

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 3 JULY 2013
ROOM 30 PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Ms Megan Fearon MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr David McIlveen MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA

The meeting opened at 10:07 am in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies are detailed above.

Agreed: that agenda items 4, 5, 6 & 7 are covered by Hansard and the Official Record published on the Assembly's website.

2. Draft Minutes of Proceedings of 26 June 2013

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 Girvan joined the meeting at 10.10am.

4. Defamation Act 2013 – Evidence from Libel Reform Campaign

The Committee received evidence on the Defamation Act 2013 from the following witnesses: Michael Harris, Head of Advocacy, Index on Censorship; Jo Glanville, Director of English Pen; Dr Sile Lane, Sense About Science; and Dr Peter Wilmshurst, Senior NHS Cardiologist. The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: that the witnesses will provide follow up information as discussed during the session.

5. Defamation Act 2013 – Evidence from Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

The Committee received evidence on the Defamation Act 2013 from the following representatives of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission: Virginia McVea, Director; Angela Stevens, Case Worker; and Colin Caughey, Policy Worker. The evidence session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: that the witnesses will provide follow up information as discussed during the session.

Mr Bradley left the meeting at 11.03am and re-joined at 11.09am.
Mrs Cochrane left the meeting at 11.13am and re-joined at 11.20am.

6. Defamation Act 2013 – Evidence from DFP

The Committee received evidence from the following DFP officials; Oswyn Paulin, Departmental Solicitor, Departmental Solicitors Office (DSO); and Laura McPolin, Policy Advisor, DSO.

Agreed: to take up the offer by the Editor of the Belfast Telegraph, Mike Gilson, to brief the Committee on this issue.

Agreed: to commission background research into the approaches adopted by the Scottish Parliament and the Oireachtas with respect to defamation law.

7. Bank branch closures

Members noted a briefing paper from the Consumer Council on “Access to Branch Banking”.

The Chairperson informed members that communication had been received from the Managing Director of First Trust Bank to notify the Committee of the planned closure of four bank branches. The Committee recorded its appreciation for this notification and members discussed the way forward in light of this and the recent announcement by Ulster Bank about branch closures.

Peter Weir declared an interest as a customer of the Ulster Bank.

Daithí McKay declared an interest as a former employee of the Ulster Bank.

Agreed: to invite representatives of both the Consumer Council and the Ulster Bank to provide oral briefings on the recent announcements regarding bank branch closures and how this will affect consumers. Members also indicated that they would like to hear from the Ulster Bank on the options on the way forward for banking in rural areas.

Agreed: that the Committee will also write to the other main local banks to outline its concerns on this matter.

Agreed: that, given the cross-cutting nature of this matter, the Committee will liaise with the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment in taking forward this scrutiny as appropriate. In the event that the Committee for Finance and Personnel takes the lead in this instance, members of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment will be invited to attend the oral briefings and to question witnesses.

Mr Weir left the meeting at 11.35am and re-joined at 11.37am.

Mr McQuillan joined the meeting at 11.58am.

Mr Girvan left the meeting at 12.09pm and re-joined at 12.18pm.

Mr McKay left the meeting at 12.27pm and Mr Bradley took the Chair at 12.28pm.

8. Outcome of June 2013 Monitoring Round and 2012-13 Provisional Outturn – Evidence from DFP

The Committee received evidence from the following DFP officials: Michael Brennan, Head of Central Expenditure Division (CED), Central Finance Group (CFG); Peter Jakobsen, CED, CFG; and Preeta Miller, Finance Branch, Central Service Group.

Mr Weir left the meeting at 12.31pm and re-joined at 12.46am.

Agreed: that the DFP officials will provide follow up information as discussed during the session.

9. Subordinate Legislation

SR 2013/165 Compulsory Acquisition (Interest) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2013

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had no issues to raise by way of technical scrutiny in relation to the Rule.

Agreed: that the Committee has considered The Compulsory Acquisition (Interest) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2013 and has no objection to the Rule.

10. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- DFP: Departmental Savings Plans;

Agreed: to request a copy of the Savings Delivery Plan for the Department of Education, referred to in DFP briefing paper of 25 June 2013, and to forward the DFP correspondence to other statutory committees for scrutiny as appropriate.

- DFP: Non Domestic Revaluation 2015;
Agreed: to schedule a briefing on this subject to take place after summer recess.
- DFP: Rates Rebate Replacement Arrangements;
- Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (COFMDFM): European Commission proposals to promote the free movement of citizens;
- COFMDFM: Peace III Evaluation Report;
- Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development: Financial Provisions Bill 2013;
- DFP: Amendment to guidance Booklet B of the Building Regulations;
- DFP: Census Statistics for NI, Ethnicity, Country of Birth and Language;
- DFP: Response regarding G8 Summit Costs;
- Assembly Research Briefing paper: Cabinet Office Mystery Shopper Scheme;
Agreed: to consider this paper as part of the scheduled evidence session with DFP's Central Procurement Directorate on the implementation of the Committee's report into Public Procurement.
- Email from Member of the Public regarding Pay Dispute;
Agreed: to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Justice given that the matter relates to the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission.
- Email from Member of the Public regarding Equal Pay Settlement.

The following routine papers were noted:

- Consumer Council Essential Free Travel Guides
- Queen's University Belfast impact Ezine
- Equality Commission Ezine.

11. Committee Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft of the Committee work programme.

Financial Provisions Bill

Agreed: that the Delegated Powers Memorandum relating to the Bill, which had been received from DFP, is forwarded to the Examiner of Statutory Rules for scrutiny.

Agreed: that the signposting notice on the Committee Stage "call for evidence" is printed in the three main regional papers and that the detailed information on the "call for evidence" is published on the Committee's website.

Strategic Planning Day

Agreed: that the Committee will hold an informal strategic planning session on 4 September 2013, following a short formal meeting to conduct any urgent business and clear correspondence received during recess.

Agreed: that the draft Committee Work Programme is amended to reflect any decisions made today and published on the Committee's website.

12. Any Other Business

Committee input on Freedom of Information matters during summer recess

The Committee noted that the normal practice for Assembly committees was to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson during periods of recess to submit views on the releasing or withholding of information in any non-routine/contentious Freedom of Information requests received.

Agreed: that this practice is applied during the forthcoming recess.

Recycling of Committee Packs

The Committee noted the arrangements for recycling older Committee folders over recess.

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee will be held on Wednesday 4 September 2013 at 10:00 am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.04 pm.

Mr Daithí McKay MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance and Personnel
10 July 2013