



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

20 October 2021

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Dr Steve Aiken OBE MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Keith Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Pat Catney MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:
Mr Jim Allister MLA
Ms Jemma Dolan MLA
Mr Philip McGuigan MLA

Apologies: Matthew O'Toole MLA

In Attendance: Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stephen Magee (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)
Ms Rachel Keys (Research Officer) – *item 7 only*



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Chris Rothwell (Research Officer) – *item 7 only*

Proceedings commenced at 2:00pm in open session.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above

Matthew O'Toole delegated authority to vote on his behalf to Pat Catney under Temporary Standing Order 115(6).

No other Members delegated authority to vote on their behalf for the duration of the meeting, under Temporary Standing Order 115(6).

2. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

Philip McGuigan joined the meeting at 2:01pm

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Non-Domestic Rates (Coronavirus) Valuation Bill

The Chairperson advised the Committee of an informal meeting with the Minister on Tuesday 19 October 2021 in respect of issues relating to the non-domestic rates revaluation process. He indicated that accelerated passage is likely to be sought for the Non-Domestic Rates (Coronavirus) Bill which would exempt compliance with coronavirus restrictions etc. as a matter which could be taken into account in respect of the business rates revaluation process.

Jim Wells joined the meeting at 2:04pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing from the Department on the Non-Domestic Rates (Coronavirus) Bill.



Northern Ireland Assembly

3.2 Fiscal Council / Fiscal Commission

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Fiscal Council and Fiscal Commission are expected to produce reports shortly relating to the Executive's draft 2022-25 budget and options for enhancing tax-varying powers, respectively.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to meet informally with the Fiscal Council and Fiscal Commission at the time of the publication of their reports.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 13 October 2021.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Financial Reporting (Departments and Pubic Bodies) Bill – Committee deliberations

The Committee noted Departmental papers relating to the Bill and related correspondence from Further Education colleges, Stranmillis University College and Invest NI.

The session was recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Fiscal Council seeking its views on amendments to the Bill which are designed to enhance the transparency of the Estimates including particularly accruing resources.

Agreed: The Committee informally agreed to:

- not pursue a tidying-up amendment relating to Clause 8(1) of the Government Resources Accounts (NI) Act 2001 which refers to limits as set by Budget Acts;



Northern Ireland Assembly

- not pursue an amendment relating to the Fiscal Council; and
- support the Departmental amendment relating to NIPSO.

Agreed: The Committee informally agreed that it was content with Clauses 2, 3 and 4, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee informally agreed to not pursue amendments relating to:

- the description of the office of the Attorney General of Northern Ireland;
- the designation of NI Water, NILGOSC, North South Bodies and the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission; and
- the designation of bodies funded from other Consolidated Funds.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further information on the materiality of additional audit costs for Further Education colleges associated with the provisions of the Bill.

7. Financial Dashboard – Assembly Research briefing

Rachel Keys and Chris Rothwell, Research Officers joined the meeting at 2:38pm

The Committee noted related papers.

The Chairperson thanked the Research Officers for their briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for the Economy seeking clarity on negative capital expenditure during 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share relevant papers and links with the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council.

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 The Committee noted Departmental correspondence on a planned consultation on decapitalisation rates.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

- 8.3 The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of rates relief repaid by large retailers in 2020-21.
- 8.4 The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence relating to hard-charging of departments in respect of the NICS estate.
- 8.5 The Committee noted Departmental correspondence relating to a consultation on Nearly Zero Energy Buildings, pending a further briefing on the feedback to the consultation.
- 8.6 The Committee noted Departmental correspondence relating to the revaluation of public sector pensions and changes to the cost cap mechanism.
- 8.7 The Committee noted Departmental correspondence to the Committee for Communities relating to the Shared Prosperity Fund.
- 8.8 The Committee noted Departmental correspondence on procurement in the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- 8.9 The Committee considered Departmental correspondence relating to the Special Advisers' code.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity as to whether any Special Advisers have been subject to disciplinary proceedings since the passage of the recent legislation and to ask that the Committee be informed when such proceedings are initiated.

- 8.10 The Committee considered Departmental and Ministerial correspondence indicating that further legal advice has been sought in respect of RHI disciplinary matters.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister recording its disappointment that its queries have not been answered and seeking a timeline for the receipt of the revised legal advice and provision of requested information.

- 8.11 The Committee considered Ministerial correspondence relating to the NICS Injury Benefit Scheme consultation.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister recording its disappointment in respect of the recent related oral briefing and indicating that it found the explanations provided in respect of PTSD sufferers to be perplexing. The Committee agreed to write to the Minister indicating that it hoped that a more reasoned approach would be adopted going forward in respect of this important issue.

8.12 The Committee noted Departmental correspondence on a consultation on marriage law.

8.13 The Committee considered correspondence from the House of Lords Sub-Committee on the NI Protocol relating to a proposed EU Energy Tax Directive.

8.14 The Committee also considered Ministerial correspondence relating to a proposed EU Energy Tax Directive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for the Economy seeking his views on the proposed EU Energy Tax Directive.

8.15 The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence relating to the Legislative Consent Motion on the Public Service Pensions and Judicial Offices Bill.

8.16 The Committee noted Departmental correspondence providing details on the Peace Plus programme.

8.17 The Committee considered a Departmental response on the Income and Expenditure Statement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further clarity on deposits by the Government Accounts Branch and interest earned.

8.18 The Committee deferred consideration of tabled Departmental correspondence in respect of covid support for travel agents.

8.19 The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of delegation limits for consultancy and business case test drilling criteria.

8.20 The Committee considered the composite information request.



Northern Ireland Assembly

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

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed to again revise its invitation to HOCS for 17 November 2021 to include NICS HR and to defer the briefing on the annual report and accounts indefinitely.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule the Ministerial briefing on budgets and major policy issues for 24 November 2021.

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

10. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on clawback provisions in respect of the Strule campus.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should circulate the most recent NIAO report on the Strule campus.

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Finance will be at 2pm on Wednesday 3 November 2021 in the Senate and on Starleaf.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:44pm.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Dr Steve Aiken MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Finance
3 November 2021