

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY, 06 NOVEMBER 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
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA

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

Apologies: Mr Ian McCrea MLA

The meeting opened at 10.04am in public session.

Agreed: that agenda items 4 and 5 are recorded by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly's website.

1. Apologies

Apologies are detailed above.

2. **Draft Minutes of Proceedings of 23 October 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 summary table of requests for information from DFP which provided an update on any matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

Public Service Pensions Bill

The Committee noted a follow-up research paper on Opposition amendments relating to special provision for firefighters, which were proposed to the equivalent GB legislation during the Westminster legislative process.

Agreed: that the Chairperson will write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to seek clarification as to the basis for the Executive decision of 8 March 20102 on public service pensions; in particular, the extent to which it was made aware of the consequences of any automatic linkage between ‘normal pension age’ and State Pension Age in the Bill in terms of future decisions in this regard.

Reduction in NICS Pensions Staff

Agreed: that DFP officials will provide a written submission to the Committee on the possible reduction of Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Pensions staff in Derry/Londonderry and implications of same.

4. **Public Service Pensions Bill – Evidence from DFP**

Paul Girvan joined the meeting at 10.13am

Peter Weir left the meeting at 10.13am

Peter Weir rejoined the meeting at 10.16am

The Committee received evidence on the Public Service Pensions Bill from the following DFP officials:

- Grace Nesbitt, Head of Pay and Pensions Division;
- Blathnaid Smyth; Pay and Pensions Division;
- Margaret Coyle; Pay and Pensions Division;
- Stephen Ball, Pay and Pensions Division, DFP.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: that the Committee will write to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety requesting information on: the options for firefighters to retire early with

actuarial reduction; whether there is scope for “unfit” firefighters to transfer to other parts of the public service; and the turnover of firefighters.

Agreed: that the DFP officials will provide urgent clarification on issues discussed during the evidence session.

Agreed: to forward the DFP response regarding clauses 30-32 of the Bill to the Independent Financial Review Panel for its information.

Judith Cochrane joined the meeting at 10.29am

Dominic Bradley left the meeting at 11.08am

5. Public Service Pensions Bill – Consideration of issues from Evidence

The Committee considered residual issues in respect of clauses 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 21, 22, 23 and 24 of the Bill and discussed the potential for drafting amendments to address the issues where concerns remained.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: that draft amendments in relation to clauses 13 and 23/24 will be prepared for consideration at the next Committee meeting.

Dominic Bradley rejoined the meeting at 11.15am

John McCallister joined the meeting at 11.20am

6. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- NI Law Society response regarding the Legal Complaints and Regulation Bill;
Agreed: that, in principle, the Committee is content to hold a formal Committee meeting in Law Society House as proposed by the Society.
- DFP: Equine Rates response;
- DFP: Rating provisions in the Financial Provisions Bill;
- Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (COFMDFM): European Priorities 2012-13 Implementation Report;
- COFMDFM: Memorandum of Understanding – Joint Ministerial Council Europe (March) 2013;
- Confederation of British Industry (CBI): NI Infrastructure Report;
Agreed: to schedule a briefing from CBI on this report and, in the interim, to seek a written response from DFP to the proposals within the report which relate to public procurement.
- Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Proposed closure of Exploris Aquarium and Seal Sanctuary;
- Investment Strategy for NI – Investing Activity Report (DFP) October 2013;
- Non Domestic Rates Revaluation 2015: Targeted Consultation: Treatment of Shared Telecommunication Mast Sites; and
- DFP Press Release on NICS Sick Absence Statistics and Executive Summary of recent report by the NI Statistics and Research Agency;

Agreed: that the Committee Clerk will liaise with the Clerk to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to ensure that any future scrutiny of this issue does not overlap with PAC plans in this regard.

7. Committee Work Programme

Members considered a draft of the Committee work programme

Access to Finance – update on case-study research

Members were provided with an update on the progress of the work being undertaken by Assembly Research in respect of identified businesses which have experienced difficulties in accessing finance from the local banks.

Agreed: that, where necessary, members will contact Assembly Research directly to check whether businesses which they have identified have been in contact.

Effective Questioning – follow-up session

Members were advised that a follow up session on Effective Questioning will take place prior to the meeting on 20 November.

Agreed: that the work programme is updated to reflect any agreements made today and published on the Committee's website.

8. Any other business

None

9. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee will be held on Wednesday 13 November 2013 at 10:00 am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11.34pm

Mr Daithí McKay MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance and Personnel
13 November 2013