

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2014
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

- Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (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)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Joe Westland (Clerical Supervisor)
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
- Apologies: Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

The meeting commenced at 10:05am in public session.

Agreed: that agenda items 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9 are 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 02 July 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.

Draft Committee Report on Sickness Absence in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland

Agreed: that a copy of the draft report is sent to the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) for comment in advance of the report being considered formally by the Committee.

Members Attendance figures for 2013-2014

Agreed: that members who have not yet responded to the attendance figures will advise Committee staff, by the indicated response date, whether they are content with the figures circulated.

4. Non-Domestic Revaluation – Briefing by DFP

The Committee received a briefing on the Non-Domestic Revaluation from the following departmental officials:

- Mr Brian McClure, Head of Rating Policy Division, DFP; and
- Mr Alan Brontë, Commissioner of Valuation, Land and Property Services (LPS).

Agreed: that DFP will provide written follow-up advice on the timeline which applied to consideration of the budgetary provision for the Non-Domestic Revaluation.

Agreed: that DFP will provide the Committee with work by the British Retail Consortium on the potential for rating online retail businesses.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

Paul Girvan joined the meeting at 10:12am

Ian McCrea joined the meeting at 10:12am

Adrian McQuillan joined the meeting at 10:20am

John McCallister joined the meeting at 10:20am

Judith Cochrane joined the meeting at 10:40am

Peter Weir left the meeting at 10:47am

Peter Weir rejoined the meeting 10:53am

5. Small Business Rate Relief Scheme (SBRR) – Briefing from DFP

The Committee received a briefing on the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme from the following departmental officials:

- Mr Brian McClure, Head of Rating Policy Division, DFP; and
- Mr Andrew McAvoy, Rating Policy Division, DFP.

Agreed: that the Committee will schedule an evidence session from the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy on the outcome of the policy evaluation of the SBRR scheme.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

Adrian McQuillan left the meeting at 11:10am

6. Managing Convergence of District Rates – Briefing from DFP

The Committee received a briefing on Managing Convergence of District Rates from the following departmental officials:

- Mr Brian McClure, Head of Rating Policy Division, DFP; and
- Mr Andrew McAvoy, Rating Policy Division, DFP.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

Judith Cochrane left the meeting at 11:18am

Michaela Boyle left the meeting at 11:19am

Michaela Boyle rejoined the meeting at 11:28am

7. Rate Rebate Replacement Scheme – Briefing from DFP

The Committee received a briefing on the Rate Rebate Replacement Scheme from the following departmental officials:

- Mr Brian McClure, Head of Rating Policy Division; and
- Ms Teresa Murray, Rating Policy Division DFP.

Agreed: that the Committee will schedule a briefing on the options for longer-term rate rebate arrangements.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

8. Review of Rate Liability for the Landlord Sector – Briefing from DFP

Paul Girvan declared an interest in this item as a private landlord.

The Committee received a briefing on the Review of Rate Liability for the Landlord Sector, from the following departmental officials:

- Mr Brian McClure, Head of Rating Policy Division, DFP; and
- Mr Andrew McAvoy, Rating Policy Division, DFP.

Agreed: to forward the DFP correspondence on this issue to the member of the public who raised the matter, for information.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

Mitchel McLaughlin left the meeting at 11:42am

Adrian McQuillan joined the meeting at 11:44am

Ian McCrea left the meeting at 11:44am

9. Outcome of Consultation on Decapitalisation Rates and Other Relevant Issues – Briefing from DFP

The Committee received a briefing on the Outcome of the Consultation on Decapitalisation Rates and other relevant issues, from the following departmental officials:

- Mr Brian McClure, Head of Rating Policy Division, DFP; and
- Mr Andrew McAvoy, Rating Policy Division, DFP.

Agreed: that, in relation to the timing of the next Domestic Revaluation, the Committee will refer the member of the public who recently corresponded on this matter to the Official Report of this session for information.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

The Committee moved into closed session at 11.51am in line with normal convention for considering draft committee reports.

