

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**WEDNESDAY, 24 FEBRUARY 2016
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

Present: Mr Daithí McKay MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Claire Hanna MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Leslie Cree MBE, MLA
Mr Gordon Lyons MLA
Mr John McCallister MLA
Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

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

Apologies: Mrs Michaela Boyle MLA
Mr Ian McCrea MLA
Mr Gary Middleton MLA

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

Agreed: that agenda item 5 is 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 17 February 2016

Agreed: that the minutes will be published on the Assembly website.

3. Matters Arising

Proposed subordinate legislation – The Rates (Automatic Telling Machines) (Designation of Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016

Members noted follow up information from the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) clarifying the position of the Rathfriland ward in respect of the ATM Rural Areas Scheme.

Table of requests for information from DFP

The Committee noted the summary table of requests for information from DFP which provided an update on other matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

4. DFP Performance against Business Plan Targets – Briefing from DFP

Members received a briefing on DFP Performance against Business Plan Targets from the following departmental officials:

- David Sterling – Permanent Secretary DFP;
- Brigitte Worth – Finance Director, DFP; and
- Seanin Ferguson – Finance Division, DFP.

Jim Wells joined the meeting at 10:34am

John McCallister joined the meeting at 10:45am

Agreed: that the departmental officials will provide follow-up information in relation to queries raised during the briefing.

5. Defamation Reform – Briefing from DFP

Members received a briefing on Defamation Reform from the following departmental officials:

- Laura McPolin – Departmental Solicitors Office, Civil Law Reform, DFP; and
- Claire Archbold – Deputy Head of Legal Service, DFP.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: that the Committee will consider its draft report on the progress of the Review of the Sale of National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) Assets in Northern Ireland, previously scheduled as agenda item 12, immediately after this item.

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir left the meeting at 10:50am

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir rejoined the meeting at 11:12am

The Committee then moved into closed session at 11.12am in line with normal protocol for the consideration of draft reports.

6. Review of the Sale of NAMA Assets in Northern Ireland - Consideration of draft Progress Report

Members considered the draft report on the progress of the Committee's Review of the Sale of NAMA Assets in Northern Ireland, including proposed additions to the report which had been tabled by individual members.

Agreed: that the draft report will be updated to take account of the Committee's consideration of the proposed additions tabled by individual members and that a revised draft will be circulated to members for formal consideration and agreement at the Committee's meeting on 9 March 2016.

Claire Hanna left the meeting at 11:30am

The Committee returned to public session for the remainder of the meeting.

7. Subordinate Legislation

The Committee considered three proposals for subordinate legislation ('SL1s') and a statutory rule (SR) as follows:

SL1 The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016

Agreed: that the Committee has considered DFP's proposal for subordinate legislation under SL1 - The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 and has no objection to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.

SL1 The Superannuation (Certification Officer for Northern Ireland) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016

In response to specific queries raised by members, a briefing was received from the following DFP official:

- Peter Philips, Pensions Division, DFP.

Agreed: that the Committee has considered DFP's proposal for subordinate legislation under The Superannuation (Certification Officer for Northern Ireland) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016, and has no objection to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.

SL1 The Public Service Pensions (Certification Officer for Northern Ireland) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016

Agreed: that the Committee has considered DFP's proposal for subordinate legislation under The Public Service Pensions (Certification Officer for Northern Ireland) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016, and has no objection to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.

S.R. 2016/26 The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016

Agreed: that the Committee has considered SR The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 and has no objection to the rule.

8. Legislative Consent Motion (LCM): Northern Ireland (Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan) Bill

Members considered correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First and deputy First Minister (COFMDFM) on the above LCM. Members also noted that a response from DFP was not received in time to be considered during today's meeting.

Agreed: that, in view of the time constraints imposed by the LCM process, the response from DFP will be forwarded to COFMDFM once received.

9. Correspondence

Members noted the following items of correspondence:

- Member of Public – NAMA and Land and Property Service (LPS) issues;
- Ministerial response regarding the Women's Centres Childcare Fund;
- DFP – Central Procurement Division (CPD) follow up information following recent evidence session;
- DFP – Final Outturn Report 2014-15;

Agreed: to circulate previous correspondence from DFP on Assembly Research papers on the Executive Draft Budget 2016/17 to other statutory committees as applicable.

- Committee for Employment and Learning – Special Educational Needs Inquiry;
- Public Accounts Committee – correspondence from DFP regarding the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) potential loophole;
- Community Foundation NI – Dormant Accounts scheme; and

Agreed: to schedule an oral briefing from the Community Foundation NI on this issue.

- Correspondence from Manleys Ltd regarding the Financial Ombudsman Service.

Agreed: to write to the Financial Ombudsman Service, subject to the agreement of Manleys Ltd, asking for the matter under consideration to be expedited.

Claire Hanna rejoined the meeting at 11:54am

The Committee also noted routine correspondence which had been sent to members on 22 February 2016.

10. Committee Work Programme

Derelict Land Tax

Agreed: to schedule an oral briefing from DFP on the considerations in relation to introducing a derelict land tax.

Charity Shops and Business Rates

Agreed: to schedule an oral briefing from a panel of representatives, including the ‘More than a Shop’ campaign and Saint Vincent de Paul, to hear their views on any potential removal of the existing business rates exemption for charity shops.

Agreed: that DFP officials will be asked to provide a response to the issues raised by the representatives of the charity shops.

Members noted the updated work programme which will be published on the Committee’s website.

11. Any Other Business

None.

*Máirtín Ó Muilleoir left the meeting at 11:57am
Claire Hanna left the meeting at 12:00pm*

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee will be on Wednesday 02 March 2016 at 10:00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12:00pm.

**Mr Daithí McKay MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance and Personnel
02 March 2016**