

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2014
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE, MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir MLA
Mr Ian McCrea 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 Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA

The meeting commenced at 10:20 am in public session.

Agreed: that agenda items 4, 5 and 7 are covered by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly's website.

The Committee welcomed Máirtín Ó Muilleoir to his first Committee meeting and acknowledged Raymond McCartney's contribution to the Committee.

1. Apologies

Apologies are detailed above.

2. Draft Minutes of Proceedings of 05 November 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.

Flexible Working Inquiry Report

Members noted that DFP would provide a formal written response to the Inquiry Report and the Committee could then decide on any necessary follow up action in pursuance of the Inquiry recommendations.

Mid-Year Review of DFP Performance against Business Plan Objectives – Briefing from DFP

The Committee took evidence on the Mid-Year Review of DFP Performance against Business Plan Objectives from the following departmental officials:

- David Sterling, Permanent Secretary, DFP;
- Brigitte Worth, Finance Director, DFP; and
- Kathryn Hill, Head of Business Planning and Corporate Governance, DFP.

This session was recorded by Hansard.

Ian McCrea joined the meeting at 10:28am

John McCallister joined the meeting at 10:55am

Peter Weir left the meeting at 11:00am

Peter Weir rejoined the meeting at 11:05am

Michaela Boyle left the meeting at 11:06am

Michaela Boyle rejoined the meeting at 11:14am

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir left the meeting at 11:15am

Agreed: that the Departmental officials will provide additional information as requested during the session, including: detail on specific measures being taken by Land and Property Services (LPS) on actionable debt recovery; a general briefing paper providing an update on LPS performance in rate collection; and the business case for DFP's move to Workplace NI standards, including forecast financial savings.

4. Review of DFP Programme for Government Targets 2015-16 – Briefing from DFP

The Committee received a briefing on the Review of DFP's Programme for Government Targets 2015-16 from the following departmental officials:

- David Sterling, Permanent Secretary, DFP;
- Brigitte Worth, Finance Director, DFP; and
- Kathryn Hill, Head of Business Planning and Corporate Governance, DFP

This session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: that the Departmental officials will provide additional information as requested during the session, including a progress update on the Air Connectivity Study and consideration of the case for devolving short-haul Air Passenger Duty.

5. Review of the Operation of the Barnett Formula – Briefing from Assembly Research

The Committee received a briefing on the Review of the Operation of the Barnett Formula from Assembly Research.

Agreed: that, based on the proposals contained in the research papers, the Committee will consider options for a fact-finding visit to meet with relevant contacts in GB and will schedule further briefings from expert witnesses.

Ian McCrea left the meeting at 11:23am

6. Review of the Operation of the Barnett Formula – Briefing from Professor Alan Trench and Professor Gerald Holtham

The Committee received a briefing on the Operation of the Barnett Formula from the following expert witnesses:

- Professor Alan Trench – formerly Professor of Politics at University of Ulster, author of 'Devolution Matters' blog.; and
- Professor Gerald Holtham – former Chairperson of Independent Commission for Funding Wales (evidence received through internet-based conferencing)

This session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: to seek written follow up submissions from the expert witnesses, providing more detail on the issues discussed during the session and on any other relevant considerations.

Peter Weir left the meeting at 12:04pm

Peter Weir rejoined the meeting at 12:13pm

Ian McCrea rejoined the meeting at 12:22pm

Peter Weir left the meeting at 12:30pm

7. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following pieces of correspondence;

- DFP: The Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill, Assignment of Receivables - Legislative Consent Motion;

Agreed: to notify the Enterprise, Trade & Investment Committee that the Finance & Personnel Committee is broadly content with the proposals based on the information and assurances provided at this stage.

- Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Response to oral statement on draft Budget 2015-16 – 3 November 2014;
- Historic Royal Palaces: Further information on Hillsborough Castle and Historic Royal Palaces;
- Consumer Council: Press release welcoming the Competition and Market Authority's decision to fully investigate the Personal Current Account market; and
- Press Article: Reform of Defamation Laws;

Agreed: to write to DFP requesting advice on the implications of the closure of the Northern Ireland Law Commission for progressing consideration of the reform of defamation law and for DFP's view on the way forward.

8. Committee Work Programme

Draft Budget 2015-16

Agreed: to request a briefing from DFP on the provisions in the Draft Budget for £133m associated with increased employers pension contributions. It was *further agreed* to request that the Northern Ireland Centre for Economic Policy provides an oral briefing on the impact of the Draft Budget on the wider economy when it is before the Committee on a separate issue.

Agreed: to invite short written briefings on the Draft Budget from the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, the Confederation for British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses and Trade Union Side to inform the Committee's co-ordinated report.

Committee Report on Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Public Sector

Agreed: that an urgent response is sought from Trade Union Side on the Northern Ireland Audit Office Report on Sickness Absence in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland, as well as to the subsequent evidence received by the Committee to date.

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

9. Any other business

Agreed: that members could provide the Secretariat with further suggestions for expert witnesses to the Review on the Operation of the Barnett Formula.

There was no other business.

10. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee will be held on Wednesday, 19 November 2014 at 10:00 am, Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12:55 pm.

Mr Daithí McKay MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance and Personnel
19 November 2014