10. End of Session Report: Initial consideration of draft report.

The Committee considered the first draft of the End of Session Report for the 2013-14 Session.

Agreed: that members will consider the draft report formally on 24 September, having given consideration to the Committee's strategic priorities for the 2014-2015 Session. In the meantime, the draft report will be amended to correct a formatting error in the details of Committee membership changes.

The Committee returned to open session at 11.55am

11. Correspondence

- DFP: Response to Assembly Research Paper on European Investment Bank;
- DFP: European Investment Bank – Statutory Borrowing Limit;
- DFP: Business Plan 2014-2015;
- DFP: Equality issues in Recruitment to the Northern Ireland Civil Service;
Agreed: to seek a written briefing on Departmental progress in implementing the recommendations from the independent report on this matter.

- DFP: Equality Scheme 2013-14 Annual Report;
- DFP: Outcome of Consultation on Regulations for the Civil Service Pension Scheme;
- DFP: Legal Complaints and Regulation Bill;
- DFP: Monthly Forecast Outturn Data April 2014;
- DFP: Monthly Forecast Outturn Data May 2014;
- DFP: Performance against Programme for Government and Business Plan Targets – Centres of Procurement Expertise;
- DFP: Performance against Programme for Government and Business Plan Targets – Vacant Office Space;
Agreed: to schedule an oral briefing from DFP on the Reform of Property Management Project.

- DFP: Post Project Evaluations – Quarter Ending 30 June 2014;
Agreed: to circulate the correspondence to the other statutory committees and the Public Accounts Committee for information and scrutiny at a departmental level as applicable.

- DFP: Response to Assembly Research paper on Year End Surges;
- NIAO – Response to Assembly research paper on Year End Surges;
- DFP: Savings Delivery Plan – number of leases to be surrendered in 2014-15;
- DFP: Response to Justice Committee’s correspondence regarding RUC George Cross Widows Association;
- DFP: Implementation of Social Clauses in Public Procurement;
Agreed: to schedule an oral session from DFP to scrutinise this area further, as part of a wider session on public procurement issues.
Agreed: to request a copy of the progress report that was considered by the Procurement Board in June 2014.

- DFP: Ministerial Response – Draft Memorandum of Understanding on the Budget Process;
Agreed: that this issue will be considered further during the Ministerial briefing on 17 September 2014.

- DFP: Preventative Spending – Comments from DFP;
Agreed: to schedule a briefing from departmental officials on this issue.

- DFP: Response to Committee on Research Paper regarding Private Members’ Bill;
- Committee for Justice: Legal Complaints – Corrigans & Co Ltd Accountants;

Agreed: to seek a copy of the DFP response to inform the Committee's consideration of this area.

- Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Inquiry into Building a United Community;
Agreed: to seek a copy of any response which DFP has made in the first instance.
- Committee for Education: Inquiry into Shared Integrated Education;
- Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Tourism Statistics;
- Bar Council: Issues regarding anonymous correspondence;
- Breezemount Manor – Ulster Bank Issues;
- Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure: Invitation regarding BBC Director General's visit to Parliament Building on 8th October 2014;
- Law Society of Northern Ireland: Invitation to Council Dinner 2014;
- Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA): Request to present to the Committee on the topic of Business Rates;
Agreed: to offer NIIRTA the opportunity to provide a briefing on its concerns in respect of Business Rates, as requested.
- Member of the Public – PSNI and NIO Equal Pay Settlement.

Peter Weir rejoined the meeting at 12 Noon.

12. 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 is published on the Committee's website.

13. Any other business

Members noted that the Chairperson, Clerk and Assistant Clerk will be attending the Institute of Revenues, Rating & Valuation Conference at Belfast City Hall on Thursday 11 September 2014 given the relevance to key rating issues before the Committee.

14. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee will be held on Wednesday, 17 September 2014 at 10:00am, Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12:05pm

Mr Daithí McKay MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance and Personnel
17 September 2014