



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

5 June 2024

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)
Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Phillip Brett MLA
Eóin Tennyson MLA
Paul Frew MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Gerry Carroll MLA
Deirdre Hargey MLA
Nicola Brogan MLA
Steve Aiken MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Peter Hall Committee Clerk
Clairita Frazer Assistant Assembly Clerk

Stephen Magee Clerical Supervisor

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:05pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

None.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Minister of Finance – Budget No.2 Bill

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Finance indicating that she intends to introduce the Budget (No.2 Bill) to the Assembly on Monday 1 July.

Members also noted the Minister's indication that to enable the Bill to pass through all its stages and receive Royal Assent before the Vote on Account provided by the 1st Budget Bill is exhausted; the second Bill would need to proceed by accelerated passage.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to inform the Speaker of the Minister of Finance's request for accelerated passage for the Budget (No.2) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek information on a number of issues including; the current position with other Statutory Committees receiving briefing on their respective department's budget position, confirmation of how far provision within the 65% Vote on Account would extend into the financial year, consequences of not granting accelerated passage to the Budget (No.2) Bill and confirmation of any occurrence when a Budget Bill did not proceed by accelerated passage.

3.2 Northern Ireland Audit Office Report – Budgeting and Accountability – 24 May 2024

The Committee noted the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on Budgeting and Accountability which was published on 24 May 2024.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of 29 May 2024.

5. Matters arising

5.1 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) – Methodological changes for Excess Deaths

The Committee noted correspondence from NISRA providing clarification on issues around the methodological changes for excess deaths statistics.

Members indicated that they would maintain a watching brief on this issue.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:17pm.

5.2 Department of Finance – Shared Island Funding

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance in relation to the governance and accountability framework for Shared Island Funding.

5.3 Department of Finance – Renewable Heat Inquiry (RHI) Records Management

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance providing an update on its compliance with post RHI Inquiry recommendations.

5.4 Department of Finance - Land Registration Employer Liability cases

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance providing further information and detail on Land Registration Employer Liability cases.

Agreed: The Committee expressed disappointment with the response to its request for more detail on the Land Registration Employer Liability cases and agreed to write again to the Department of Finance regarding this issue.

5.5 Urgent Written Ministerial Statement to Assembly – The RalSe Programme

The Committee noted an Urgent Written Ministerial Statement to the Assembly, laid on 31 May by the Minister for Education setting out a package of measures to raise achievement to reduce educational disadvantage.

5.6 Committee for Education – Budgetary matters within the Department of Education

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Education outlining its scrutiny of budgetary matters within the Department of Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this correspondence as an addendum to the Committee's report on Engagement on the draft Budget 2024-25.

5.7 Committee for the Economy – City and Growth Deals

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Committee for the Economy to the Department of Finance in respect of the early phasing of support for City and Growth Deal projects.

5.8 Minister of Finance – Copy correspondence to the Chair of the Senedd's Finance Committee

The Committee noted a copy of the Minister of Finance's reply to the Senedd's Finance Committee relating to its Inquiry into Fiscal Intergovernmental Relations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed seek an update from the Minister of Finance on her engagement with Treasury in relation to a dispute around funding for the Troubles Permanent Disablement Scheme.

5.9 – 5.11 Assembly Research and Information Service Briefing Papers – 24 May 2024

The Committee noted a series of 3 briefing papers published by the Assembly Research and Information Service, related to the Executive Budget 2024-25: Context setting for 24-25 Budget, Allocations and Northern Ireland Economic Context.

Some Members commented on the usefulness of these briefing papers and the Fiscal Council's assessment of the Northern Ireland Executive's 2024-25 Budget.

5.12 – 5.14 Hansard Transcripts – Evidence sessions on the Draft Executive Budget 2024-25 on 22 May 2024

The Committee noted Hansard transcripts of the Committee's evidence sessions on 22 May on the draft Executive Budget 2024-25 on 22 May 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the transcripts are included as addendum to the Committee's report on Engagement on the draft Executive Budget 2024-25.

