



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Finance

### Minutes of Proceedings

**24 April 2024**

**Meeting Location:** Room 21, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:**

Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Eóin Tennyson MLA

Gerry Carroll MLA

Nicola Brogan MLA

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Steve Aiken MLA

Phillip Brett MLA

Paul Frew MLA

**Apologies:** None

**In Attendance:**

Peter Hall Committee Clerk

Clairita Frazer Assistant Assembly Clerk

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:01pm in public session

### **1. Apologies**

As above.

### **2. Declaration of Interests**

None.

### **3. Chairperson's Business**

#### **3.1 Draft Executive Budget 2024-25.**

The Committee noted that a paper on a draft Executive Budget for 2024-25 has been issued to Ministers to discussion at the Executive meeting due to take place on Thursday 25 April. Members also noted that this could have an impact on the Committee's agreed Forward Work Programme in the coming weeks.

### **4. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of 17 April 2024.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:05pm

## **5. Matters arising**

### **5.1 Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters Bill)**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding a Legislative Consent for the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill.

The Committee noted that the Finance Minister was not supportive of a Legislative Consent Motion in this instance and had informed the Executive Office of her position.

Members discussed if a Committee position could be reached to support the Minister's decision in relation to this legislative consent but a consensus could not be reached.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Clerk would prepare a draft response to the Minister which would be considered at next week's meeting.

### **5.2 Executive Office Assembly & Legislation Section - Guidance**

The Committee noted a copy of Executive Office Guidance outlining Assembly Plenary Procedures for Departments.

### **5.3 Department of Finance – Sickness Absence Data**

The Committee considered additional information from the Department of Finance on comparative figures analysing sickness absence in the years prior to the Covid Pandemic.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance to consider providing a similar narrative briefing along with the quarterly sickness absence figures. Members also agreed to seek clarification on how the cost of sickness absence is calculated and if figures presented in relation to long term sickness absences were correct.

#### **5.4 Hansard Transcript – Department of Finance Briefing on Departmental Budget Pressures**

The Committee noted a Hansard transcript produced from a Department of Finance briefing on Departmental Budget Pressures on 10 April 2024.

### **6. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding the outcome of Financial Context for Revenue Raising consultations and broad themes identified in this consultation.

Members noted that a briefing on this consultation had already been requested and should be confirmed in due course.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to seek additional information on the Minister's plans and timescales to progress issues identified in the Financial Context for Revenue Raising consultation.

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Clerks to the Committee on Procedures regarding discussions at a recent Inter-Parliamentary Forum on Legislative Consent Motions.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as a Member of the Committee on Procedures.

**Agreed** The Committee agreed to update the Committee on Procedures accordingly, including information on the recent issue in relation to legislative consent to the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill.

- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Clerk of the Executive Office Committee regarding scrutiny of Common Frameworks

**Agreed** The Committee agreed that the Clerk would update the Clerk to the Executive Office Committee on planned scrutiny of the Department of Finance Common Frameworks.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence regarding UK and NI University Sectors.

- v. The Committee considered a Department of Finance Memorandum of Reply to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Report “Planning in Northern Ireland”

**Agreed** The Committee agreed keep a watching brief on the recommendations within the PAC report and to forward the Memorandum of Reply to the Committee for Infrastructure.

- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee regarding primacy over Northern Ireland Audit Office Reports.

**Agreed** The Committee agreed to request that the Public Accounts Committee keeps this Committee informed of its Inquiry on Public Procurement.

- vii. The Committee noted a copy of a Written Ministerial Statement on the 2023 Civil Service Pay Award.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Department of Finance on any outstanding pay claims, including those for non-NICS staff where the Department of Finance has a locus.

- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Finance to the Northern Ireland Assembly Audit Committee regarding the Draft Budgets for the Northern Ireland Audit Office, Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman and Northern Ireland Assembly Commission.

- ix. The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Economy Committee to the Minister of Finance regarding the Non-Domestic Renewable Heat Initiative Tariff.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Minister of Finance for information on any likely budgetary implications of a potential closure of the RHI tariff Scheme, potential compensation and timescales for same.

- x. The Committee considered a Department of Finance Memorandum of Reply to the Public Accounts Committee 10<sup>th</sup> Report “Closing the Gap – Social Deprivation and links to Education Attainment”

**Agreed** The Committee agreed to forward the Memorandum to the Committee for Education.

- xi. The Committee considered a request to brief from the Development Trusts NI.

**Agreed:** The Committee provisionally agreed to receive this briefing when there is capacity in the Forward Work Programme.

## **7. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee noted that the Forward Work Programme, as agreed, would need to be amended to allow for substantial briefings on the Draft Executive Budget 2024-25.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to postpone the scheduled briefing on Gender Recognition and other Civil Law Reform should a Draft Executive Budget for 2024-25 be agreed.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Forward Work Programme should be published on the Committee webpages.

## **8. Any Other Business.**

None.

## **9. Date and Time of next meeting**

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 1 May 2024 at 2.00pm in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:41pm and the Committee moved into an informal, closed session to discuss strategic planning. The strategic planning session ended at 4:03pm.

**Matthew O'Toole MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Finance**

**1 May 2024**