

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 16 MARCH 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 Ian McCrea 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 Judith Cochrane MLA
Mr Gary Middleton MLA

The meeting commenced at 10:06am in public session.

Agreed: that agenda item 4 is covered by Hansard and the Official Report published on the Assembly's website.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

Claire Hanna joined the meeting at 10:06am

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir joined the meeting at 10:10am

The Chairperson and other members thanked the secretariat staff for the support which they provided to the work of the Committee during the mandate.

The Chairperson also paid tribute to the contribution of Committee members who were not standing for re-election, including: the previous Deputy Chairperson, Dominic Bradley; Leslie Cree; and Judith Cochrane.

2. Draft Minutes of Proceedings of 09 March 2016

Agreed: that the minutes of the meeting on 09 March 2016 will be published on the Assembly website.

Agreed: that, as there are no further meetings of the Committee scheduled in this Assembly Mandate, the Chairperson will agree the minutes from this meeting on behalf of the Committee.

3. Matters Arising

Review of the sale of NAMA assets in Northern Ireland – Committee Progress Report

Members noted the correspondence from Mr Frank Daly, Chairman of the National Assets Management Agency (NAMA) in response to the Committee's report on the progress of the Review of the sale of NAMA assets in Northern Ireland.

Several members expressed their disappointment with the content of the correspondence given NAMA's previous refusal to give oral evidence to the Committee.

The Committee considered a draft reply to Mr Daly.

Agreed: that the reply to Mr Daly is issued and published on the Committee's webpage in line with previous practice.

Agreed: to write to the Department of Finance (Republic of Ireland) asking for clarity over the nominations made by the former Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson MP, for appointments to the NAMA Northern Ireland Advisory Committee.

Agreed: that, for completeness, the correspondence from Mr Ronnie Hanna considered at last week's meeting will be published on the Committee's webpages along with any other relevant papers.

Rating of Empty Homes

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) to a question from John McCallister about the amount of revenue raised through the rating of empty homes.

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.

Agreed: that any outstanding matters on the table of requests would be included in the Committee's Legacy Report.

4. Rating Issues: Charity Shops – Panel briefing from 'More than a Shop' Campaign.

The Committee received a briefing from the following representatives from two charities involved in the 'More than a Shop' campaign:

- Joyce Savage, Head of Communications and Marketing, Cancer Focus NI; and
- Margaret Carr, Public Affairs Manager, Cancer Research UK

The Committee noted that Cormac Wilson, Senior Vice President of the St Vincent de Paul was unable to attend the meeting due to illness.

This session was recorded by Hansard.

John McCallister joined the meeting at 10:27am

John McCallister declared that he had met previously with Margaret Carr of Cancer Research UK to discuss this issue.

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir left the meeting at 10:50am

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir rejoined the meeting at 11:00am

Jim Wells left the meeting at 11:03am

Jim Wells rejoined the meeting at 11:08am

Claire Hanna left the meeting at 11:09am

Claire Hanna rejoined the meeting at 11:10am

Daithi McKay left the meeting at 11:11am

Claire Hanna, Deputy Chairperson, took the Chair at 11:12am

Agreed: that, on the basis of this briefing, the Committee will recommend that, in the event of DFP considering any policy proposals to change the current rates relief for charity shops, the Department should undertake a comprehensive impact assessment, including of the environmental, financial, health and equality/inequality implications of applying any rate liability on the charity sector.

Agreed: that the representative from Cancer Research UK will provide follow-up information, for illustrative purposes, on the amount of rates paid by Cancer Research UK in Northern

Ireland on non-donated VAT able goods; and that the Hansard transcript of the briefing will be sent to St Vincent de Paul for it to provide any follow-up comments as applicable.

5. OECD Review of Public Governance in Northern Ireland – Update Briefing from DFP

Members received a briefing on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Review of Public Governance in Northern Ireland from the following departmental officials:

- Dr Colin Sullivan, Director, Strategic Policy and Reform Directorate, DFP; and
- Ms Deirdre McMullan, Acting Head of Economic Advisory Unit, DFP.

Jim Wells declared that he had met with the OECD team during the ‘mission phase’ of the Review.

Agreed: that the Department’s briefing paper will be copied to the other relevant statutory committees for information, given the cross-departmental relevance of the OECD review.

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir left the meeting at 11:15am

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir rejoined the meeting at 11:20am

Gordon Lyons left the meeting at 11:21am

Máirtín Ó Muilleoir left the meeting at 11:22am

6. Subordinate Legislation

The Committee considered the following three Statutory Rules (SRs):

S.R. 2016/70 The Superannuation (Certification Officer for Northern Ireland) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016

Members noted that it was not possible to calculate the statutory period for this Rule as, at the time of the Rule being laid, there were fewer than 10 sitting days left in the Mandate. The statutory period will therefore carry over to the next Mandate.

The Committee also noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had not yet published his report about the Rule by way of technical scrutiny.

