



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2020

Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Paul Frew MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister MLA
Mr Pat Catney MLA
Mr Seán Lynch MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

Present by teleconferencing:

Ms Jemma Dolan MLA

Apologies: Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

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

The meeting commenced at 12.33pm in public session, Chaired by Mr Paul Frew, Deputy Chairperson

The Committee were advised that the mother of Jim McManus, Clerk to the Committee, had passed away at the weekend.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send a letter of condolence to Jim and his family.

1. Apologies

See above.

2. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 8 July 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 8 July 2020.

The Committee considered the revised minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 1 July 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the revised minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 1 July 2020.

3. Matters Arising

The Committee noted the cover note from the Department and the summary of the UK Chancellor's summer economic update totals which was copied to all Statutory Committees.

4. Oral Evidence: Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill – the Bill Sponsor

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The oral evidence session commenced at 12.37pm

- Mr Jim Allister MLA, Bill sponsor

Issues discussed included: A new statutory duty for Departments to comply in providing information before implementing Section 44 and sanctions; criminal offence for failure to use non-official systems and the transfer of information to official systems; maintaining the dates identified in Clause 4 due to COVID-19; Codes vs legislation.

Agreed: To write to the Bill Sponsor seeking responses to additional questions outlined in the Clerk's paper.

Agreed: To invite the Bill Clerk to brief the Committee on the next steps of the passage of the Bill

The oral evidence session ended at 13.34pm

5. SR 2020/144: The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee for Finance considered SR 2020/144 – The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020. The 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 Coronavirus.

Agreed: The Committee for Finance considered SR 2020/144 – The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the rule.

6. SR 2020/160: The Rates (Automatic Telling Machines) (Designation of Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee for Finance considered SR 2020/160 – The Rates (Automatic Telling Machines) (Designation of Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020. The rule updates the eligible wards for the purpose of providing a rates exemption to Automatic Telling Machines in these areas.

Agreed: The Committee for Finance considered SR 2020/160 – The Rates (Automatic Telling Machines) (Designation of Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the rule.

7. SR 2020/161: The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee for Finance considered SR 2020/161 - The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020. The rule amends the Schedule to the principal Regulations to provide an update of the telecommunication companies laid out in Part 1 of the Schedule to the principal Regulations.

Agreed: The Committee for Finance considered SR 2020/161 - The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the rule.

8. Consultation: Public Service Pension Schemes: Changes to the Transitional Arrangements to the 2015 Schemes

Members considered the consultation on the Public Service Pension Scheme.

Agreed: To receive an oral evidence session from the Pensions Division in relation to the Public Service Pensions Schemes and changes to the transitional arrangements to the 2015 Schemes.

Agreed: To forward the details of the consultation to the committees for Education, Health and Justice for information.

9. Consultation: Amending the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Members considered the consultation on Amending the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

Agreed: To ask the Department to provide a summary of the consultation responses once the consultation has completed.

Agreed: To write to MW Advocate in relation to this issue and inform them that committees do not respond to departmental consultations. However, the Committee will consider the matter in full once the consultation has completed and the Committee has had an opportunity to consider the outcome of the consultation.

10. Chairpersons Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered the Clerk's briefing paper – Funding Allocations/Summer Economic Statement COVID-19.

Agreed: To forward the tables of COVID-19 allocations to each scrutiny committee for their consideration.

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding Coronavirus: £3 Billion for NHS.
- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding Coronavirus: extra £3.6 Billion for devolved Administrations.

Agreed: To consider both items of correspondence ii. And iii. in conjunction with October Monitoring and the Main Estimates.

- iv. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding issues raised by the Mineral Products Association (MPA).

Agreed: To forward the response from the Department to MPA.

- v. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the North / South Implementation Bodies.
- vi. The Committee noted a response from the Department in relation to its 2020-21 Main Estimate position.
- vii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Infrastructure regarding financial support for road haulage, taxi industry and transport sector.

Agreed: To write to the Northern Ireland Executive expressing the Committee's concern on this issue; to seek clarification as to which Department is responsible for providing financial support for the road haulage, taxi and transport industries; and to establish if any costed proposals or initiatives have been considered to provide support to those working within these sectors.

- viii. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding the financial pressures facing the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Department for Finance.

Agreed: To raise the 'McCloud' ruling and its impact with the Pensions Division in a future oral evidence session.

Agreed: To request that the Department keep the Committee informed as to the pressures facing the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Department of Finance.

- ix. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the Civil Service Injury Benefits Scheme Amendment Scheme (NI) 2020.
- x. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department in relation to the Monthly Outturn & Forecast May-June 2020.
- xi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department in relation to the Monthly Outturn & Forecast July 2020.

