



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 24 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 Simon Kelly Assembly (Legal Adviser) (For Agenda Item 1 only)

The meeting commenced at 12.30pm in closed session.

1. Legal Advice from Assembly Legal Services – Powers of the Committee under Section 44 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 - Briefing from Assembly Legal Services

The Committee considered legal advice from the Assembly Legal Services.

The Committee considered a proposal from Dr Steve Aiken

Proposed:

“To accept the offer from the Minister of Finance to receive the correspondence relating to the joint order for PPE emails on the basis that it will be treated in confidence.”

The Committee divided: Ayes 6; Noes 3; Abstain 0.

AYES

Steve Aiken MLA
Pat Catney MLA
Matthew O’Toole MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA
Maoliosa McHugh MLA
Seán Lynch MLA

NOES

Paul Frew MLA
Jim Allister MLA
Jim Wells MLA

Agreed: To accept the offer from the Minister of Finance to receive the correspondence relating to the joint order for PPE emails on the basis that it will be treated in confidence

Agreed: The Legal Adviser to clarify returning to the issues raised under Section 44 at a later stage.

Agreed: To write to thank the Legal Adviser.

Members agreed remain in closed session and move to agenda item 11 to consider the first item under Chairperson’s Business.

11. Chairperson’s Business

Assembly sitting days

The Committee considered proposed changes to Assembly sitting days.

Agreed: The Committee for Finance expressed no consensus on the proposal.

The Committee moved into public session at 13.41pm

Budget (No. 2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee noted that the Budget (No. 2) Bill has received Royal Assent. The Budget (No. 2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2020 became law on 17 June 2020.

Committee input on FoI matters during summer recess

The Committee considered input on FoI matters during summer recess.

Agreed: To delegate the authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson during periods of recess to submit views on the releasing or withholding of

information in any non-routine/contentious FoI requests received and the Committee would be advised of any such requests and the views expressed by the Chairperson and / or Deputy Chairperson and the response issued by the FoI Unit, at the first available meeting following the recess period.

2. Apologies

There were no apologies.

A Member declared the following interest:

Jim Wells MLA - Agenda Item 12 - Correspondence - (i).

3. 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.

4. Matters Arising

NIAO Report on The LandWeb Project

The Committee considered the response from the PAC in relation to the above report.

Agreed: To return to the matter once the Department has responded to the PAC report.

Letter to Minister of Finance and Minister of Health

The Committee considered the amended letter and the initial letter to the Ministers.

The Committee considered a proposal from Dr Steve Aiken

Proposed:

“To send the original letter of congratulations to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health.”

The Committee divided: Ayes 6; Noes 3; Abstain 0.

AYES

Steve Aiken MLA
Pat Catney MLA
Matthew O’Toole MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA

NOES

Paul Frew MLA
Jim Allister MLA
Jim Wells MLA

Maoliosa McHugh MLA
Seán Lynch MLA

Agreed: To send the original letter of congratulations to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health

Permanent Secretary

The Committee considered the response letter from the Permanent Secretary.

Agreed: To ask the Permanent Secretary, as Schedule 1, Annex 2, Part 7 of the North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 requires the approval of both Finance Ministers on the NMSC recommendations as to the amount of grants, how, in the absence of a Finance Minister over the past three years funding could have been allocated to North/South bodies and how this could have been done without accounts having been qualified.

5. Oral Evidence: In-Year Monitoring – Outcome of the June Monitoring Round - from Public Spending Directorate, Department of Finance.

The Committee considered a letter from the Minister in relation to the delay in bringing the June Monitoring Round to the Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer this agenda item until 1 July 2020.

6. Subordinate Legislation: SL1 The Rates (Automatic Telling Machine) (Designation of Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered The Rates (Automatic Telling Machine) (Designation of Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020. The purpose of this draft Rule is to update the eligible wards following the previous rule in 2016 for the purpose of providing a rates exemption to Automatic Telling Machines in these areas.

Agreed: That the Committee has considered the Department of Finance's proposal for subordinate legislation The Rates (Automatic Telling Machine) (Designation of Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.

