



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 17 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
Mr Seán Lynch MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

Present through teleconferencing:

Ms Jemma Dolan MLA

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

The meeting commenced at 12.33pm in public session.

Paul Frew joined the meeting at 12.34pm

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 10 June 2020.

Agreed: The Committee Agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 10 June 2020.

3. Matters Arising

PPE Order – Committee request for Information

The Committee considered the response from the Minister of Finance to the Committee's request for information regarding the PPE Order.

Agreed: To forward the Minister's letter to Legal Services and to consider it further following the legal advice on 24 June 2020.

Letter to Minister of Finance and Minister of Health

The Committee considered the draft letter and additional amendments.

Agreed: To include the additional amendments and circulate the letter for approval outside the Committee meeting.

National Crime Agency

The Committee noted the National Crime Agency (NCA) will provide a written briefing by 18 June 2020 and the Committee Office will contact members to confirm the details of the meeting with the NCA on 1 July 2020 in Parliament Buildings.

4. Oral Evidence: Private Members' Legislation: The Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill - Strategic Policy and Reform Division

The following officials joined the meeting at 12.57pm

- Mr Bill Pauley, Director, Strategic Policy and Reform Directorate, Department of Finance
- Mr David Hughes, Head of RHI Inquiry Sponsorship Team, Department of Finance

Issues discussed included: Clauses in the Bill not included in the codes, Clause 3 – the provision to remove the prerogative power; the lack of a clear process or evidence for selection and appointment of special advisers; the powers to investigate by an expert multiple person panel; changing the culture of the NICS.

Jim Allister Left the meeting at 13.59pm

Agreed: To provide the Committee with the lists of exemptions to the merit principle of recruitment for NI Civil Service Commissioners and GB Civil Service Commissioners.

This oral session was recorded by Hansard.

Officials left the meeting at 14.15pm

5. Oral Briefing: In-Year Monitoring - June Monitoring Round: Department of Finance position - Oral Evidence from Finance Division

The following officials joined the meeting at 14.15pm

- Stewart Barnes, Finance Director, Department of Finance
- Ms Janis Marynowski, Financial Management Branch, Department of Finance

Issues discussed included: departmental rates rebate, LPS income COVID-19 and other pressures; savings related to vacancy management, income, maintenance, General Administrative Expenditure and consultancy; and capital pressures.

This oral session was recorded by Hansard

Officials left the meeting at 14.34pm

6. Subordinate Legislation SL1 - Census Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered the SL1 – 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: That the Committee has considered the Department of Finance’s proposal for subordinate legislation Census Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.

7. Subordinate Legislation SL1 - The Business Tenancies (Coronavirus) (Restriction on Forfeiture: Relevant Period) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020

The Committee considered the SL1 – The Business Tenancies (Coronavirus) (Restriction on Forfeiture: Relevant Period) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020. The Coronavirus Act 2020 Act 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.

Agreed: That the Committee has considered the Department of Finance’s proposal for subordinate legislation The Business Tenancies (Coronavirus) (Restriction on Forfeiture: Relevant Period) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020 and has no objection to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.

8. Written Briefing - NILGA and SOLACE Joint Written Submission - 'Councils - Key to Post COVID Social and Economic Recovery'

The Committee considered the joint written submission by NILGA and SOLACE regarding Councils post COVID-19.

Agreed: To write to the Department seeking information on a number of issues raised from the submission.

Agreed: To write to NILGA on the Committee’s approach and to update them again on receipt of the departmental response

9. Written Briefing - Consultation - Administration of Estates (Small Payments) Act 1967

The Committee considered and was content with the consultation process.

10. Chairperson’s Business

There was no Chairperson’s Business

11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered update for EU Affairs Manager regarding Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol – VAT provision which includes a response from HM Treasury to the Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee

Agreed: To ask the Department if it is aware of the potential for any new costs and burdens on businesses in Northern Ireland as a result of the protocols, especially in relation to VAT and excise provisions.

- ii. The Committee noted from the Committee for the Economy regarding Changes to the Hardship Fund Criteria.
- iii. The Committee noted from the British Dental Association to the Economy Minister regarding Private Dental Practice
- iv. The Committee noted the Departmental response to the Committee for Health re COVID-19 Support for Self-Employed Health Care Professionals
- v. The Committee noted the Departmental response to Committee for the Economy regarding Graduate School at Magee
- vi. The Committee noted the Departmental response to Committee for Economy regarding the Self-Employment Support Scheme – Identity Checks
- vii. The Committee noted the Departmental response to the Committee for Communities re Update on the Dormant Accounts Fund
- viii. The Committee noted from Committee for Infrastructure to Department of Finance regarding Funding Package for Ferry Operators
- ix. The Committee noted the Departmental response to AERA Committee regarding £25 million for Farmers and Horticulture Industry

The Committee noted the information request to the Department and the routine papers circulated on 12 June 2020.

12. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme for July 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

13. Any Other Business

The Committee considered the NI Audit Office Report on The Land and Property Service LandWeb project.

Agreed: To write to the Public Accounts Committee asking if it intends to consider the report further or if it is content for the Committee for Finance to do so.

Agreed: To ask the Department when the Committee can expect to see proposals for a new Fee Order with the appropriate level of fees as recommended in the report as an urgent action.

14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 24 June 2020 at 12.30pm in the Senate Chamber.

The meeting was adjourned at 14.45pm

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