

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY, 04 DECEMBER 2013
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

- Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE, MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Ian McCrea MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Peter Weir MLA
- In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
- Apologies: Mr Dominic Bradley MLA
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA

The meeting commenced at 10.16am in public session.

Agreed: that agenda items 5 and 6 are recorded by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly's website.

1. Apologies

Apologies are detailed above.

The Committee noted Michaela Boyle's declaration of interests and welcomed her as a new member to the Committee.

Agreed: to write to Megan Fearon to express the Committee's thanks and appreciation for her work on the Committee.

2. Draft Minutes of Proceedings of 27 November 2013

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

Paul Girvan joined the meeting at 10.17am

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.

Ulster Bank

The Committee considered the recent difficulties experienced by Ulster Bank customers unable to access funds from their accounts due to a fault in the Bank's IT system.

Agreed: to write to the Ulster Bank expressing concern about the recent difficulties experienced by its customers and also to request that the Bank sends a representative to next week's Committee meeting to discuss the issues in more detail.

4. Flexible Working Inquiry – Assembly Research Briefing

The Committee received a briefing from Assembly Research on the following research papers: '*Telework in the US Federal Government*'; and '*Technology for flexible working: sources of evidence*'. In relation to the latter, it was noted that a further source of evidence would be the Professor of Telecommunications at the University of Ulster's School of Computing and Information Engineering, who has expertise on the emerging technologies to support flexible working.

Agreed: to schedule evidence via video-conferencing from relevant US federal agencies in addition to evidence on the technology for flexible working.

5. Flexible Working Inquiry – Evidence from Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance

The Committee received evidence on the Flexible Working Inquiry from the following Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) representatives:

- Kieron Bannon – Assistant General Secretary of NIPSA;
- Billy Lynn – Chairperson of NIPSA Civil Service Group Executive Committee.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

Paul Girvan left the meeting at 10.51am

Paul Girvan rejoined the meeting at 10.55am

Michaela Boyle left the meeting at 11.05am

*Ian McCrea left the meeting at 11.10am
Michaela Boyle rejoined the meeting at 11.15am*

Agreed: to request data from DFP on the breakdown of homeworkers/teleworkers in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, including gender breakdown, and also up-to-date figures on the usage of the 'satellite hubs' across Northern Ireland.

6. Financial Provisions Bill – Clause-by-Clause Scrutiny

The Committee carried out formal clause-by-clause consideration of the Financial Provisions Bill as follows:

Clause 1 – Repeal of the Development Loans (Agriculture and Fisheries) Act (Northern Ireland) 1968

Agreed: that the Committee is content with clause 1 as drafted, mindful that the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development does not have any concerns with the provisions in this clause.

Clause 2 – Grants payable to certain harbour authorities in relation to expenses

Agreed: that the Committee is content with clause 2 as drafted, mindful that the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development does not have any concerns with the provisions in this clause.

New Clause – Rating of owners instead of occupiers in certain cases

Agreed: that the Committee is content with the new proposed new clause, to be tabled by the Minister of Finance and Personnel at Consideration Stage, as follows:

After clause 2 insert -

'Rating of owners instead of occupiers in certain cases

2A. In Article 20 of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 (rating of owners instead of occupiers in certain cases) -

(a) in paragraph (1) -

(i) in sub-paragraph (a), after "hereditament" insert "(where the hereditament does not have a net annual value and a capital value)";

(ii) in sub-paragraph (b) for "£55,000" substitute "£150,000";

(iii) in sub-paragraph (c), for head (ii) substitute -

"(ii) its net annual value does not exceed £1,590;"

(b) in paragraph (1A), for the words from "both conditions" to the end of that paragraph substitute "the conditions in sub-paragraphs (b) and (c) (ii) of paragraph (1) must be satisfied, but the condition set out in sub-paragraph (c)

(i) of that paragraph does not apply in relation to such a hereditament."

New Clause – Repeal of Articles 23 and 24 of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977

Agreed: that the Committee is content with the proposed new clause, to be tabled by the Minister of Finance and Personnel at Consideration Stage, as follows:

After clause 2 insert -

‘Repeal of Articles 23 and 24 of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977

2B. Articles 23 (liability of occupier for rates unpaid by owner) and 24 (recovery of rates from tenants and lodgers) of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 are repealed.’

New Clause – Power of Department of Finance and Personnel to require information for rating purposes

Agreed: that the Committee is content with the proposed new clause, to be tabled by the Minister of Finance and Personnel at Consideration Stage, as follows:

After clause 2 insert -

‘Power of Department of Finance and Personnel to require information

2A. - (1) Article 26 of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 (power of Department to require information as to ownership, etc.) is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph (1) -

(a) at the end of sub-paragraph (a) insert “and the date on which he acquired that interest”;

(b) after sub-paragraph (c) insert -

“(cc) the date on which he began to occupy the hereditament;”.

(3) After paragraph (1) insert -

“(1A) The Department may, for the purposes of this Order, serve a notice on the owner of any hereditament requiring him to state to the Department in writing, within a period and in the manner specified in the notice -

(a) the date on which he acquired ownership of the hereditament; and

(b) the date, if any, on which he began to occupy the hereditament.”.

(4) In paragraph (2B)(a) after “(1)” insert “,(1A)”.’

New Clause – Discount on rates on dwellings

Agreed: that the Committee is content with the proposed new clause, to be tabled by the Minister of Finance and Personnel at Consideration Stage, as follows:

After clause 2 insert -

‘Discount on rates on dwellings

2B. - (1) Article 30 of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 (discount on rates on dwellings) is amended as follows.

