



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 4 MARCH 2020

Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Paul Frew MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister MLA
Mr Pat Catney MLA
Ms Jemma Dolan MLA
Mr Seán Lynch MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

Apologies:

In Attendance: Mr Jim McManus (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Kate McCullough (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Neil Sedgewick (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2:10pm in public session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 26 February 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 26 February 2020.

3. Matters Arising

The Committee considered information provided by the Department on the operation of In-Year Monitoring.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to Research and Information Services to inform its development of the budget process and procedures.

The Committee considered a response from the National Crime Agency (NCA) to a Committee request for the Agency to provide an informal update briefing on the sale of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) Loans' portfolio NI.

Agreed: To hold an informal update briefing from NCA on Tuesday 12 May at 1:00pm.

4. Oral Evidence: Overview and Priorities for Enterprise Shared Services

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.15pm

- John Crosby, Finance and HR Share Services
- Desi McDonnell, Properties Division
- Colm Doran, Central Government Transformation Programme
- Iggy O'Doherty, Digital Shared Services

Issues considered included: Property disposal, rationalisation of the NICS estate; dilapidation payments; data sharing in a post-EU exit scenario; challenges in relation to data hosting; and building regulations such as energy performance.

Agreed: To commission research on the Estonian approach to electronic delivery of Government services and how Estonia developed into a world leading nation in this area.

Agreed: The Department to provide a written response on the number cases that remain outstanding from the 16 exit properties in the last 3 years (as of 4 March 2020) in relation to dilapidation payments, including the amounts and reasons for delays.

Agreed: To receive a written explanation from the Department of the detailed dilapidation payments' process from start to finish.

Officials left the meeting at 3:15pm

5. Written Briefing – Departmental Response Regarding Voluntary Exit Schemes (VES) Evaluations

The Committee considered the written briefing from the Department regarding Voluntary Exit Schemes' Evaluations (VES)

Agreed: To receive clarification from the Department on issues raised regarding the information provided in the written briefing on the VES.

Agreed: To schedule an oral evidence session from the Public Sector Reform Division on 25th March regarding the VES.

Agreed: To receive the written briefing clarifying the issues raised at the 4 March meeting before the oral evidence session on the 25th March.

6. Oral Evidence – Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) – Voluntary Exit Scheme, Civil Service Pay and HR Policy Matters

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3.20pm

- Alison Millar, General Secretary, NIPSA
- Carmel Gates, Deputy General Secretary, NIPSA
- Tina Creaney, Civil Service Group Executive Committee, NIPSA

Issues considered included: VES and staff absenteeism; increase in agency staff; incremental payments; and incentives for more young people within the NICS.

Agreed: To receive from the Department the figures for NICS staff absenteeism since before the beginning of VES until present.

Agreed: To include a breakdown of staff absenteeism due to work related stress during this period.

Agreed: To receive from the Department a breakdown, by grade and department, of the age profile of NICS staff.

Agreed: To receive from NIPSA a breakdown on the number of members dismissed with long-term illness such as cancer, mental illness and heart problems and to indicate at what stage of the sick pay scheme this was instigated.

Witnesses left the meeting at 4.34pm

7. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business

8. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following correspondence:

- i. A response from the Department to the request to provide an analysis of the impact on Local Government Pensions Schemes of the McCloud ruling, including the impact on rate payers

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Committee for Communities for information.

- ii. The Committee noted a response from the Department to the request for information regarding safeguarding Pension Scheme members from potential defrauding and transferring from the scheme.
- iii. Lisney Chartered Surveyors informing the Committee of an issue regarding payment of agreed dilapidation sums (this item was considered under Agenda Item 4).

The Committee noted the remaining items of correspondence including outgoing correspondence and routine papers issued 28 February 2020.

9. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme for January to April 2020 and the written and oral evidence still to be scheduled.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

10. Any Other Business

The Committee noted the notification of a motion for debate in plenary arising from the launch of the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Inquiry Report on Monday 16 March.

The Committee considered the second stage of Mr Allister's Private Members Bill which is due to be considered on 16 March 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to access the Committee information on consultees from Mr Allister's 2015 Bill consultation to help inform the debate.

The Committee considered the issue of advertising plasma screens and small businesses.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to update the Committee for the Economy and copy to the Committee for Justice informing them that the Northern Ireland Trading Standards Service is investigating this matter.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The Committee's strategic planning meeting will be held on Wednesday 11 March at 1:30pm in Room 29. Apologies have been received from Mr Steve Aiken MLA and Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA.

The next Committee meeting will be on Wednesday 18 March 2020 at 2:00pm in Room 29. An apology has been received from Mr Steve Aiken MLA.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.44pm

Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance
18 March 2020