5.15 Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) – Election to the UK Parliament - Guidance on Conduct for Civil Servants and Special Advisers in the Northern Ireland Devolved Administration

The Committee noted a copy of the NICS Guidance for Conduct for Civil Servants and Special Advisers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek information from the Department of Finance on what advice the Minister of Finance had been given on the appropriateness, or otherwise, of progressing work or making announcements in the pre-election period.

5.16 Department of Finance - Public Sector Pay Guidance 2024-25.

The Committee noted notification from the Department of Finance that Public Sector Pay and Pay Remit Approvals 2024-25 guidance has now been published on the Department's website.

5.17 Department of Finance – October Monitoring Round

The Committee noted clarification from the Department of Finance on the position of the October Monitoring Round.

5.18 Department of Finance – Ministerial Engagement with UK Financial Services Bodies and Banks

The Committee considered an update from the Department of Finance on the Minister's engagement with UK Financial Services Bodies and Banks.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek detail on the basis for the Minister of Finance's disappointment in relation to banking hubs, if any review has been carried

out on the impact of banking hubs and if there have been any identified outcomes of the one banking hub opened to date.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Finance regarding the Executive's strategic direction, policy intent and objective in relation to engagement with Treasury and regulatory authorities on banking matters.

5.19 Interparliamentary Finance Committee (IFC) Forum

The Committee noted a copy of a response to the IFC Forum from HM Treasury staff regarding its correspondence relating to engagement with the devolved Parliaments.

6. SR 2024-124 The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered a statutory rule to enable the Department of Finance to request information from Departments and bodies designated and to pass that information to HM Treasury for use in the preparation of the Whole of Government Accounts.

Agreed: The Committee has considered SR 124/2024 The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024 and subject to the Examiner's report, has no objection to the Rule.

7. SR 2024-114 The Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001 (Estimates and Accounts) (Designation of Bodies) Order 2024

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had published her 16th report and did not draw any matters to the Assembly's attention in relation to SR 2024-114 The Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001 (Estimates and Accounts) (Designation of Bodies) Order 2024.

8. Reform/Central Government Transformation – Oral Briefing from Departmental officials

The following officials joined the meeting at 2:44pm;

Paul Duffy, Director, Digital, Security & Finance Shared Services, Department of Finance; and

Kirstie Murray, Integr8 Programme Director

The officials briefed the Committee on the Integr8 Programme.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including the background to the establishment of the Integr8 Programme, the strategic outcome, scope and qualitative benefits of the programme, overall costs of the programme, an update on the “Amber” status at the Independent Gateway review stage, project milestones, resourcing of the project team, and benefits realisation of the project.

When discussing recruitment matters, Matthew O’Toole declared an interest as the Chair of the All-Party Group on Press Freedom and Media Sustainability.

The officials left the meeting at 3:22 pm.

9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee regarding an individual’s complaints in relation to the Department of Finance and Land and Property Services’ handling of revaluations.
- ii. The Committee considered a copy of the Department of Finance’s Memorandum of Reply to a Public Accounts Committee report on Broadband Investment in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an update on the recommendations relevant to the Department of Finance remit in 6 months’ time. Members also agreed to forward a copy of the memorandum to the Committee for the Economy for its information given its relevant to the remit of that Committee.

- iii. The Committee noted the 15th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.
- iv. The Committee noted the Investment Strategy Northern Ireland (ISNI) Delivery Tracking System Investing Activity Report for May 2024.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme, as drafted.

The Committee noted a number of briefings confirmed up to 3 July 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing with the Fiscal Council on 2 October 2024 on a normal budget cycle.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 3:30pm.

The Committee discussed appointments to the Public Sector Transformation Board which had been highlighted by the Minister of Finance during topical questions on 4 June 2024. Members voiced their concern that this information was not shared with the Committee in advance, particularly given the Committee's recent request for an update in this regard and urgency of the Board's work.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an urgent response to its recent request from the Department of Finance and to schedule an oral briefing with the appropriate Departmental officials at the earliest opportunity before summer recess given the urgency of the Board's work.

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

11. Any Other Business.

None.

12. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 12 June 2024 at 2:00pm in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:36pm.

Matthew O'Toole MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

12 June 2024