agreed: that the Assembly Legal Services will provide follow up information as requested during the briefing.

The Committee noted a written submission from Dr Máire Braniff and Dr Cillian McGrattan, entitled *The Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill: Democratic Implications and Considerations*.

Agreed: that the Committee will invite Dr Braniff and Dr McGrattan to give oral evidence on the Bill.

Agreed: that the Committee will also invite Professor Bill Rolston and Professor Peter Shirlow to give oral evidence on the Bill, in view of their work in relation to employment issues affecting loyalist and republican ex-prisoner groups.

The meeting moved into public session at 10.55am.

5. Public Service Pensions Bill – Evidence from DFP Officials

The Committee took oral evidence from Grace Nesbitt, Head of Corporate HR Pensions Division, DFP; Blathnaid Smyth, Civil Service Pensions, DFP; and Stephen Ball, Civil Service Pensions, DFP. The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

Mr McLaughlin returned to the meeting at 11.02am.

Mr Weir left the meeting at 11.10am.

Mr Weir returned to the meeting at 11.19am.

Mr Bradley declared an interest as a member of the Northern Ireland Teachers' Pension Scheme.

Mr Bradley left the meeting at 11.27am.

Mr McIlveen left the meeting at 11.27am.

Agreed: that DFP will provide additional information as requested during the oral evidence session.

Agreed: that briefings on the proposed Bill will be scheduled with DFP and the relevant trade unions once the public consultation has concluded and that background research will be commissioned from Assembly Research.

6. Rating Debt Issues – Evidence from Land and Property Services

The Committee took oral evidence from the following Land and Property Services (LPS) officials: Alan Brontë, Director of Mapping and Valuation Services, Patricia McAuley, Director of Revenues and Benefits and Judith Andrews, Head of Operational Finance, LPS. The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

Mr Bradley returned to the meeting at 11.33am.

Mr McIlveen returned to the meeting at 11.36am.

Mr Bradley left the meeting at 11.40am.

Mr McLaughlin left the meeting at 12.21pm.

Mr Weir left the meeting at 12.23pm.

Agreed: that the LPS officials will provide additional information as requested during the oral evidence session.

7. Subordinate Legislation

- Air Passenger Duty (2012 Act) (Commencement) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012

Members noted this Commencement Order.

8. Correspondence

- Email from Member of Public regarding the NICS Equal Pay Settlement;
- Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce (BCTC) request to make a presentation to the Committee;

Agreed: to receive a presentation from BCTC as requested.

- Assembly Research: Further information on NICS Recruitment;

- DFP: Response regarding Programme for Government Monitoring;
- DFP: Response regarding Financial Capability Strategy for NI;
- DFP: Publication of 2011 Census Key Statistics for NI Local Government Districts;
- Committee for the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (COFMDFM): European Commission Work Programme Pilot Project;

Agreed: that, to inform its response to COFMDFM, the Committee will take a briefing from Assembly Research on this issue; and request DFP's view on the priority areas in terms of EU issues, including those arising from the European Commission Work Programme 2013.
- Audit Committee: 2013-14 and 2014-15 Budget Realignment Exercise;
- DFP: Response to Ad Hoc Committee on Welfare Reform Bill – HM Treasury Green Book Guidelines;
- CETI: Ulster Bank Correspondence;
- DFP: Proposed Buildings (Prescribed Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 – Summary of Responses;

Agreed: to request information from DFP on the rationale for the individual increases in fees calculated as well as a list of respondents to the consultation.
- DFP Press Release: “Government departments continue to drive down the use of external consultants – Wilson”;
- DFP: Foreign and Commonwealth Office – Review of the Balance of Competencies;
- Employers for Childcare Charitable Group – Request for meeting to discuss appointment of a Childcare Voucher provider to the NI Civil Service;

Mr McCallister left the meeting at 12.35am.
Mr Weir returned to the meeting at 12.36am.

Agreed: to take an oral briefing from Employers for Childcare on this matter.
- NI Assembly Legislative Strengthening Trust – Effective Questioning and Scrutiny Workshop;

Agreed: Committee staff will establish the dates available for the workshop and advise members accordingly.
- NI Assembly Business Trust – NI Economic Outlook for 2013, Briefing by Finance Minister;
- DFP: Further information regarding Regional Pay;
- DFP: Air Passenger Duty - Terms of Reference for research into air connectivity;
- Public Accounts Committee: Procurement Policies – Small Businesses;

Agreed: to forward the correspondence to DFP for a response to the small business which had raised concern regarding the impact of framework contracts on small and medium enterprises.
- Progress Report on the delivery of DFP's Capital Projects.

9. 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.

10. Any Other Business

None.

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee will be held on Wednesday 16 January 2013 at 10.00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.39pm.

Mr Daithí McKay MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance and Personnel
16 January 2013