



**COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

**DRAFT**

WEDNESDAY 1 JULY 2020

Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

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

Apologies: Mr Pat Catney MLA

In Attendance: Mr Jim McManus (Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Neil Sedgewick (Clerical Supervisor)

*The meeting commenced at 12:32pm in public session.*

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Mr. Pat Catney

**2. Draft Minutes**

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 24 June 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee Agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 24 June 2020.

### **3. Matters Arising**

*Jim Wells joined the meeting at 12.34pm*

#### Consideration by the Chancellor of a Temporary Reduction in VAT

At the meeting of 24 June it was agreed to return to this issue and to consider the implications of extending any reduction of VAT to Northern Ireland.

*Agreed:* To forward the joint letter to Treasury regarding timing of UK Budget to the Minister for information.

### **4. Written Evidence: In-Year Monitoring – Outcome of the June Monitoring Round, Public Spending Directorate, Department of Finance**

The Committee considered the June Monitoring Round papers including departmental June Monitoring responses from departments to their relevant Committees.

*Agreed:* To write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the role of scrutiny committees in monitoring the performance of their respective departments and to seek an assurance that, in future, TEO will adhere to the in-year monitoring guidance issued by the Department of Finance.

*Agreed:* To seek a response from the Department to the issues identified in the Clerk's brief for consideration alongside the oral evidence at next week's meeting.

### **5. Oral Evidence: Rates Relief: Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC)**

*The following witness joined the meeting at 12.39pm*

- Gareth Hetherington, Director of the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre

*Jim Wells left the meeting at 12.55pm*

Issues discussed included: strengthening local supply chains, supporting the construction and manufacturing sectors, identifying programmes deadweight, training development for Job Centre staff.

*Jim Wells joined the meeting at 13.21pm*

*The Witness left the meeting at 13.45pm*

**6. Oral Evidence: SL1 - The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 - Rating Policy Division, Department of Finance**

*The following officials joined the meeting at 13.45pm by videoconference*

- Mr Alan Brontë, Director of Rating Policy Division, Department of Finance
- Mr Andrew McAvoy, Rating Policy Division, Department of Finance

Issues discussed included: clarifying rate exemption for number of named groups/sectors, and how successful the programme has been for businesses.

*Officials left the meeting at 13.58pm*

*Agreed:* To write to the Committee for the Economy outlining Rating Policy Division's response to its correspondence regarding businesses covered by the proposed legislation.

The Committee for Finance considered the SL1 – The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020. The purpose of this Statutory Rule is to make provision to provide emergency rate relief in order to help business ratepayers who are facing financial impacts arising from the serious public health issues caused by the virus known as Coronavirus or “Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2”, causing the disease known as “COVID-19”.

*Agreed:* The Committee for Finance considered Department of Finance's proposal for subordinate legislation The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the policy implications of the of the proposed legislation at this stage.

**7. Subordinate Legislation SR 2020-106 - Census Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee for Finance considered SR 2020-106 – Census Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020. The purpose of the Census Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 is to make provision for the operational arrangements and procedures necessary for the conduct of the 2021 Census, prescribe the paper questionnaires and provide details on the various online questionnaires that will be used in Schedules to the Regulations

*Agreed:* The Committee for Finance considered SR 2020-106 - Census Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and, subject to the ESR's report has no objection to the rule.

**8. Subordinate Legislation – SR 2020-110 The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee for Finance considered SR 2020-110 – The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020. The Statutory Rule will reinstate the previously applied rates exemption for separate entries in the Valuation List associated with automatic telling machines (ATMs) in a designated rural area. The exemption will apply to any ATMs which are valued individually.

*Agreed:* The Committee for Finance considered the SR 2020-110 The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 and, subject to the ESR report, recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

**9. Subordinate Legislation - SR 2020-111 The Business Tenancies (Coronavirus) (Restriction on Forfeiture: Relevant Period) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020**

The Committee for Finance considered SR 2020-111 The Business Tenancies (Coronavirus) (Restriction on Forfeiture: Relevant Period) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020. While the Coronavirus Act 2020 provided that, where non-payment of rent would usually enable a landlord to treat a lease as forfeited, that right would not be able to be exercised for a period of three months (up to 30th June 2020) - with a power to extend if it is needed. The purpose of the Statutory Rule is to extend that period in Northern Ireland until 30 September 2020.

*Agreed:* That the Committee for Finance has considered SR 2020-111 The Business Tenancies (Coronavirus) (Restriction on Forfeiture: Relevant Period) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020 and, subject to the ESR's report has no objection to the rule.

**10. Chairperson's Brief**

Joint letter to Treasury regarding Timing of UK Budget

The Committee considered the draft joint letter to the Treasury regarding timing of the UK budget.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to issue a joint letter to the Chief Secretary of the Treasurer.

## 11. Correspondence

- i.&ii. The Committee noted the response from NI Human Rights Commission to follow up questions relating to the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill and the response to follow up questions to Felicity Huston relating to the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

*Agreed:* To consider further as part of its scrutiny of the Functioning of Government Bill.

- iii. The Committee considered from the Department of Finance regarding Review of ALBs

*Agreed:* To forward the information to other statutory committees for information.

- iv. The Committee considered from the Department of Finance regarding Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2019/2020

*Agreed:* To consider when the Committee deliberates on public sector reform as part of the Forward Work Programme (FWP)

- v. The Committee noted the Departmental response regarding VAT and excise provisions

- vi. The Committee considered the departmental response regarding Councils' post COVID-19 Social and Economic Recovery

*Agreed:* To forward the response to NILGA/SOLACE

- vii. The Committee considered from Mineral Products Association (MPA) Northern Ireland regarding COVID-19 recovery

*Agreed:* To forward correspondence to the Department for comment on each of the ten actions suggested by MPA NI.

- viii. The Committee considered the departmental response regarding Land Registry Fees Order

*Agreed:* To forward to the Public Accounts Committee to help inform its inquiry

Members were content to note the following correspondence:

- ix. The Department's response to questions from the Infrastructure Committee relating to construction projects  
x. Arc21 and the positive contribution to the role of local government

- xi. The Minister of Finance response to the Committee for Communities regarding the Trussel Trust

The Committee noted the Composite Request to the Department.

### **Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme for July 2020.

*Agreed:* To include oral evidence from the Public Spending Directorate, Department of Finance in-Year Monitoring – Outcome of the June Monitoring Round on the agenda for the meeting on 8 July 2020.

### **12. Any Other Business**

#### NCA Informal Briefing

The Committee considered the informal briefing received from a representative of the NCA on its investigation into Project Eagle.

*Agreed:* To write on behalf of the Committee to thank the NCA for its informal briefing to the Committee.

#### Emails - PPE Joint Order

*Agreed:* The Committee Office to track the emails previously and recently received and to provide a synopsis to the Committee on 8 July.

*Agreed:* To write to the Permanent Secretary asking how control of this information has been handled considering it had been referenced in the media despite the Committee having agreed to handle the information in confidence.

### **13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 8 July 2020 at 12.30pm in the Senate Chamber.

*The meeting was adjourned at 14.30pm*

**Dr Steve Aiken, OBE MLA**  
**Chairperson**  
**Committee for Finance**  
**8 July 2020**