



COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY 4 NOVEMBER 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 Philip McGuigan MLA
Mr Maolíosá McHugh MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

Apologies:

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)
Ms Eileen Regan (Senior Researcher, RaISe) for (Agenda Item 4)

The meeting commenced at 14.03pm in public session

The Committee considered a revised draft agenda to include two proposed agenda items – an urgent SR on the Financial Assistance(Coronavirus) Regulations and the Small Business Support Grant Scheme

Agreed: To proceed with the revised agenda.

The Committee noted that officials giving oral evidence on agenda items 5 and 7 are the same officials.

Agreed: To move Agenda Item 6 before Item 5 to take this into account.

Matthew O'Toole joined the meeting at 14.06pm

The Committee agreed to move to agenda item 11

11. Chairperson's Business

The Committee considered the issues arising from the Small Business Support Grant Scheme.

Agreed: To ask the LPS to address the issues of illegibility payments, the process for payments and due diligence in relation to the payments at its oral evidence session on 18 November.

1. Apologies

None

Jim Wells left the meeting at 14.32pm

2. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 21 October 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 21 October 2020.

Draft Minutes of Proceedings of 14 October 2020

The Committee considered an amendment to the draft Minutes of Proceedings of 14 October 2020 at the Function of Government Bill Clause by Clause agenda item to reflect Clause 12 was agreed 'subject to amendment' rather than 'as drafted.'

Agreed: to amend the minutes of 14 October 2020.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. RaISe Presentation – Review of Financial Process

The Senior Researcher joined the meeting at 14.33pm

Jim Wells returned to the meeting at 14.50pm

- Ms Eileen Regan, Senior Researcher, RaISe.

The Committee considered a presentation by Ms Regan on the Review of Financial Process.

Agreed: RaISe to prepare a pack for the Committee with relevant information relating to the Review of Financial Process

The Researcher left the meeting at 15.09pm

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as a Civil Service Pension holder

6. Oral Evidence: The Consultation & Changes to the Transitional Arrangements 2015 Scheme – Pensions Division, Department of Finance

Officials joined the meeting at 15.09pm

- Mr Stephen Ball, Policy and Legislation, Pensions Division, Department of Finance
- Ms Blathnaid Smyth, Head of Public Service Pension & Legislation Branch, Department of Finance

This oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Issues discussed included: the cost cap will depend on the outcome of the consultation; costs for employers is set until 2023; employees' choice of the schemes which may be more attractive but may have additional cost; consultation is based on the choice of the schemes and the timing; ICTU consultation and the need for an Equality Impact Assessment; final salary scheme versus career average scheme.

Agreed: The Department to provide the ICTU written response to the consultation.

The officials left the meeting at 15.45pm

Agreed: To suspended the meeting.

The meeting suspended at 15.45pm

The Committee resumed at 15.52pm

5. Oral Evidence: Review of Financial Process, Department of Finance

Officials joined the meeting at 15.52pm

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

This oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Issues discussed included: Phase I & II of the project review of the financial process; the timescale of the implementation extended to 2020/23; NDPB to be included in easily reconcilable future financial documents; the project team includes departments, the Audit Office and internal audit office; future dry run schedule for Estimates and Accounts from 2020-2023; addressing misalignments; engaging with Committees; understanding how best to present information; consolidation in a work plan which impacts on a Fiscal Council and other concepts.

Agreed: The Department to provide information on ‘lessons learned’ arising from the workshop following the dry run Estimates 2018/19.

Agreed: The Department to provide sight of the proposed amendment to the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001.

Agreed: The Department to provide a copy of the revised templates for Estimates and Accounts.

Agreed: The Department to provide a copy of the proposed amendments to the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001.

Agreed: To ask the Department to clarify if the Advisory Board referred to Clause 20 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 20201 was established and if ongoing, its relationship, if any to the establishment of a Fiscal Council

7. Oral Evidence: October Monitoring

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

Issues discussed included: £100m being held by the Executive for future issue arising restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic; pressure to use FTC budget before April 2021; DoF has oversight of all departments and therefore can balance out the short-falls.

