



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

1 December 2021

Meeting Location: The Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Keith Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:
Mr Pat Catney MLA
Ms Jemma Dolan MLA

Apologies: Mr Philip McGuigan MLA

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Carla Campbell (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stephen Magee (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)



Northern Ireland Assembly

Proceedings commenced at 2:00pm in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

Philip McGuigan delegated authority to vote on his behalf to Maolíosa McHugh under Temporary Standing Order 115(6).

2. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill

The Chairperson advised the Committee that during the Consideration Stage of the Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Bill on Tuesday 30 November 2021, the Minister for the Economy appeared to indicate that the Department of Finance had advised that there was significant financial risk which could arise from proposed amendments to the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Finance seeking clarity on the potential repercussive costs for the Executive of making the proposed revised parental leave arrangements available in Northern Ireland, as well as an explanation of the reported £100m cost which would reportedly accrue to the Executive owing to the provision of the proposed arrangements throughout the UK, in line with the parity principle.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 24 November 2021.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Defamation Bill – Committee Stage – Oral Evidence

The witness joined the meeting at 2:04pm.

- Paul Tweed, Lawyer.

The Committee noted Mr Tweed's submission to the Committee Stage of the Defamation Bill.

Mr Tweed briefed the Committee.

Matthew O'Toole joined the meeting at 2:15pm.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as Chairperson of the All Party Group on Press Freedom and Media Sustainability.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witness for his briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Mr Tweed seeking his views on the Westminster On-line Safety Bill and the merits of a Communications and Decency Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Minister for the Economy seeking clarity on the Westminster On-line Safety Bill and its applicability to Northern Ireland and overlap with the Defamation Bill.

Proceedings were suspended at 3:20pm

Proceedings resumed at 3:23pm with Steve Aiken; Keith Buchanan; Jim Allister; Jemma Dolan; Maolíosa McHugh; and Jim Wells in the meeting.



Northern Ireland Assembly

7. Defamation Bill – Committee Stage – Oral Evidence

The witnesses joined the meeting at 3:23pm.

- Mr Sam McBride, author and journalist.
- Mr David Attfield, a Legal Director, BBC.

The Committee noted Mr McBride's and the BBC submission to the Committee Stage of the Defamation Bill.

The witnesses briefed the Committee.

Pat Catney rejoined the meeting at 3:25pm.

Matthew O'Toole rejoined the meeting at 3:26pm.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

8. Oral Briefing – Fiscal Council Comprehensive Guide Report – Northern Ireland Fiscal Council

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer this briefing to a later date.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 5:06pm.

9.2 The Committee noted restricted correspondence from the Department of Finance providing a chronology for the development of the Non-Domestic



Northern Ireland Assembly

Rates Valuation (Coronavirus) Bill and a summary of the related legal advice it had obtained.

- 9.3 The Committee noted a Department of Finance amendment to the Consideration Stage of the Financial Reporting (Departments and Public Bodies) Bill in relation to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.
- 9.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department for the Economy to Committee queries relating to covid business support schemes: overpayment, fraud and error.
- 9.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance again declining to provide information on Unique Circumstances funding and providing a breakdown of Financial Transactions Capital bids and allocations.
- 9.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister for Finance providing information on Barnett consequentials in response to a written Assembly Question from Jim Allister MLA.
- 9.7 The Committee noted a further response from the Department of Finance indicating that medical advice will be sought in respect of the treatment of PTSD claimants in relation to the NI Civil Service Injury Benefit Scheme.
- 9.8 The Committee noted an invitation from the Commission for Victims and Survivors to the launch of their EU Peace IV-funded research “Better Together: Reviewing the needs of victims and survivors of the Troubles/Conflict” on 7 December 2021.
- 9.9 The Committee noted an invitation to an online Member Development session on Personal Security to be facilitated by the PSNI on 15 December 2021.
- 9.10 The Committee considered the Office for Statistics Regulation phase 2 assessment report for the Northern Ireland Census 2021 which made a number of findings in relation to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to NISRA to ask if the findings in the Office for Statistics Regulation publication had been addressed.

9.11 The Committee considered the composite information request.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the composite request was an accurate and complete record of the Committee's outstanding information requests.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft of its Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek oral evidence from the sporting organisation sector on the Non-Domestic Rates Valuation (Coronavirus) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider information received on RHI disciplinary matters in closed session on 8 December 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from the National Union of Journalists for 8 December 2021 on the Defamation Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme, as amended.

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Finance will be an additional meeting at 2:15pm on Monday 6 December 2021 in the Senate and on Starleaf.

The next regular meeting of the Committee for Finance will be at 2pm on Wednesday 8 December 2021 in the Senate and on Starleaf.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15pm.

Dr Steve Aiken MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Finance
8 December 2021