

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY, 05 FEBRUARY 2014
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

- Present: Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle MLA
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE, MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Ian McCrea 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)
Mr Joe Westland (Clerical Supervisor)
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
- Apologies: Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)

The meeting commenced at 10:11am in public session.

The Clerk informed members that both the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson would not be available at the beginning of today's meeting and invited nominations for a temporary Chairperson.

It was proposed by Mr Weir and seconded by Mr Cree that Mr McLaughlin takes the Chair of the Committee until either the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson joined the meeting. Mr McLaughlin duly took the Chair.

The meeting moved to closed session at 10.12am for a preparatory preview of today's business.

The meeting returned to open session at 10.15am.

Agreed: that agenda items 4, 5 and 6 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 29 January 2014

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.

4. Flexible Working Inquiry – Stakeholder Evidence via video-link

Judith Cochrane joined the meeting at 10.16am

John McCallister joined the meeting at 10.20am

The Committee received evidence on the Flexible Working Inquiry, via video-link, from the following witness:

- Riona Carroll – New Ways of Working

Paul Girvan joined the meeting at 10.30am

Dominic Bradley joined the meeting at 10.35am

Peter Weir left the meeting at 10.40am

Peter Weir rejoined the meeting at 10.47am

John McCallister left the meeting at 10.50am

The session was recorded by Hansard

Agreed: that the witness will respond in writing to any follow up queries from the Committee.

Dominic Bradley took the Chair at 10.50am

5. Budget Bill and Spring Supplementary Estimates – Evidence from DFP

The Committee received evidence on the above from the following DFP officials:

- Peter Jakobsen, Central Expenditure Division; and
- Jeff McGuinness, Central Expenditure Division.

Adrian McQuillan joined the meeting at 11.00am
Michaela Boyle left the meeting at 11.10am
John McCallister rejoined the meeting at 11.11am
Michaela Boyle rejoined the meeting at 11.15am
Peter Weir left the meeting at 11.21am
Judith Cochrane left the meeting at 11.22am
Peter Weir rejoined the meeting at 11.30am
Judith Cochrane rejoined the meeting at 11.31am

The session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: that the DFP officials will provide follow up information on technical adjustments and reclassifications by departments during 2013-14, as discussed during the session.

Agreed: that advice will be sought from DFP on the feasibility of a composite Final Outturn report being prepared and laid in the Assembly in future, in order to address an apparent gap in the budget and financial reporting process.

Agreed: to copy the DFP briefing paper to the other statutory committees for information, highlighting in particular the provision of significant 'headroom' in the estimates for some departments.

Agreed: that the Committee is satisfied that there has been appropriate consultation with it on the public expenditure proposals contained in the Budget Bill (NI) 2014 and is content to grant accelerated passage to the Bill in accordance with Standing Order 42(2).

Agreed: to issue the draft letter informing the Speaker of the Committee's decision on accelerated passage.

Agreed: to circulate the DFP paper on the reconciliation of its budget and estimate to the other statutory committees as a potential model for the other departments to follow in future.

6. EU Funding – Update Briefing from SEUPB and DFP

The Committee received an explanation why the above briefing was cancelled at short notice by the Department, from the following DFP official:

- Mr Frank Duffy, Head of European Union Division.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

Ian McCrea left the meeting at 11.37am

Ian McCrea rejoined the meeting at 11.48am

Agreed: that the DFP official will ensure that, in future, there is early notice provided to Committee staff of any potential need to cancel scheduled evidence sessions on this matter. It was further *agreed* that departmental officials will liaise with the Clerk to reschedule today's session.

7. European Commission Work Programme 2014: Response to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (COFMDFM)

The Committee noted that correspondence from a response from DFP had not arrive in time for this meeting, therefore this item of business would be considered at next week's meeting.

8. Further amendment to the Financial Provisions Bill

The Committee noted the wording of a further amendment to the Financial Provisions Bill ahead of Consideration Stage scheduled for 11 February 2014.

9. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- Open University Ceremony Invite;
- DFP correspondence regarding two statutory rules on building regulations arising from the transposition of a European Commission Directive.
Agreed: to schedule a briefing from DFP officials on the outcome of the consultations and before decisions are taken on the statutory rules.
- COFMDFM, Northern Ireland Executive European Priorities 2013-14 – mid-year progress report;
- DFP response regarding query on Programme for Government targets; and
- DFP response to Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (CETI) query relating to an energy efficiency project at Addenbrooke's Hospital.
Agreed: to copy the DFP response to the CETI for information.

10. Committee Work Programme

Members considered a draft of the Committee work programme.

Northern Ireland Audit Office report on Sickness Absence in the Public Sector

Michaela Boyle declared an interest as Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee.

Agreed: to write to the other applicable statutory committees seeking their views on the report findings to inform the Committee's deliberations in advance of further scrutiny.

Agreed: to commission an Assembly research paper comparing sickness absence in the public sector with that of the private sector in Northern Ireland, including the levels, reasons cited and approaches to managing absence.

Meeting at Construction Employers Federation – 12 February 2014

Agreed: to organise minibus transportation to and from next week's meeting to be held at the Construction Employers Federation.

Agreed: that the Committee work programme will be updated to reflect decisions taken today and published on the Committee's website.

11. Any other business

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee will be held on Wednesday 12 February 2014 at 10:00am at the Construction Employers Federation, 143 Malone Road, Belfast.

The Deputy Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.00pm

**Mr Daithí McKay MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance and Personnel
12 February 2014**