Agreed: To forward items x. and xi. to the Research and Information Service and to commission a quarterly analysis of the financial forecasting performance of departments.

- xii. The Committee considered a response from the Minister regarding the Renewable Heating Initiative disciplinary process.

Agreed: To request from the Department a copy of the 'Departmental Guidance on Assembly Committees' as referred to in the Minister's letter.

Agreed: The Clerk and Chairperson to draft a letter to the Speaker regarding the correspondence from the Minister and to seek the Committee's approval before issuing the letter to the Speaker.

- xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister regarding public expenditure: 2020-2021 COVID-19 Urgent Allocations.

Agreed: To forward the correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding August COVID-19 Allocations to the Committees for Health, Economy, Education, Communities and Infrastructure.

- xiv. The Committee considered a report from Development Trusts (NI) (DTNI) - From Coronavirus to Community Wealth: Building Back Better in NI.

Agreed: To inform DTNI that due to the Committee's current workload and restricted meeting opportunities it would not be possible to arrange an oral evidence session in the foreseeable future.

- xv. The Committee considered a response from the Department on the Digital Economy Act 2017.

Agreed: To write to the Department and ask to be kept informed of any future developments.

- xvi. The Committee noted correspondence from Energy Efficiency Group NI regarding incorporating energy efficiency measures into NI recovery.
- xvii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding the Public Sector Pay Policy 2020/21.
- xviii. The Committee considered correspondence from member of Association of Northern Ireland Travel Agents (ANITA).

Mr Frew declared an interest as a member of his family had undertaken work experience in the office of the person who had issued this item of correspondence.

Agreed: To write to the Department for Finance to ask the what specific financial support has been provided for this sector and if any proposals have come from the Department for the Economy to support the sector.

Agreed: To forward the correspondence to the Committee for the Economy for information.

The Committee agreed to note the following correspondence:

- xix. Departmental response regarding Rate Arrears.
- xx. Departmental response regarding LPS and Local Councils.
- xxi. Committee for the Economy regarding procurement of PPE.
- xxii. National Crime Agency.
- xxiii. Departmental response to Committee for Communities regarding Local Councils Rate Guarantee.
- xxiv. Departmental response to Committee for the Economy regarding procurement of PPE.
- xxv. The Speaker regarding Establishment of a Youth Assembly.
- xxvi. Departmental response to Committee for Communities regarding Support for Disability Employment.
- xxvii. Health Committee to Department of Finance regarding financial support for HSC staff carers.
- xxviii. Health Committee to Department of Health regarding PPE production.
- xxix. HM Treasury regarding Block Grant Transparency.
- xxx. Department of Finance input into Committee for the Economy query.
- xxxi. Department response to Committee for Health regarding financial support for HSC staff.
- xxxii. Paula Bradley MLA, Chair of APG on UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace and Security regarding embedding gender equality in future policy and COVID-19 response.

Members are content to note routine papers of 8 September 2020.

12. Any Other Business

General Register Office NI

Agreed: To ask the Department to provide detail on letters sent to churches from the General Register Office NI regarding complying with government legislation on marriage and preventing churches from officiating weddings if they don't comply.

Fiscal Council

Agreed: To receive an update from the Department on the establishment of a Fiscal Council.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 16 September 2020 at 12.30pm in the Senate Chamber.

14. Correspondence Regarding the Joint Order for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Members considered correspondence and emails from the Department.

The Committee considered a proposal from Mr Paul Frew MLA

Proposed: "To write to the Department to seek further information in respect of the Department's Information Management policy including its operation and how decisions are made, and by whom, in the application of the classification of items considered non-sensitive/sensitive."

The Committee divided: Ayes 3; Noes 3; Abstain 1

AYES

Paul Frew MLA
Jim Allister MLA
Jim Wells MLA

NOES

Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA
Seán Lynch MLA

ABSTAIN

Pat Catney MLA

The proposal fell.

The Committee considered a proposal from Maolíosa McHugh MLA

Proposed: *“To note the material provided by the Department relating the failed order for PPE and to move onto other matters.”*

The Committee divided: Ayes 3; Noes 3; Abstain 1

AYES	NOES	ABSTAIN
Maolíosa McHugh MLA Jemma Dolan MLA Seán Lynch MLA	Paul Frew MLA Jim Allister MLA Jim Wells MLA	Pat Catney MLA

The proposal fell.

The meeting moved into closed session at 14.48pm

15. Operational Plan

The Committee considered the Clerk’s paper on the operational plan 2020-21

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the strategic plan the Website

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Operational Plan 2020-2021

Agreed: To inform PSRD of the Committee’s focus for the coming oral evidence session

The meeting was adjourned at 14.51pm

Paul Frew, MLA
Deputy Chairperson
Committee for Finance
16 September 2020