Gordon Lyons rejoined the meeting at 11.26am

Jim Wells left the meeting at 11.27am

Agreed: that the Committee has considered S.R. 2016/70 The Superannuation (Certification Officer for Northern Ireland) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 and, subject to the Examiner's report, has no objection to the rule.

S.R. 2016/71 The Public Service Pensions (Certification Officer for Northern Ireland) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016

Members were informed that, due to an issue raised by the Examiner of Statutory Rules, it was not possible to consider S.R. 2016/71 The Public Service Pensions (Certification Officer for Northern Ireland) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 at this time.

The Committee noted that DFP will lay a revised Statutory Rule to take account of the Examiner's observations, which will be considered in the next Mandate.

S.R. 2016/87 The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016

Members were informed that it was not possible to calculate the statutory period for this Rule as, at the time of the Rule being laid, there were fewer than 10 sitting days left in the Mandate. The statutory period will therefore carry over to the next Mandate.

The Committee also noted that the The Examiner of Statutory Rules had not yet published his report about the Rule by way of technical scrutiny.

Agreed: that the Committee has considered S.R. 2016/87 The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 and, subject to the Examiner's report, has no objection to the rule.

7. Correspondence

Members noted the following correspondence:

- DFP - Ministerial letter regarding MoU on the budget process;
- DFP - Ministerial letter re Cost of Division - Independent Audit;
- DFP - follow up to General Rating Issues;
- DFP - Follow up to Northern Ireland Civil Service People Strategy and People Plan;
- DFP - Corporation Tax – Second Round effects;
- DFP - Corporate Services Division follow up information;
- DFP - Business Plan follow up information (Feb 2016)(Q2 2015-16);
- DFP - Budget Bill and Spring Supplementary Estimates 2015-16;
- DFP - Response re Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) and Probation Board NI Agency Staff;

Agreed: to forward the Department's response to NIPSA, who had raised the issue with the Committee.

- DFP - HM Treasury Consultation - repayment of public sector exit payments;

Agreed: to forward the Department's response to NIPSA, who had raised the issue with the Committee.

- DFP - Review of Non Domestic Rating System Consultation Report;
- DFP - Pre 2002 Civil Service Widows Pensions;
- DFP - Westminster - Consultation on Reforms to Public Sector Exit Payments; and
- DFP - Office for National Statistics: Consultation on Country and Regional Public Sector Finance.

The Committee also noted routine correspondence which had been sent to members on 14 March 2016.

8. Any other business

Recess & Dissolution Arrangements

Agreed: that, should any correspondence be sent to the Committee between this last meeting and dissolution, a standard reply will be issued stating that the Committee has no further meetings scheduled before the Assembly dissolves on 29 March 2016, but that the correspondence has been forwarded to members of the Committee for information.

Agreed: that the incoming Committee for Finance is permitted access to the Committee papers from this Mandate, subject to any legal requirements, should it request so in the new Mandate.

Members noted the 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 Freedom of Information (FoI) requests received. Furthermore, that 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 FoI Unit by email. This will be the case until the Assembly dissolves on 29 March 2016. Any FoI requests received after dissolution will be dealt with by the FoI Unit directly.

9. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

Members were advised that, due to dissolution, there are no further scheduled meetings of the Committee for Finance and Personnel in the current Mandate.

Daithí McKay rejoined the meeting at 11:31am and resumed the position of Chair for the remainder of the meeting

The Committee then moved into closed session at 11:31am in line with normal protocol for the consideration of draft reports.

10. Committee Legacy Report: Final consideration of draft report

Members considered the draft Committee Legacy Report as follows:

Agreed: that paragraphs 1 - 20 stand part of the Report;

Agreed: that paragraphs 21 - 30 stand part of the Report;

Agreed: that paragraphs 31 - 43 stand part of the Report;

Agreed: that paragraphs 44 - 51 stand part of the Report;

Agreed: that paragraph 52, as amended, stands part of the Report;

Agreed: that the Appendices, subject to finalised statistical information, stand part of the report.

Agreed: that the Legacy Report 2011-16 be the 18th Report of the Committee for Finance and Personnel to the Assembly 2011-16.

Members noted that all committee legacy reports will be published on-line during week commencing 21 March 2016.

Members noted that the work of the Committee during the mandate, as reflected in the Legacy Report, will be highlighted through the Committee's Twitter feed before the end of the Mandate.

Ian McCrea left at 11.32am

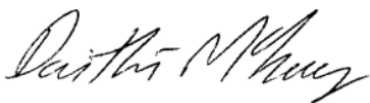
Ian McCrea rejoined the meeting at 11.37am

John McCallister left the meeting at 11:39am

John McCallister rejoined the meeting at 11:40am

Leslie Cree left the meeting at 11:41am

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11:45am.



Mr Daithí McKay MLA

Chairperson

Committee for Finance and Personnel

22 March 2016