



**COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

WEDNESDAY 10 JUNE 2020

Senate Chamber, 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)  
Mr Neil Sedgewick (Clerical Supervisor)  
Mr Ray McCaffrey (RaISE Researcher) – by teleconferencing

*The meeting commenced at 14.31pm in public session.*

**1. Apologies**

There were no apologies.

**2. Draft Minutes**

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 3 June 2020

*Agreed:* The Committee Agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 3 June 2020.

### **3. Matters Arising**

Members noted a letter from the Minister regarding the joint order for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the Committee's request for relevant emails.

### **4. Oral Evidence: Minister's First Day Brief: Oral Evidence from the Department of Finance**

*The following official joined the meeting at 14.36pm*

- Sue Gray, Permanent Secretary, Department of Finance

*The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 14.41pm*

*Jim Wells joined the meeting at 14.46pm*

*The meeting resumed in public session at 15.22pm*

Issues discussed included: consideration of the redacted issues in the Minister's First Day Brief; the letter from the Minister regarding the joint order for PPE; authorisation of North / South Bodies expenditure; and support to the Department on the issue of Air Passenger Duty and other matters.

*Agreed:* The Permanent Secretary to provide a statement of potential pressures across the NICS including the potential litigation costs and other financial pressures arising in the Department for Finance.

*Agreed:* The Permanent Secretary to confirm if the suppliers of the recent PPE delivery are the same suppliers referred to in emails requested but not yet received by the Committee.

*Agreed:* The Permanent Secretary to provide clarity on how, in the absence of a Minister, funding for North / South Bodies was authorised, if it was legal, and, if not, were the accounts of these bodies qualified.

*Agreed:* The Permanent Secretary to explain, given that the EU procurement rules require the process to be open and transparent, how information in relation to this can be withheld.

*The Official left the meeting at 16.03pm*

**6. Subordinate Legislation SR 2020-91: The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020-91: The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020. These Regulations amend the Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 ("the 2010 Regulations") so as to provide rate relief in respect of eligible small business hereditaments to 31st March 2021.

*Agreed:* The Committee considered SR 2020-91: The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the Rule.

**7. SR 2020-92: The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020-92: The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) 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 Covid-19.

*Agreed:* The Committee considered SR 2020-92: The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the Rule.

**8. SL1 - The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Regulations**

The Committee considered the SL1 – The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Regulations. The purpose of the draft Rule is to reinstate the previously applied rates exemption for separate entries in the Valuation List associated with automatic telling machine (ATMs) in a designated rural area.

*Agreed:* That the Committee has considered the Department of Finance’s proposal for subordinate legislation The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Regulations and has no objection to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.

*The researcher joined the meeting by teleconferencing at 16.06pm*

## **5. Oral Briefing by RaISe - a research paper on the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill**

The Committee considered a presentation on the research paper prepared by the RaISe researcher on the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

*Agreed:* To clarify if, when in a coalition government, the Scottish First Minister still has the power to discipline Special Advisers from other political parties.

*The researcher left the meeting at 16.26pm*

## **9. Chairperson's Business**

There was no Chairperson's Business

## **10. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted the Departmental correspondence regarding an Overview of the Annually Managed Expenditure Forecasting.
- ii. The Committee noted the Departmental response regarding Extended Rate Relief.
- iii. The Committee considered the response from the Institute for Government regarding the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

*Agreed:* To forward the response from the Institute of Government on the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill to the Committee for the Executive Office.

- iv. The Committee considered the Departmental response regarding Air Passenger Duty.

*Agreed* The Committee's view is that in the absence of a long haul flight in Northern Ireland the requirement to return £2.3m from the block grant to HM Treasury is absurd.

- v. The Committee noted a letter from the Committee for Justice regarding the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.
- vi. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding the Fiscal Council

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to offer assistance to the Department in the establishment of the Fiscal Council and Fiscal Commission.

- vii. The Committee noted the Department response to the Committee for Justice regarding the Domestic Abuse and Proceedings Bill.
- viii. The Committee noted the Department response to the Committee for Infrastructure regarding the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.
- ix. The Committee noted from the Committee for Infrastructure to the Minister of Finance regarding a Translink deficit and the response from the Minister of Finance to the Committee for Infrastructure.
- x. The Committee considered the Departmental response regarding Financial Support for Road Haulage, Taxi Industry and Transport Sector.

*Agreed:* To write to the Committee for Infrastructure and the Committee for the Economy to seek the views as to which Department would be responsible for bringing forward proposals to provide financial support to this road haulage sector.

- xi. The Committee considered the National Crime Agency (NCA) offer to meet with the Committee in July.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to an informal meeting with NCA on Wednesday 1 July 2020 at 10.30am in Parliament Buildings

*Agreed:* To ask the NCA if they will provide a written brief before the meeting on 1 July 2020.

The Committee noted the information request to the Department and the routine papers for the week.

## 11. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme for July 2020

*Agreed:* RaISe research in relation to the Functioning of Government Bill regarding the independence of the Commissioner for Public Appointments NI to be received on 1 July 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee was content with the time change for future meetings of the Committee. Future meetings will be held from 12.30pm to 2.30pm on Wednesdays in the Senate Chamber.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

## 12. Any Other Business

### Legal Advice

The Committee considered the need for legal advice with regards in relation to its request for information from the Department regarding a joint order for Personal Protective Equipment between the Department of Finance and the Irish Government.

*Agreed:* To commission legal advice on:

- a. The scope of powers contained under Section 44 of the Northern Ireland Act and associated process for exercising such powers, in order to compel the production of papers from the Department of Finance relating to correspondence regarding a proposed joint order for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) between the Executive and the Irish Government; and
- b. The powers of committees and requirements of departments to provide information to statutory committees compared to requirements to provide information to the public or media in relation to requests for information under Freedom of Information legislation, especially in the case where such information may be considered commercially sensitive.

### Letters to Minister

The Committee considered a proposal to write to both the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health congratulating them both in securing the orders of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

*Agreed:* To circulate a draft letter to the members for agreement to issue.

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

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 17 June 2020 at 12.30pm in the Senate Chamber.

*The meeting was adjourned at 4.57pm*

**Dr Steve Aiken, OBE MLA**  
**Chairperson**  
**Committee for Finance**  
**17 June 2020**