

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2014
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

- Present: Mr Daithi McKay (Chairperson)
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 Peter Weir MLA
- In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Joe Westland (Clerical Supervisor)
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
- Apologies: Mr Mitchel McLaughlin MLA

The meeting commenced at 10:12am in public session.

Agreed: that agenda item 4 is covered by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly's website.

1. Apologies

Apologies are detailed above.

2. Draft Minutes of Proceedings of 5 February 2014

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

3. Matters Arising

Committee meeting of 12 February 2014

The Committee noted that quorum difficulties meant that the scheduled briefings on 12 February 2014 did not proceed and that the sessions from both the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and Construction Employers Federation would be rescheduled for a later date. The Construction Employers Federation will send a formal written submission to address areas discussed during the informal session which took place with members in place of a formal Committee meeting on 12 February.

Agreed: to copy the Assembly research paper on the implementation of social clauses policy, which was in the papers for the Committee meeting of 12 February, to DFP for written comment.

Table of requests for information from 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. Sick Absence in the Northern Ireland Public Sector – Briefing from Northern Ireland Audit Office

The Committee received a briefing on ‘Sick Absence in the Northern Ireland Public Sector’ from the following officials from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO):

- Neil Gray - Director, NIAO;
- David Murdie – Audit Manager, NIAO; and
- Richard Emerson – Assembly Liaison Officer, NIAO.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: to invite the Institute of Public Health and/or the Public Health Agency to provide a view on the potential for reducing sick absence in the public sector through increased focus on health and wellbeing programmes.

Judith Cochrane joined the meeting at 10.15am

Peter Weir joined the meeting at 10.15am

Peter Weir left the meeting at 10.20am

Peter Weir rejoined the meeting at 10.21am

Ian McCrea joined the meeting at 10.36am

Peter Weir left the meeting at 10.37am

Peter Weir rejoined the meeting at 10.44am

5. Subordinate Legislation

The Committee considered the following proposals for Subordinate Legislation, and welcomed the following DFP officials to the meeting:

SL1 – The Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspection) Regulation (Northern Ireland) 2008 (the 2008 Regulations)

SL1 - The Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

- Roy Todd – Acting Head of Building Standards, DFP; and
- Susan Dornan – Building Standards Branch, DFP.

Dominic Bradley left the meeting at 10.47am

Members questioned the DFP officials on the background to the proposals, the reasons why they had not been brought forward earlier and the requirement to fast track the statutory rules.

Agreed: that the Committee has considered DFP’s proposal for subordinate legislation under the Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspection) Regulation (Northern Ireland) 2008 and has no objection to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.

Agreed: that the Committee has considered DFP’s proposal for subordinate legislation under The Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 and has no objection to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.

Agreed: to schedule a separate session on the enforcement of Building Regulations.

6. Subordinate Legislation – draft Statutory Rules

The Committee considered the following draft statutory rules:

Draft SR – The Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspection) (Amendments) Regulation (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Draft SR - The Building (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Agreed: that the Committee has considered The Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspection) (Amendments) Regulation (Northern Ireland) 2014 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rule’s report, has no objection to the rule.

Agreed: that the Committee has considered The Building (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rule’s report, has no objection to the rule.

7. Subordinate Legislation

The Committee considered the following Subordinate Legislation:

- The Draft General Register Office (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014
- SR 22/2014 – The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (NI) 2014

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

Agreed: that the Committee has considered draft SR – The General Register Office (Fees) Order (NI) 2014 and recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

Agreed: That the Committee has considered SR 22/2014 – The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (NI) 2014 and recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

8. Northern Ireland Civil Service People Strategy – Briefing from DFP

The Committee received a briefing from the following DFP officials on the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) People Strategy:

- Colin Lewis - Director of Corporate HR; and
- Grace Nesbitt - Head of Pensions Division.

Agreed: to schedule a briefing on NICS health and wellbeing measures in the context of the Committee's scrutiny of sick absence in the public sector.

