



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

23 February 2022

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present:

- Dr Steve Aiken MLA (Chairperson)
- Mr Keith Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Mr Pat Catney MLA
- Mr Philip McGuigan MLA
- Ms Maolíosa McHugh MLA
- Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA
- Mr Jim Wells MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Jim Allister MLA

Apologies: Ms Jemma Dolan MLA



Northern Ireland
Assembly

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Angela McParland (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stephen Magee (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
Ms Rachel Keyes (Research Officer) - item 6 only
Mr Nathan Mulholland (Research Officer) – item 6 only
Mr Christopher Rothwell (Research Officer) – item 6 only

The meeting commenced at 2:00pm in open session.

Jim Allister indicated concerns in respect of the value of the Committee's continuing consideration of the draft 2022-25 budget and use of RalSe resources in the absence of an Executive and given that the related consultation has been paused.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

Jemma Dolan delegated her vote to Maolíosa McHugh, under Temporary Standing Order 115(6).

2. Declaration of Interests

The Chairperson declared an interest in respect of item 17.5 as a member of the Commonwealth and Parliamentary Association.



Northern Ireland Assembly

The Chairperson declared an interest in respect of item 17.7 as he had been approached on matters relating to NW200 and Ulster Grand Prix funding by the organisers.

There were no other declarations of interest at this time.

3. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 16 February 2022.

5. Matters Arising

There were no Matters Arising.

6. Oral Presentation: Research and Information Service (RaISe) – 2022-2025 Draft Budget

The Research Officers joined the meeting at 2.05pm:

- Ms Rachel Keyes, Research Officer, RaISe;
- Mr Nathan Mulholland, Research Officer, RaISe; and
- Mr Christopher Rothwell, Research Officer, RaISe.

The Committee noted four RaISe papers on the Draft Executive Budget 2022-2025 on: the public finance context; the economic context; capital investment; and departmental pressures. The Committee also noted related correspondence from the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council.

Jim Allister left the meeting at 2:05pm



Northern Ireland Assembly

Jim Wells joined at 2:07pm

The Research Officers presented their papers to the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Research Officers for their presentation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information from RaiSe in respect of: the difference between the Draft 2022-25 Budget resource allocation and all departmental pressures; NI Water's budget pressures and the impact of its governance arrangements on its financial sustainability.

7. Written Briefing: Committee Compilation Report on 2022-25 Draft Budget

The Committee considered its draft compilation report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the title page, introduction, committee approach and appendices, including submissions from other statutory committees.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the report with the Minister and all MLAs as soon as possible and to publish the report on the Committee's web pages on the day of the debate, 7 March 2022.

Matthew O'Toole joined the meeting at 2:50pm

8. Oral Briefing: Guidance on Nearly Zero Energy Buildings (NZEB)

The officials joined the meeting at 2.51pm.

- John Burke, Head of Building Regulations Unit II, Department of Finance; and
- Ronan Casey, Part F Policy Lead, Building Regulations Unit II, Department of Finance.



Northern Ireland Assembly

The Committee noted Departmental papers and related correspondence from the Construction Employers Federation (CEF).

The officials briefed the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Jim Allister rejoined the meeting at 3:14pm

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 3:37pm

The Chairperson left the meeting at 3:37pm

Keith Buchanan assumed the Chairpersonship

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department indicating its dissatisfaction with the draft guidance and seeking clarity on the impact of the proposed changes on the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) energy efficiency rating of new houses; and on the impact of the guidance of houses which are in the process of being constructed or substantially altered.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an oral brief from CEF and to give further consideration to the guidance.

9. Oral Briefing: Changing Places Toilets (CPT) Regulations

The officials joined the meeting at 3:39pm.

- Billy Black, Acting Head of Building Standards Branch, Department of Finance; and
- Paul Daley, Lead Technical Writer, Part R, Building Standards Branch, Department of Finance.

The officials briefed the Committee.

This was followed by a question and answer session.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

The acting Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department indicating that it welcomed the new CPT guidance.

10. SL1 The Pensions Increase (Review) Order (NI) 2022

The Committee considered SL1 The Pensions Increase (Review) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note SL1 The Pensions Increase (Review) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022.

11. SL1 The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (NI) 2022

The Committee considered SL1 Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the policy intention and for the Department to make the rule.

The Chairperson rejoined the meeting and resumed the chairpersonship at 4:02pm

Keith Buchanan left the meeting at 4:03pm

12. SL1 The Rate Relief (Lone Pensioner Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2022

The Committee considered SL1 The Rate Relief (Lone Pensioner Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the policy intention and for the Department to make the rule.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

13. SR 2022/50 The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (NI) 2022

The Committee considered SR 2022/50 The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Finance has considered SR 2022/50 The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

14. SR 2022/51 The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2022

The Committee considered SR 2022/51 The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Finance has considered SR 2022/51 The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule.