The officials left the meeting at 16.53pm

8. Consideration of Draft Report - Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

This session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee considered the draft Bill Report in advance of its formal consideration and agreement and a second draft including proposed amendments.

The question was put that the Committee agrees the amendments included in the latest draft of the report.

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

AYES

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

NOES

Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Philip McGuigan MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA

ABSTAIN

Agreed The Committee is content with the amendments included in the latest draft of the report.

The Committee considered a further proposed amendment to the draft report to include the following after paragraph 6 of the report:

“There was broad welcome from the majority of the committee that the Bill sponsor responded to the many concerns raised in the evidence by tabling significant

amendments. These provide a better basis for the Bill going forward and allowed broader support for the Bill at committee.”

Agreed: To include the amendment in the report.

Agreed: to move to formal consideration and agreement of the report at next week’s meeting.

9. Written Evidence - PEACE PLUS Programme – Update on development

The Committee noted the update on development of the PEACE PLUS programme in advance of an oral evidence session from DoF and SEUPB on 11th November 2020.

10. Written Evidence: - PAC Report on Major Capital Works

The Committee considered the Report and the Department of Finance’s 8-week timescale to respond to PAC’s conclusions and recommendations.

Agreed: To note a follow up as a future item once PAC has considered the Memorandum of Reply (MoR)

Agreed: To schedule a future oral evidence session from the Construction Employers’ Federation on the PAC Report into Major Capital Works

12. Correspondence

- i. Response from HM Treasury regarding invitation to officials from HM Treasury to provide oral evidence on the impact of the cancellation of the autumn Budget on devolved administrations and original request from the Committee Office

Agreed: The Chairperson to write to the Chief Secretary of the Treasury noting the inadequate nature of HMT’s response and to request that officials attend the Committee to respond to a number of issues relating the impact on devolved administrations of the cancellation of the UK Budget.

- ii. The Committee noted a response from Department to Committee for Committees regarding Solace Briefing: COVID-19 Impact
- iii. The Committee noted a response from Department regarding Travel Agents meeting with Minister to be held on 4 October

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office regarding Special EU Programmes Body Special EU Programmes Body
- v. From Department update on capital to resource transfers in previous budgets

Agreed: To seek clarification of capital to resource transfers in previous budgets on what was it used for and if there were any previous examples in the last 10 years.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from Department of Finance to Committee for Communities regarding Support for NI Football League

Agreed: To note the information request to the Department

Agreed: To note routine papers circulated on 23 October 2020 and 2 November 2020.

13. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: To receive oral evidence on January Monitoring on 16 December.

Agreed: to consider the RaISe research paper on a number of cladding and fire safety experts in relation to amendment to the Building Regulations (NI) 2012 and to agree expert witnesses to call

Agreed: to receive oral evidence from the Department on 9 December regarding the summary of the amendment to the Building Regulations (NI) 2012 consultation.

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 17:23pm

14. Any Other Business

The Committee considered the recent support grant scheme being issued by the Department of Finance.

Agreed: To ask the Department to clarify why the emergency payments have not yet been made.

Agreed: To ask the Department if the application process could be more accessible (e.g. postal applications) in applying for the emergency funding

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to agenda items 16 and 17.

16. Subordinate Legislation: SR 2020/230 The Financial Assistance (Coronavirus) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/230 The Financial Assistance (Coronavirus) Regulations (No2) (Northern Ireland) 2020. The purpose of the draft Rule will be to implement the scheme which the Department has been designated to enact, and to revise the previous scheme to increase the level of assistance provided for the duration of that scheme. The Regulations are subject to the negative resolution.

Agreed: That the Committee for Finance has considered, 2020/230 The Financial Assistance (Coronavirus) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report, has no objection to the rule

17. Coronavirus: Small Business Support Grant Scheme

The Committee noted the correspondence in relation to the Small Business Support Grant scheme.

15. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting is on **Wednesday 11 November 2020 at 2:00pm in the Senate Chamber**

The meeting adjourned at 17.30pm

Dr Steve Aiken, OBE MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance
11 November 2020