

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY, 22 OCTOBER 2014
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle MLA
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE, MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Raymond McCartney 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 Ian McCrea MLA

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

It was proposed by Mrs Cochrane and seconded by Mr Cree that Mr Weir be elected as temporary Chairperson. No other nominations were proposed.

Mr Weir assumed the role of temporary Chairperson.

The meeting commenced at 10:17 am in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies are detailed above.

2. Draft Minutes of Proceedings of 15 October 2014

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

Paul Girvan joined the meeting at 10:19 am

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.

Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) – Powers to prevent transfers out of unfunded, defined benefit, public service pension schemes to defined contribution pension schemes.

Members discussed correspondence received from DFP on 21 October 2014 relating to a proposed LCM to extend provisions in the Westminster Pension Schemes Bill to Northern Ireland, which would prevent transfers out of unfunded, defined benefit, public service pension schemes to defined contribution pension schemes.

Agreed: to write to the Department expressing the Committee's concern over the late notice of the proposed LCM and to indicate that, as a consequence, the Committee would not have sufficient time to report its opinion on the proposed LCM to the Assembly based on the timetable presented.

Agreed: to schedule an oral hearing from the responsible departmental officials at the next Committee meeting on 5 November 2014.

Agreed: to circulate the correspondence from the Department to the other relevant Assembly committees for information.

4. Validation Study of Welfare Reform Costs – Review of Terms of Reference

The Committee discussed the terms of reference for the 'Welfare Reform Costs - Validation Study', which DFP commissioned for the purpose of providing an independent assessment of the economic impact on Northern Ireland of not progressing the Welfare Reform agenda in line with Great Britain.

Members noted that the Committee was not afforded the opportunity to input to the terms of reference prior to work on the Study commencing. Some members queried how the Study

would also assess the repercussions of implementing Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland, particularly for individuals.

Agreed: that members could write to DFP directly for clarification on how the Study will address particular issues of concern.

Agreed: to forward all relevant correspondence on the Study to the Committee for Social Development for information given the cross-cutting nature of this issue.

Michaela Boyle joined the meeting at 10:30 am

5. Report on Land Value Tax – Briefing from Centre for Economic Empowerment/NICVA

The Committee received a briefing on the ‘Report on Land Value Tax’ from the following representatives:

- Seamus McAleavey, Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
- Ronan Lyons, Economics Consultant
- Andy Wightman, Economics Consultant

Mr McCallister declared an interest as owner of a small agricultural landholding.

Daithi McKay joined the meeting at 10:55 am

Agreed: to forward the report to DFP for a response to the recommendations contained therein.

Daithi McKay resumed his role as Committee Chairperson for the following session which commenced at 11:20 am

6. Strategic Policy Division – Business Plan Targets – Briefing from DFP

The Committee received a briefing on Strategic Policy Divisions’ Performance against Business Plan Targets from the following departmental officials.

- Tony Simpson: Strategic Policy Division (SDP), Central Finance Group (CFG), DFP
- Noel McNally: SPD, DFP
- William Dickson: SPD, DFP

Agreed: that the departmental officials will provide follow up information in response to issues discussed during the briefing.

John McCallister left the meeting at 11:20 am

Adrian McQuillan left the meeting at 11:20 am

Peter Weir left the meeting at 11:20 am

Dominic Bradley joined the meeting at 11:21 am

Adrian McQuillan joined the meeting at 11:25 am
Peter Weir rejoined the meeting at 11:27 am
Paul Girvan left the meeting at 11:28 am
Raymond McCartney left the meeting at 11:34 am
Raymond McCartney re-joined the meeting at 11:40 am
Peter Weir left the meeting at 11:44 am

7. Legal Complaints and Regulations Bill – Follow up Assembly Research Briefing

The Committee received follow up briefings on the Legal Complaints and Regulations Bill from Assembly Research.

Agreed: to forward the research papers to DFP for a response to the issues raised, including the potential for the forthcoming Bill to apply some aspects of the model in Scotland for handling both conduct and service complaints.

Judith Cochrane left the meeting at 11:50 am
Peter Weir re-joined the meeting at 11:51 am

8. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following pieces of correspondence:

- DFP: Response to Assembly Research - In-year Reductions to Departmental Resource DEL: October 2014-15 Monitoring Round
- Committee for Justice: Provision in the Public Service Pensions Act (NI) 2014 relating to RUC Widows' Pensions
- Committee for Justice: Copy of letter sent to Minister of Finance and Personnel on PSNI Equal Pay
- Committee for Justice: Update on the implementation process for all Public Sector Pension Schemes
- Committee for Justice: Northern Ireland Audit Office Report on Sickness Report
- Committee for Employment and Learning: Northern Ireland Audit Office Report on Sickness Absence
- Assembly Research: Follow-up to Briefing paper on Preventative Expenditure
- Assembly Research: Report on Annual Northern Ireland Economic Conference 2014
- Historic Royal Palaces: Plans for Hillsborough Castle

Agreed: to receive a written briefing from Historic Royal Palaces on this issue.

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

Committee input on Freedom of Information (FoI) matters during Halloween recess

The Committee was reminded that it is normal practice for Committees to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson during periods of recess to submit views on the releasing or withholding of information in any non-routine/contentious FoI requests received. The Committee will be advised of any such requests, the views expressed by the Chairperson and/or Deputy Chairperson and the response issued by the Assembly FoI Unit, at the first available meeting following the recess period.

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee will be held on Wednesday, 05 November 2014 at 10:00 am, Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12:03pm

Mr Daithí McKay MLA

Chairperson

Committee for Finance and Personnel

05 November 2014