

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 2015
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 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)
Miss Alison Ferguson (Clerical Supervisor)
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA

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

It was proposed by Peter Weir and seconded by Leslie Cree that John McCallister should be elected as temporary Chairperson. No further nominations were proposed; therefore John McCallister took the Chair.

The meeting commenced at 10:18am in public session.

Agreed: that agenda items 4 and 5 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 11 February 2015

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.

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Budget Process

Members noted that, during the Second Stage debate on the Budget Bill, the Minister had indicated a willingness to see work on the draft MoU between the Assembly and the Executive completed with a view to implementation ahead of next year's budget process.

Agreed: to write to the Minister to formally request a resumption of the work to finalise the draft MoU.

Paul Girvan joined the meeting at 10:23am

4. Review into the Operation of the Barnett Formula – Briefing from Expert Witness: Professor Colin Thain

The Committee received a briefing on the operation of the Barnett formula from the following expert witness via video link:

- Professor Colin Thain – Professor of Political Science, University of Birmingham, England

Agreed: that papers relating to the Review are published online.

Michaela Boyle joined the meeting at 10:35am

Daithí McKay joined the meeting at 10:35am and took the Chair

Dominic Bradley joined the meeting at 10:51am

Paul Girvan left the meeting at 10:51am

Paul Girvan rejoined the meeting at 10:58am
Michaela Boyle left the meeting at 11:05am
Peter Weir left the meeting at 11:07am
Peter Weir rejoined the meeting at 11:12am

5. EU Funding Programmes: PEACE IV and INTERREG V – briefing by DFP and the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB)

The Committee received a briefing on EU Funding Programmes: PEACE IV and INTERREG V from the following officials:

- Frank Duffy – Head of European Union Division, DFP;
- Dominic McCullough – Head of North/South Policy and Programmes Unit, DFP;
- Pat Colgan – Chief Executive, SEUPB;
- Shaun Henry – Director of the Managing Authority, SEUPB.

Michaela Boyle rejoined the meeting at 11:20am
Peter Weir left the meeting at 11:27am
Peter Weir rejoined the meeting at 11:50am
Paul Girvan left the meeting at 11:55am
Dominic Bradley left the meeting at 12:05pm

Agreed: that the witnesses will provide the Committee with a process map showing how applications to PEACE IV and INTERREG V will be assessed by SEUPB and accountable departments as part of a single process, thereby facilitating faster turnaround times.

Agreed: that SEUPB will consider scheduling additional pre-application development workshops for locations not covered in the existing programme, including the North Down and Strangford area.

Agreed: that a further briefing from DFP/SEUPB will be scheduled before the summer recess.

Agreed: to copy the briefing papers to other applicable Assembly committees given the cross-cutting interest.

6. Subordinate Legislation

The Committee considered the following items of subordinate legislation:

SR 32/2015 Valuation for Rating (Decapitalisation Rate) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015.

Agreed: that the Committee has considered SR 32/2015 Valuation for Rating (Decapitalisation Rate) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 has no objection to the rule.

Dominic Bradley rejoined the meeting at 12:06pm

SR 46/2015 The Rates (Owner Allowances) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015.

Agreed: that the Committee has considered SR 46/2015 The Rates (Owner Allowances) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 and recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

SR 47/2015 The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015.

Agreed: that the Committee has considered SR 47/2015 The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 and recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

SR 48/2015 The Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015.

Agreed: that the Committee has considered SR 48/2015 The Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 and recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

The Public Service Pensions (Valuations and Employer Cost Cap) (Amendment) Directions (Northern Ireland) 2015.

The Committee noted the above Directions.

7. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following pieces of correspondence:

- Minister of Finance and Personnel – Draft Legal Complaints & Regulation Bill;
- DFP – Assembly Research on Preventative Spend – Invest to Save;
- DFP – Budget 2015-16 – Assembly Research Lines of Questioning;
- DFP – Response to Evidence Session on Budget 2015-16;
- DFP – Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (CETI) Inquiry into Economic Growth;
- DFP – Pre-Qualification Criteria in Public Procurement;

Agreed: to forward the response to Peter Fitzpatrick Ltd for information. It was *further agreed* to copy the response to the Regional Development Committee for consideration given that the specific issue raised in relation to Transport NI policy falls within its remit.

- DFP – Monthly Forecast Outturn Data October and November;
- DFP – Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Bill (Public Sector Exit Payments);

Agreed: to forward to the First Division Association for information.

- DFP – LPS Actionable Debt Recovery;

Agreed: to note pending receipt of the related strategy in due course;

- DFP – Performance assessment of DHSSPS Budget 2015-16;
- DFP – Department of Justice (DoJ) Savings Delivery Plan: NIPS Staff Exit Scheme shortfall;

Agreed: to copy the response to Committee for Justice for information.

- DFP – Overdue responses to Committee requests for information;

Agreed: to notify DFP of the possibility that the Committee will schedule oral hearings from poor performing business areas in this regard.

- DFP – Enterprise Shared Service (ESS) Performance against business plan targets;

Agreed: to note pending an oral evidence session with ESS on business plan targets on 25 March 2015;

- DFP – Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) Business Plan Session follow up;

- Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (COFMDFM) – Joint Ministerial Council;

- COFMDFM – The Children’s Services Co-operation Bill;

Agreed: to write to DFP to enquire whether it has made comments on the Bill.

- Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI) – Response to the Committee on current banking issues;

Agreed: to note and to forward to CETI for information.

- The Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) – Fairness for Families;

Agreed: to seek comments from both DoJ and DFP and also to advise the Committee for Justice and APIL accordingly.

- Member of the public – Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) Pay Increment Query;

Agreed: to forward to DFP for comment.

- DFP – OECD Review of the Public Sector: invite to stakeholder session on 23 February 2014;

Agreed: that, subject to his availability, the Chairperson will attend this session in order to reflect the Committee position on issues relevant to the Review terms of reference.

Paul Girvan rejoined the meeting at 12:15pm

8. Committee Work Programme

Review of the Operation of the Barnett Formula: Visit to Edinburgh

Members noted potential dates for a fact-finding visit to Edinburgh in May, which would include discussions with the Scottish Parliament’s Finance Committee and Scottish Government officials on a range of issues of mutual interest, including the operation of the Barnett formula.

Agreed: that, once members' availability on the proposed dates is confirmed, the business case for the visit will be submitted for approval.

Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Voluntary Exit Scheme

Members were advised that the Committee will receive a briefing from DFP at its meeting next week on the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme in advance of the Scheme being launched formally on 2 March 2015.

Agreed: to commission an Assembly research paper comparing similar exit schemes in other jurisdictions in order to inform the Committee's future scrutiny of this issue.

Committee Twitter Account

Members noted that other committees in the Assembly and in other legislatures were beginning to use social media, in particular Twitter, as an effective means of communicating their work to stakeholders.

Agreed: that the Committee staff proceed to establish and administer a Committee Twitter Account on a pilot basis.

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

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, 25 February 2015 at 10:00am, Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12:20pm

Mr Daithí McKay MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance and Personnel
25 February 2015