(2) After paragraph (2) insert -

“(2ZA) An allowance shall be granted in accordance with paragraph (2ZC) to any person entitled to possession of a hereditament to which paragraph (2ZB) applies who pays the net amount due on account of a rate in respect of that hereditament in a single sum before such date as the Department may notify to him.

(2ZB) This paragraph applies to a hereditament in the capital value list in respect of which rates are chargeable under Article 25A where the hereditament is a hereditament which -

(a) is not in use; and

(b) is a hereditament which the Department considers will, when next in use, be a dwelling-house or, though not a dwelling-house, will be used partly for the purposes of a private dwelling; and

(c) is not the subject of an agreement under Article 21.

(2ZC) The allowance shall be by way of a discount of 4% on the amount payable on account of the rate as is computed by reference to the rateable capital value of the hereditament.”.

(3) In paragraph (2A) after “(2)” insert “or (2ZC)”.

Clause 3 – Provision as to payment of interest on funds in court

Agreed: that the Committee is content with clause 3, mindful that the Committee for Justice does not have any concerns and subject to the amendment, to be tabled by the Minister of Finance and Personnel at Consideration Stage, as follows:

‘leave out “make provision as” and insert “give directions in relation” at Clause 3, line 13’

Clause 4 – Power of Northern Ireland Housing Executive to recover certain costs

Agreed: that the Committee is content with clause 4 as drafted, mindful that the Committee for Social Development has not expressed any concerns with the provisions in this clause.

Clause 5 – Accounts and audit: health and social care bodies

Agreed: that the Committee is content with clause 5 as drafted, mindful that both the Public Accounts Committee and Audit Committee do not have any concerns with the provisions in this clause .

Clause 6 - Expenditure on bodies providing services for the police etc.

Agreed: that the Committee is content with clause 6, mindful that the Committee for Justice does not have any concerns and subject to the amendment, to be tabled by the Minister of Finance and Personnel at Consideration Stage, as follows:

“after “Regulations” insert “subject to negative resolution” at Clause 6, line 6’

Clause 7 – Repeals

Agreed: that the Committee is content with clause 7 as drafted.

Clause 8 – Commencement

Agreed: that the Committee is content with clause 8, subject to the amendment, to be tabled by the Minister of Finance and Personnel at Consideration Stage, as follows:

“Leave out “Section 5 comes” and insert “Sections 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D and 5 come” at Clause 8, line 21’

Schedule: Repeals

Agreed: that the Committee is content with the schedule of repeals, subject to the amendment, to be tabled by the Minister of Finance and Personnel at Consideration Stage, as follows:

‘At end insert – “The Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 Articles 23 and 24” at Schedule, line 15’

Clause 9 – Short title

Agreed: that the Committee is content with clause 9 as drafted.

Long Title of the Bill – *‘A Bill to Repeal the Development Loans (Agriculture and Fisheries) Act (Northern Ireland) 1968; to enable the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to pay grants to certain harbour authorities; to make provision in relation to the payment of interest on funds in court; to make provision enabling the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to recover certain costs; to make provision for the disclosure of data obtained by the Comptroller and Auditor General for data matching purposes; to enable the Department of Justice to make payments to certain bodies providing services for the police, etc.; and for purposes connected with those matters.’*

Agreed: that the Committee is content with the Long Title of the Bill, subject to the amendment, to be tabled by the Minister of Finance and Personnel at Consideration Stage, as follows:

‘In the long title after “authorities;” insert “to amend the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977”’

The session was recorded by Hansard.

7. Financial Provisions Bill – Consideration of Draft Report

The Committee considered a working draft of its report on the Financial Provisions Bill.

Agreed: that members will forward any comments on the working draft report to the Clerk by close of play on Friday 6 December and that a final draft will be considered at next week's meeting.

8. Correspondence

- Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment – Minutes of Evidence of meeting in Exploris;
- DFP: Investing Activity Report;
- Committee for Education – Memo regarding EU and PEACE IV Funding;
- Letter from CBI regarding Infrastructure Report;
The Committee noted that a briefing from CBI on the procurement aspects of this report would be taken at a future Committee meeting focusing on issues in relation to public procurement.
- Public Accounts Committee (PAC): Letter to the Minister of Finance and Personnel regarding the PAC take-note debate on 12 November 2013;
- DFP: Outturn and Forecast Outturn tables for the month of September 2013;
- DFP: Consultation Report on Future Rate Rebate;
Agreed: that a DFP briefing on this matter will be scheduled after the proposed Departmental stakeholder seminar and before the Executive decides on the matter.
- DFP response to query on Northern Ireland Housing Executive pay increase;
Agreed: to forward this response to the original correspondent.
- Letter to Patsy McGlone MLA regarding Civil Service Pensions, Future Service Delivery Project.
Agreed: that, as this is a copy of previous correspondence considered by the Committee, the DFP response, when received, will be issued to both MLAs who raised the issue.

Adrian McQuillan left the meeting at 11.25am

9. Committee Work Programme

Members considered a draft of the Committee work programme.

Agreed: to schedule an update briefing from DFP on the recently announced Strategic Assessment of Rate Collection and Recovery at an appropriate point in the Committee work programme.

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

10. Any other business

Agreed: to commission an Assembly Research paper on the progress made by departments in implementing the Programme for Government and Economic Strategy commitments on social clauses in public sector contracts.

Adrian McQuillan rejoined the meeting at 11.28am

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee will be held on Wednesday 11 December 2013 at 10:00 am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11.30am

**Mr Daithí McKay MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance and Personnel
11 December 2013**