7. Subordinate Legislation: SL1 The Rates (Coronavirus) (Electronic Communications) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered The Rates (Coronavirus) (Electronic Communications)

(Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020. This Order amends Article 62 of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 in order to allow District Valuers' certificates to issue electronically rather than by post. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak in Northern Ireland, this electronic rule has been developed to provide LPS valuation staff with an alternative legal means of issuing certificates as a result of operational limitations created by the COVID-19 arrangements.

Agreed: That the Committee has considered the Department of Finance's proposal for subordinate legislation The Rates (Coronavirus) (Electronic Communications) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.

8. Subordinate Legislation: SL1 The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered 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 COVID-19.

Agreed: To invite officials to provide oral evidence at next week's Committee meeting following the oral evidence session from the Ulster University Economic Policy Unit.

Agreed: To Forward the SL1 to the Committee for the Economy to seek its views on the extent to which the proposed legislation addresses the gaps in support to business.

Agreed: To consider the SL1 again next week following these evidence sessions.

9. Subordinate Legislation: SL1 The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020. The nature of telecommunications and natural gas undertakings requires companies working in these fields to occupy or own various properties in more than one place. Paragraph (4) of Article 37 of the Rates

(Northern Ireland) Order 1977 empowers the Department to prescribe, by Regulations, that anything which would (apart from the Regulations) be more than one hereditament shall be treated as one hereditament.

Agreed: The Committee considered The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and has no objection to the policy implications of the proposed legislation at this stage.

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 14.14pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance and the Department for the Economy why it is not the case that all multiple owned sites can be treated as one hereditament.

Agreed: To ask the Department for the Economy and the Department of Finance why the grant provided to companies cannot be extended to enable companies with multiple sites to receive grant support in respect of each of those sites.

10. Written Briefing - Sale of National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) assets in Northern Ireland – Written Briefing from the National Crime Agency (NCA)

The Committee noted the written briefing from the NCA on the Sale of National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) Northern Ireland and the proposed meeting on 1 July 2020 in Room 115 at 10.30am.

12. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered correspondence from Committee for Communities regarding Visual Impairment

Agreed: to forward letter to the Department for Finance

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for the Economy regarding COVID-19 Financial Support

Agreed: to forward to UUEPC asking them to respond when they provide oral evidence to the Committee on 1st July

Agreed: to inform the Committee for the Economy that this has been done.

- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for the Economy regarding the need for partnership to rebuild the economy

Agreed: to forward the letter to UUEPC

- iv. The Committee noted from Committee for the Economy regarding House of Lords International Agreements Sub Committee Inquiry
- v. The Committee considered the Response from Committee for the Economy and the Committee for Infrastructure regarding Financial Support for Road Haulage, Taxi Industry and Transport Sector

Agreed: To write to both the Departments of the Economy and Infrastructure expressing concern that there have been no proposals to central funding to financially support the road haulage, taxi industry and transport sector.

The Committee agreed to note the remaining items of correspondence:

- From the Committee for Communities regarding Trussell Trust
- Departmental response to Committee for the Economy regarding funding package for ferry operators
- From the Committee for Infrastructure regarding Mineral Products Association (Northern Ireland)
- From the Committee for the Economy regarding Support for the Supported Employment Sector
- From the Committee for Communities regarding the Housing (Amendment) Bill

The Committee noted the information request to the Department and the routine papers circulated on 19 June 2020.

Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme for July 2020.

The Committee considered a heavy agenda on 1 July 2020.

Agreed: to hold a short additional meeting on 8th July to:

- Consider a possible SR relating to the Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020;
- Defer the Research presentation relating to the independence of the Commissioner for Public Appointments until that date; and
- The Committee's operational plan for the 2020-2021 session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

13. Any Other Business

Response to Committee Request

Agreed: To ask the Department to explain why the response requested by the Committee on 3 June regarding disciplinary processes arising from the RHI Inquiry, which was due by 19 June, has not yet been received.

Consideration by the Chancellor of a Temporary Reduction in VAT

Agreed: To consider the implications in asking for consideration to extend any reduction to VAT to Northern Ireland at next week's meeting.

14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 1 July 2020 at 12.30pm in the Senate Chamber.

The meeting was adjourned at 14.42pm

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