

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 01 JULY 2015
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mrs Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Leslie Cree MBE, MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Ian McCrea MLA
Mr Adrian McQuillan MLA
Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Clairita Frazer (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Dominic Bradley MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle MLA

The meeting commenced at 10:14am in public session.

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

It was proposed by Paul Girvan and seconded by Judith Cochrane that Leslie Cree should be elected as temporary Chairperson. No further nominations were proposed; therefore Leslie Cree assumed the role of Chairperson for the duration of the meeting.

1. Apologies

Apologies are detailed above.

2. Draft Minutes of Proceedings of 17 June 2015

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

3. Matters Arising

Table of requests for information from 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.

Order of business

Agreed: that, in view of a potential difficulty in maintaining quorum and to facilitate decision making, the business on the agenda is reordered as follows: Subordinate Legislation, Correspondence, Committee Work Programme, Any Other Business, followed by the two scheduled oral briefings.

4. Subordinate Legislation

SR 2015/272 - The Funded Public Service Pension Schemes (Reduction of Cash Equivalents) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

Members considered the DFP papers relating to this statutory rule.

It was noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had confirmed that he has no points to raise by way of technical scrutiny in relation to the Rule.

Agreed: that the Committee has considered S.R 2015/272 - The Funded Public Service Pension Schemes (Reduction of Cash Equivalents) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 and has no objection to the rule.

John McCallister joined the meeting at 10:16am

5. Correspondence

Members consider the following items of correspondence:

- DFP – Ministerial Response to the Report on Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Public Sector;

Agreed: to copy the Ministerial response to all statutory committees for information, specifically highlighting to both the Health and Education committees the need for follow up scrutiny of the applicable recommendations in the report for their respective sectors.

- DFP – Devolution of Additional Fiscal Powers;

- DFP – Report on the NI Welfare Reform Bill - Economic Impact and policy considerations;

Agreed: to copy the report to the Social Development Committee given the cross-cutting interest in the issue.

- DFP – June Monitoring Review of Property Management;
- DFP – Departmental Monthly Forecast Outturn Data - March Analysis;
- DFP – (Revised) Business Plan;
- Assembly Research – The Legal Services Regulation Bill (Republic of Ireland) and statistics on complaints against solicitors;
- Assembly Research – Departmental Financial Forecasting 2011-12 – 2014-15;

Agreed: to note and forward to the other statutory committees for information.

- Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development - NISRA Multiple Deprivation Measures;
- Committee for Employment and Learning – Social Clauses & People with Disabilities;
- Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment – Inquiry into Economic Growth and Job Creation;
- Committee for Justice – Level of Bereavement Damages;
- Committee for Regional Development – EU Commission Vice President Visit;

Agreed: to copy the previously considered DFP summary report on the visit to the Committee for Regional Development for information.

- Committee for Regional Development – Over reliance on In-year monitoring process;
- Phil Flanagan MLA – Amateur Sports Grounds Rates Relief;

Agreed: to write to DFP requesting that it responds directly to the issues raised.

- Mickey Brady MP – Rates for ATM's;

Agreed: to write to DFP requesting that it responds directly to the issues raised.

- EU Matters – June Newsletter;
- Institute of Revenue, Rating and Valuations (IRRV) – Northern Ireland Conference 2015; and
- Member of the Public – Equal Pay.

Agreed: to forward to DFP for a direct response.

Jim Wells joined the meeting at 10:23am

6. Committee Work Programme

Members considered a draft of the Committee work programme.

Legal Complaints and Regulation Bill

The Committee considered a draft timetable, Call for Evidence and Signposting Notice for the Legal Complaints and Regulation Bill.

Agreed: that the Call for Evidence and Signposting Notice for the Bill will be published as drafted.

Agreed: that the Committee Motion seeking an extension to Committee Stage of the Legal Complaints and Regulation Bill will be laid in the Business Office.

Rates (Relief for Community Amateur Sports Clubs) Bill

The Committee noted correspondence from the Bill Sponsor, a draft Call for Evidence and Signposting Notice for the Rates (Relief for Community Amateur Sports Clubs) Bill.

Agreed: that, as the summer recess would provide an opportunity to issue the Call for Evidence and help manage the pressures on the Committee's upcoming work programme, the Call for Evidence and Signposting Notice for the Bill will be published as drafted.

Agreed: that, in line with usual convention, the papers received to date in relation to both the Legal Complaints and Regulation Bill and the Rates (Relief for Community Amateur Sports Clubs) Bills will be published online.

Cerberus briefing

Members were advised that confirmation has been received that representatives of Cerberus Capital Management will be available to brief the Committee on 23 September 2015.

Financial Transactions Capital

Agreed: that, given the growing importance of this source of infrastructure finance, a specific progress briefing from DFP is scheduled for after summer recess.

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

7. Any Other Business

Electronic/Hard Copy Committee Packs

Members noted that, arising from a central agreement reached at the Chairperson's Liaison Group, from September onwards, Committee Staff will no longer be providing hard copy packs to any member. A decision on tabled packs will be made in the coming weeks and members will be informed in due course.

Committee input on Freedom of Information matters during recess

The Committee noted the normal practice for Assembly 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 Freedom of Information requests received.

Agreed: that this practice is applied during the forthcoming summer recess.

8. Review of Business Rates: Consideration of the Draft Terms of Reference – Briefing From DFP

In addition to the DFP briefing paper for this session, members noted correspondence from the Department in relation to the separate issue of the proposed Rates (Amendment) Bill.

Agreed: to write to DFP setting out the Committee's briefing requirements in relation to the anticipated request for accelerated passage for the Rates (Amendment) Bill.

The Committee received a briefing on the work to prepare a Draft Terms of Reference for the Review of Business Rates from the following departmental officials:

- Brian McClure, Head of Rating Policy Division, Central Finance Group, DFP; and
- Andrew McAvoy, Rating Policy Division, Central Finance Group, DFP.

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir joined the meeting at 10:35am

Jim Wells left the meeting at 10:36am

Jim Wells rejoined the meeting at 10:40am

John McCallister declared an interest as a farmer and a beneficiary of the exemption of rates for agricultural land.

9. Performance Against Business Plan Objectives: Central Procurement Directorate – Briefing from DFP

The Committee received a briefing on the Central Procurement Directorate's Performance against Business Plan Objectives from the following departmental officials:

- Des Armstrong, Director of Central Procurement Directorate, DFP; and
- Gareth Johnston, Head of Policy and Performance Division, DFP

Ian McCrea left the meeting at 11:00am

Ian McCrea rejoined the meeting at 11:01am

Ian McCrea left the meeting at 11:24am

Agreed: that the departmental officials will work with the Centres of Procurement Expertise to establish how previous subcontracting experience of tenderers can be taken into account when setting the criteria for public procurement opportunities relating to main contractors.

10. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee will be held on Wednesday, 9 September 2015 at 10:00am, Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11:45pm.

**Mr Daithí McKay MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance and Personnel
07 July 2015**