



**COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

WEDNESDAY 3 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 by Teleconferencing:

Ms Jemma Dolan MLA

Apologies:

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

*The meeting commenced at 14.30pm in public session.*

**1. Apologies**

There were no apologies.

**2. Draft Minutes**

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 27 May 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee Agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 27 May 2020.

### **3. Matters Arising**

The Committee considered a response from the National Crime Agency (NCA) to the request for an informal briefing on the Sale of National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) loan portfolio in Northern Ireland in the NCA's Belfast Office.

*Agreed:* To ask NCA for a written update regarding the Sale of National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) loan portfolio in Northern Ireland.

*Agreed:* To schedule an informal meeting with NCA on the Sale of National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) loan portfolio in Northern Ireland from NCA once current restrictions have been relaxed.

### **4. Oral Evidence: In-Year Monitoring from the Department of Finance, Finance Division**

*The following official joined the meeting at 14.35pm*

- Stewart Barnes, Finance Director, Department of Finance

Issues discussed included: The Executive's reprioritisation exercise due to pressures faced by departments as a result of COVID-19; the Department's need to identify departmental pressures in order to allocate further funding to high priorities.

*Agreed:* To receive oral evidence on the In-Year Monitoring from the Department for Finance, Finance Division on 17 June 2020.

*The official left the meeting at 15.10pm*

### **5. Oral Evidence: Mrs Felicity Huston - Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill**

*The following witnesses joined the meeting at 15.10pm*

- Felicity Huston, Huston & Co. Tax Consultants and Accountants

Issues discussed included: the need to build confidence with the public; the detail of the current and previous Codes for Appointment of Special Advisers; the independence of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

*Jim Wells and Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 15.55pm*

*Agreed:* To ask the witness to respond in writing to any further questions.

*Agreed:* To commission research from RaISe to examine functions and independence of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Northern Ireland.

*Witness left the meeting at 16.17pm*

## **7. Chairperson's Business**

There was no Chairperson's Business.

*Jemma Dolan left the meeting at 16.19pm*

## **8. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding Transposition of three articles contained in the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive 2018
- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding The Rates (Coronavirus) (Emergency Relief) Regulations (NI) 2020

*Agreed:* The Committee is content with the proposal to reflect the four-month Rates holiday in the Regulations when they come to the Committee.

*Agreed:* to note the information relating to the 'Back in Business' scheme.

- iii. The Committee considered Departmental response regarding Budget (No.2) Bill 2020 Background Paper

*Agreed:* To forward the Departmental response regarding Budget (No 2) Bill 2020 to the Committee for Health and the Committee for Infrastructure

- iv. The Committee considered the Departmental response regarding Disciplinary processes arising from the RHI Inquiry

*Agreed:* To seek further detail on the number and grade of staff subject to disciplinary investigations, the numbers that will progress to formal disciplinary action, the number who have resigned or retired after being notified of formal disciplinary action and a copy of the NICS report once the process is complete.

- v. The Committee considered a response from Department regarding the closure of the Land Registry.

*Agreed:* To forward the response to the Law Society of Northern Ireland who originally raised this issue.

- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from a small business owner regarding issues arising from the Hardship Fund.

*Agreed:* To write to the Committee for the Economy suggesting that they investigate the changes to the Hardship Fund after the criteria had been published

*Agreed:* To respond to the author stating that the Minister of Finance can only take action where there has been a fully costed proposition from the relevant Minister

*Agreed:* To advise the individual that the Committee has also asked the Committee for the Economy to investigate changes to the Hardship Fund after the criteria had been published

The Committee noted the following correspondence:

- vii. Departmental response to Committee for Communities regarding funding for Councils
- viii. From the Committee for Infrastructure to the Minister of Finance regarding the Furlough Scheme Flexibility
- ix. From the Committee for Infrastructure to the Minister for Finance re Transport Sector Funding
- x. From the Committee for Infrastructure to the Minister for Finance regarding Financial Assistance for Road Haulage & Logistics Sector
- xi. From the Committee for Infrastructure to the Minister for Finance re Financial Assistance for the Taxi Industry
- xii. From the Committee for Health to the Department of Finance re COVID19 financial support for self-employed Health Care workers
- xiii. Letter from the Minister of Finance to the Committee for the Economy re Energy Strategy – Micro Inquiry

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

## **6. Financial Scrutiny: Consideration of Options**

The Committee considered the Clerk's briefing paper a number of matters highlighted during the course of the Supply Resolution and Second Stage debate on the Budget (No.2) Bill.

*Agreed:* To proceed with the suggested actions identified in the Clerk's paper.

## **9. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme for July 2020.

The Committee considered the Permanent Secretary's acceptance of the Committee's offer to hold the evidence session in closed session on 10 June 2020 in order to facilitate a more constructive discussion with Members on the issues that have been redacted in the paper.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it would prefer to hold the evidence session in public but that the meeting could move into closed session, if necessary, to consider matters that could not be considered in public session.

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

## **10. Any Other Business**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to LPS Chief Executive to recognise the value of the work he and his team have carried out in addressing concerns and in the delivery of the £10k grant.

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

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 10 June 2020 at 2.30pm in the Senate Chamber.

*The meeting was adjourned at 16.37pm*

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