15. Draft SR The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Registration of deaths and still-births) (Extension) Order (NI) 2022

The official joined the meeting at 4.13pm.

- Kathie Walker, Deputy Registrar General.

The Committee noted the SR and related correspondence from the Minister for Health and the Minister of Justice.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

There was a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health seeking clarity on the number of death certificates that would ordinarily be completed by “Doctor C” and the background to the Minister’s concerns.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Finance has considered The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Registration of deaths and still-births) (Extension) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule.

16. SR 2022/48 The Marriage, Civil Partnership and Civil Registration (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2022

The Committee considered SR 2022/48 The Marriage, Civil Partnership and Civil Registration (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

The Committee noted that £261k had been spent prior to the consideration of the legislation.

Question put:

That the Committee for Finance has considered SR 2022/48 The Marriage, Civil Partnership and Civil Registration (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule.

The Committee divided:

Ayes: 5	Noes: 2	Abstain: 0
Steve Aiken	Jim Allister	
Pat Catney	Jim Wells	
Jemma Dolan		
Philip McGuigan		
Maolíosá McHugh		



Northern Ireland Assembly

Maolíosa McHugh cast a vote on behalf of Jemma Dolan under Temporary Standing Order 115(6).

The motion was carried.

17. Correspondence

- 17.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.
- 17.2 The Committee noted commentary from the Minister of Justice on possible amendments to the Defamation Bill.
- 17.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA) in respect of the Westminster Building Safety Bill. The Department has advised that owing to the collapse of the Executive, the related Legislative Consent Motion will not now be progressed.

Matthew O'Toole rejoined the meeting at 4:45pm

- 17.4 The Committee noted a Departmental response to the Committee's queries regarding external/internal wall cladding fire safety issues and radon protection measures.

The Chairperson declared an interest as a member of the Commonwealth and Parliamentary Association

- 17.5 The Committee noted a Departmental response to Committee queries regarding the Stormont Estate review.
- 17.6 The Committee noted a response to Committee queries regarding the use of Stormont House after the Northern Ireland Office leaves.

The Chairperson declared an interest, as he had been approached on matters relating to the North West 200 and Ulster Grand Prix funding by the organisers

- 17.7 The Committee considered a Ministerial response regarding funding for the Ulster Grand Prix and North West 200. The Committee noted that the business case was cleared subject to conditions on 16 February 2022.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department, regarding the Ulster Grand Prix and NW200, seeking details of the business case conditions; who set them; and confirmation that the money has been made available.

- 17.8 The Committee noted Departmental correspondence including examples of good procurement practice.
- 17.9 The Committee noted a Ministerial response in respect of concerns relating to restrictions on red diesel use.
- 17.10 The Committee also noted a copy of correspondence to the Department regarding restrictions on red diesel use from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Treasury setting out its concerns in respect of restrictions on the use of red diesel.

- 17.11 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence to the Minister from the Committee for the Economy seeking clarity on the Levelling Up money which has been allocated to Northern Ireland.
- 17.12 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the House of Lords regarding the impact of the Subsidy Control Bill on the procurement framework.
- 17.13 The Committee also noted a copy of a response from the C&AG to the Committee for the Executive Office in respect of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) use of Strategic Investment Board secondments.
- 17.14 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office to the Minister regarding Casement Park and sub-regional stadia.
- 17.15 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence to the Minister from the Committee for Communities inquiring if the Council Tax rebate consequential will be used to fund a domestic rates rebate.



Northern Ireland Assembly

17.16 The Committee considered a copy of the Chairpersons' Liaison Group (CLG) report on strengthening committee scrutiny.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the CLG report further at its next meeting.

17.17 Composite Information Request

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

18. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold a meeting on 2 March 2022 despite the pressure of related plenary business.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive a briefing from the Department in March on spending procedures in the absence of an Executive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an additional meeting on 22 March 2022 to hear from the Fiscal Commission on its final report.

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

19. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

20. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Finance will be at 2.30pm on Wednesday 2 March 2022 in the Senate and on Starleaf.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Proceedings continued in closed session from 4:56pm

21. RHI Inquiry - Outcomes

The Committee noted previous papers relating to the RHI Inquiry; the RHI Action Plan and the RHI disciplinary process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to put down the following amended motion for plenary debate:

That this Assembly takes note of the Executive's RHI Action Plan and the outcome of the RHI disciplinary process; indicates its disappointment in respect of the lack of accountability and the failure of the Northern Ireland Civil Service to demonstrate that it has learned lessons from RHI and the consequent damage to public confidence; and calls on the Minister of Finance to thoroughly review the RHI Action Plan and the relevant disciplinary procedures for senior civil servants in order to improve transparency and accountability and thus prevent recurrence.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.05pm.

Dr Steve Aiken MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Finance
2 March 2022