



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 8 JULY 2020

Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Paul Frew MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister MLA
Ms Jemma Dolan MLA
Mr Seán Lynch MLA
Mr Maoliosa McHugh MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

Apologies: Mr Pat Catney MLA

In Attendance: Mr Jim McManus (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Kate McCullough (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Neil Sedgewick (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
Mr Tim Moore (Senior Researcher, RaISe) (For Agenda Item 6)

The meeting commenced at 12.31pm in public session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

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

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

Matthew O'Toole joined the meeting at 12.32pm

3. Matters Arising

Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules to the Assembly and the Appropriate Committees Fifteenth Report of Session 2019 - 2020 3 July 2020

The Committee considered the Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules and noted no attention was drawn to Order SR 2020/110: The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 and Order and SR 2020/111: The Business Tenancies (Coronavirus) (Restriction on Forfeiture: Relevant Period) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020 was reported to breach the 21-day rule but that the ESR was content with the explanation from the Department.

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

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The following officials joined the meeting at 12.33pm

- Jeff McGuinness, Head of Central Expenditure Division, Department of Finance
- Pamela Galloway, Central Expenditure Division, Department of Finance

Committee noted the main estimates are expected in September and the spending review in the autumn.

The Chairperson congratulated the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the reduction of VAT.

Issues discussed included: periodic monitoring rounds and re-prioritising, capital DEL underspend, Financial Transaction process and its use by other devolved legislatures, discussions with the Treasury on more flexibility use in the budget between resources and capital and multi-year budget process.

Agreed: To receive a written briefing on the outcomes from the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Summer Statement 2020 in relation to Northern Ireland

Agreed: To ask the Department to forward the written briefing to other Committees.

The officials left the meeting at 13.26pm

5. Oral Evidence: Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill - RaISe Presentation on the Regulation of Public Appointments

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Senior Researcher joined the meeting at 13.26pm

The Committee received a presentation on the research paper prepared by the RaISe on the Regulation of Public Appointments

Agreed: To include in the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill Report a recommendation to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to make legislative provisions to bring the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments to international standards

The Senior Researcher left the meeting at 13.53pm

6. Written Evidence: on the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions Bill)

The written evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee considered the written evidence on the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

Agreed: To ask the Bill Sponsor to respond in detail to the list of questions by the end of August prior to giving oral evidence to the Committee

Agreed: To inform the Bill Sponsor that he is not restricted to responding to the questions listed but can respond to any other issues raised during the evidence as he considers appropriate.

Agreed: To ask the Bill Sponsor to provide the wording of the amendments to the Bill for the Committee's consideration.

Agreed: Members to submit any further questions for the Bill Sponsor the Clerk

Agreed: To schedule oral evidence from the Bill Sponsor on 9 September 2020

7. Chairpersons Business

There was no Chairpersons Business.

8. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered from Andrew Muir MLA a request to access Committee papers

Agreed: The Committee agreed to wait for further guidance from Chairpersons' Liaison Group (CLG)

Agreed: To inform Mr Muir the Committee is awaiting further guidance from CLG

- ii. The Committee considered Common Frameworks from the Assembly EU Affairs Manager

Agreed: To consider further once correspondence has been received from TEO.

- iii. The Committee noted the response from the Department for Infrastructure regarding financial support for businesses adversely affected by COVID-19

- iv. The Committee noted from Department for Infrastructure regarding support for businesses adversely affected by COVID-19

- v. The Committee noted from Department for Communities regarding financial support for businesses adversely affected by COVID-19

- vi. The Committee considered from Belfast Chamber of Commerce regarding policy paper – 'Building Belfast Back Better' and an email from Mr. Hamilton offering to discuss the paper in more depth

Agreed: To consider oral evidence from a number of Chambers of Commerce in the Autumn

- vii. The Committee noted from the Permanent Secretary regarding the NI Audit Office report on Landweb

- viii. The Committee noted from the Minister regarding clarification of businesses included in rates relief

- ix. The Committee noted Departmental response regarding businesses with multiple owned sites
- x. The Committee noted from Pivotal regarding a new report - 'A new economic vision'
- xi. The Committee considered from the Committee for Justice regarding Westminster Acts Containing Provisions on Devolved Matters Yet to Be Commenced

Agreed: To copy the correspondence from the Committee for Justice to the Department of Finance asking the Department to outline the details of the Digital Economy Act 2017 and the devolved provisions contained therein; when it plans to commence the devolved provisions contained in the Act; and how it plans to engage with the Committee and gain the consent of the Assembly to the devolved provisions in the Act

- xii. The Committee considered from Londonderry Chamber regarding PPE Procurement in NI Position Paper

Agreed: To forward to RaISe to inform its research and respond to Londonderry Chamber to inform that the research was commissioned and its paper forwarded

Agreed: To write to the Committee for Health and the Economy on the continued supply of locally produced PPE which provides an opportunity for local businesses to diversify and to work collaboratively to establish new supply chains for Northern Ireland

- xiii. The Committee noted the Department response to the Committee for the Economy regarding financial support for businesses
- xiv. The Committee noted the Department for the Economy response regarding Multiple Owned Sites
- xv. The Committee considered Department response to North/South Implementation Bodies

Agreed: To ask the Department how the North/South Implementation Bodies' accounts can be irregular but at the same legal.

Agreed: To ask the Department have the accounts of North/South bodies been qualified

- xvi. The Committee noted from Committee for Communities regarding Solace NI updated briefing

- xvii. The Committee noted from NILGA regarding Financial Sustainability of Councils in NI

- xviii. The Committee noted from the Committee for Communities regarding Local Councils - Rates Guarantee

Members considered the request for information from the Department.

Agreed: To ask the Department and Permanent Secretary to explain why the deadlines outlined in the request for information from the Department have been missed.

Members are content to note outgoing correspondence and routine papers.

9. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 9 September July 2020 at 12.30pm in the Senate Chamber.

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

Members considered the non-sensitive emails from the Department.

The meeting moved into closed session at 14.37pm

Continued – 11. Correspondence Regarding the Joint Order for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Members considered the sensitive emails from the Department.

The Committee considered a proposal from Mr Maoliosa McHugh

Proposed:

“To mark as read the correspondence received regarding the joint order for personal protective equipment and to move on.”

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

AYES

Maoliosa McHugh MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA
Seán Lynch MLA

NOES

Steve Aiken MLA
Paul Frew MLA
Jim Allister MLA
Jim Wells MLA
Pat Catney MLA
Matthew O'Toole MLA

Agreed: To return to consider this matter at the next meeting.

12. Operational Plan

The Committee noted the written research on dilapidation payments has been deferred as additional information has been requested by RaISE from the Department.

The Committee noted the operational plan.

Agreed: To consider the operational plan incorporated into the draft forward work programme at the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 14.52pm

Dr Steve Aiken, OBE MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance
9 September 2020