Agreed: that the DFP officials will provide the Committee with a copy of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency analysis of sick absence once available.

John McCallister joined the meeting at 11.20am

Dominic Bradley rejoined the meeting at 11.30am

Judith Cochrane left the meeting at 11.31am

Judith Cochrane rejoined the meeting at 11.33am

9. Outcome of consultation on proposed changes to the Civil Service Compensation Scheme – Briefing from DFP

The Committee received a briefing from the following DFP officials on the outcome of consultation on proposed changes to the Civil Service Compensation Scheme:

- Grace Nesbitt - Head of Pensions Division;
- Blathnaid Smyth - Civil Service Pensions Branch; and
- Peter Philip - Civil Service Pensions Branch.

Agreed: that a briefing on the outcome of consultation on proposals to increase pensions contributions would be scheduled for a later date if required.

Ian McCrea left the meeting at 11.55am

Michaela Boyle left the meeting at 12.05am

10. European Commission Work Programme 2014: Response to OFMDFM Committee

The Committee considered a draft response to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the European priorities and European Commission Work Programme 2014.

Agreed: to issue the response as drafted.

11. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following pieces of correspondence;

- DFP performance against the 2013/14 Business Plan targets for the period ending 31 December 2013;
- OFMDFM Committee: Competitive European funding drawdown by Department;
Agreed: to schedule a briefing on issues in relation to the Aggregates Levy.
- DFP: Rate Rebate Replacement Scheme Response;
Agreed: that, in advance of a formal evidence session on the Rate Replacement Scheme on 19 March 2014, the Committee will schedule an informal briefing from DFP officials to discuss the complexity of the various models identified in this correspondence.
- DFP: Publication of 2011 Census Key Statistics for the New 11 Districts in Northern Ireland;
- OFMDFM Committee Chairperson to DFP Minister: Inquiry into Wind Turbines;
- OFMDFM Committee: Barroso Task Force Desk Officers' Report, October to December 2013;
- Northern Ireland Assembly & Business Trust Event – Invitation to Chairperson;
- Law Society: President's statement to accompany evidence on 29th January 2014;
- OFMDFM Committee: Joint Ministerial Council (Europe) – October 2013;
- Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development – Agri-Food Loan Scheme
- Donaghy Carey Solicitors: Client complaint against the Ulster Bank
Agreed: to issue a Committee response as drafted and to forward the original correspondence to the Ulster Bank for a direct response.

Agreed: to write to the Financial Services Ombudsman, in general terms, to enquire into the timeframes for complainants to provide information in support of their complaints and any flexibility in this regard.

- Member of Public: RBS and the future of Ulster Bank;
Agreed: to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment to address at its planned briefing from RBS representatives. It was further *agreed* to request that members of the Committee for Finance and Personnel be permitted to attend this session, in line with existing convention.
- Randox Testing Services: Northern Ireland Prisons
Agreed: to write to Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) for clarification on the central policy on linking local procurement contracts with those of other jurisdictions and the extent of CPD's involvement in this particular exercise. It was further *agreed* to examine the issue of combined contracts during a forthcoming evidence session from CPD.
Agreed: to write to the Justice Committee requesting that the Department of Justice provides a rationale and justification for the use of the combined contract in this instance, including in light of the policy on encouraging access to public procurement by local SMEs and given the argument that distinctive needs exist in terms of drug testing in Northern Ireland prisons; and
- Member of the public: Equal Pay issues
Agreed: to forward this correspondence to DFP for consideration in advance of next week's session on Equal Pay.

Peter Weir left the meeting at 12.15pm

Peter Weir rejoined the meeting at 12.18pm

12. Committee Work Programme

Members considered a draft of the Committee work programme.

National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) Briefing

Agreed: to issue a formal invitation to NAMA to brief the Committee on its work in Northern Ireland.

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

13. Any other business

There was no other business.

14. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee will be held on Wednesday 26 February 2014 at 10:00am, Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.21pm

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