

# COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

## MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY, 02 APRIL 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 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 Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Joe Westland (Clerical Supervisor)  
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
- Apologies: Mr Paul Girvan MLA

*The meeting commenced at 10:30 in public session.*

*Agreed:* that agenda item 7 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 26 March 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.

### Provision of papers from DFP

The Committee considered the findings of a recent survey, undertaken by the Chairpersons' Liaison Group, which sought detail on the performance of departments in adhering to agreed timescales for the provision of briefings and responses to Assembly committees. Members noted with concern that DFP was now amongst the worst performing departments in this regard; and that this presented a barrier to the Committee exercising its advisory and scrutiny functions effectively.

*Agreed:* that the Committee writes formally to the Department to express its concerns over the deterioration in performance in meeting established timescales and to seek assurance that steps will be taken to address the matter, including ensuring that the responsible departmental officials provide sufficient time for papers to receive Ministerial clearance.

*Agreed:* that the Committee continues its practice of seeking an explanation in person from the senior departmental officials responsible for postponing oral briefings at short notice or providing late papers.

*Agreed:* to request an up-to-date report from DFP detailing the performance of each business area in providing papers to the Committee in accordance with agreed timescales (with the option of scheduling hearings from poor performing business areas).

## **4. Rate Rebate Replacement Scheme: Consideration of Proposed Options – Briefing from DFP**

The Committee received a briefing on the Rate Rebate Replacement Scheme: Consideration of Proposed Options from the following DFP officials:

- Brian McClure, Head of Rating Policy Division, DFP; and
- Roisin McRory, Rating Policy Division, DFP.

*Agreed:* that the departmental officials will supply the contact details of the stakeholder groups who have participated in discussions on the proposed options; and that DFP will provide additional time for the Committee to obtain up-to-date views from the stakeholders and reach a position on the options before the Department brings its proposals to the Executive for decisions.

*Agreed:* to write to relevant stakeholders seeking their views in writing on the options under consideration.

*Agreed:* that the departmental officials will provide a follow up response to other issues discussed during the briefing.

*Peter Weir left the meeting at 10:55*

*Peter Weir rejoined the meeting at 10:56*

## **5. Terms of Reference for Review of Small Rates Relief – Briefing from DFP**

The Committee received a briefing on the Terms of Reference for Review of Small Rates Relief from the following DFP official:

- Brian McClure, Head of Rating Policy Division, DFP.

*Agreed:* that the Committee was content with the Terms of Reference as drafted and that an update briefing is scheduled from DFP as the review progresses.

*Mitchel McLaughlin left the meeting at 11:05*

*Mitchel McLaughlin rejoined the meeting at 11:06*

## **6. Sickness Absence in the Public and Private Sectors – Briefing by Assembly Research**

The Committee received a briefing from Assembly Research on Sickness Absence in the Public and Private Sectors in Northern Ireland.

*Agreed:* that the researcher will provide follow-up information on the breakdown of sickness absence data for the education sector.

*Judith Cochrane joined the meeting at 11:10*

*Peter Weir left the meeting at 11:12*

## **7. Northern Ireland Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Programmes – Briefing from DFP**

The Committee received a briefing on the Role of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Health and Wellbeing Programmes in reducing Sickness Absence from the following officials:

- Professor Ken Addley, Director, NICS Occupational Health Service; and
- Patricia McQuillan – Assistant Director, Nursing and Allied, Occupational Health Service.

The session was recorded by Hansard

*Agreed:* that the DFP officials will provide follow-up data on the nature and number of facilities provided by NICS departments to support the uptake of cycle-to-work initiatives.

*Agreed:* to commission Assembly Research to provide a follow-up paper which will include: a review of the research into sick absence; further analysis of specific areas; identification of measures to address gaps in data; and an analysis on the incidence of private health insurance in the private sector.

*Ian McCrea left the meeting at 11:30*

*Adrian McQuillan left the meeting at 11:36*

*Peter Weir rejoined the meeting at 11:37*

*Ian McCrea rejoined the meeting at 11:45*

*John McCallister left the meeting at 12:18*

*Michaela Boyle left the meeting at 12:20*

## **8. Correspondence**

Members noted the following items of correspondence received:

- Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Flexible Working Inquiry;
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI): Flexible Working Inquiry;
- DFP: Flexible Working Inquiry;
- Western Education & Library Board: Flexible Working Inquiry;
- DFP to Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (CETI): Driver Vehicle Agency (DVA) Job Losses;
- Committee for Regional Development: Cycling Inquiry;
- DFP: Issues raised in Construction Employers Federation (CEF) briefing; DFP response to Assembly Research paper – Implementation of Social Clauses Policy: A Comparative perspective; and Draft Committee for Finance and Personnel response:

*Agreed:* that the Committee response is issued to DFP for reply in advance of the scheduled DFP evidence session on public procurement.

*Agreed:* that this correspondence and any subsequent response from DFP is sent to CEF for response in advance of the DFP evidence session on public procurement.

- Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust (NIABT): Winners & Losers of 2014 Budget;
- DFP Report on “Investment Strategy for NI: Investing Activity Report”
- Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) on Changes to the Air Passenger Duty bands in the UK Finance Bill 2014;

*Agreed:* to add this item to the Committee work programme, subject to the LCM Memorandum being laid in the Assembly by DFP;

- NIABT Invitation to event on 3 April 2014;
- Belfast Telegraph article on National Asset Management Agency; and
- Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

*Agreed:* to write to DFP seeking detail on the availability of preventative occupational physiotherapy programmes within NICS.

## **9. Committee Work Programme**

Members considered a draft of the Committee work programme.

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

## **10. Any other business**

There was no other business

## **11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next scheduled meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee will be held on Wednesday 09 April 2014 at 10:00 am, Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12:30pm*

**Mr Daithí McKay MLA**  
**Chairperson**  
**Committee for Finance and Personnel**  
**09 April 2014**