



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

12 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

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Steve Aiken MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Gerry Carroll MLA

Nicola Brogan 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 2:09pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

None.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Advice regarding Zoom attendance at Committee Meetings

The Committee noted correspondence from the Clerking and Members Support Office (CAMs) providing guidance to MLAs regarding joining Committee meetings via Zoom.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of 5 June 2024.

5. Matters arising

5.1 Ministerial Statement- Twenty Second Meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council in Special EU Programmes Sectoral Format

The Committee considered a Ministerial Statement regarding the Twenty Second Meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council in Special EU Programmes Sectoral Format.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance why the Special European Union Programme Board (SEUPB) 2021 Annual Report and Accounts have not yet been laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and why there has been a delay in certifying the 2022 and 2023 draft Accounts. The Committee also agreed to seek detail of any excess expenditure incurred by the SEUPB in 2022 and 2023.

5.2 Department of Finance – Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) in relation to the Arbitration Bill

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance providing an update on the proposed LCM in relation to the Arbitration Bill.

5.3 Department of Finance – Financial Transaction Capital

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance providing a breakdown of Financial Transactions Capital over the last number of years.

5.4 Department of Finance – Public Sector Transformation Board

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance providing an update on the Public Sector Transformation Board (PSTB).

The Committee also noted that the Department had requested that the oral briefing on the PSTB was rescheduled from 3 July to 26 June 2024.

Some Members voiced their displeasure about the lack of communication to the Committee in relation to developments with the PSTB and Interim PSTB.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request; regular updates on the agreed transformation proposals from Departments or on the status of the process if decisions have not yet been made, copies of the pro forma issued by the Interim PSTB to obtain transformation proposals from Departments and detail of the analysis undertaken on the received proposals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing with the Final Public Sector Transformation Board when appointed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the correspondence to all other Statutory Committees indicating that they may wish to seek copies of their

Department's transformation proposals. Members also agreed to seek copies of the Department of Finance's own transformation proposals in a similar manner.

5.5 Department of Finance – Correspondence to the Committee for the Economy – City and Growth Deals

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance to the Committee for the Economy regarding the early phasing of City and Growth Deal individual project support.

5.6 Committee for Infrastructure – Scrutiny of draft Executive Budget 2024-25

The Committee considered a response from the Committee for Infrastructure regarding its scrutiny of the Department of Infrastructure Budget for 2024-25

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

5.7 Minister of Finance – Response regarding engagement with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding her engagement with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in relation to the Executive Restoration Package Settlement and its out workings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek information on the regularity of Joint Exchequer Committee meetings and clarification on whether there is regular or ad-hoc programme of meetings.

5.8 Northern Ireland Assembly Audit Committee – Report on the Estimates of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman 2024-25.

The Committee noted the NI Assembly Audit Committee Report on the Estimates of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman 2024-25.

5.9 17th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had published her 17th report and did not draw any matters to the Assembly's attention in relation to SR 2024-

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

The Committee moved into closed session at 2:29pm

6. Consultation on Non-Domestic and Domestic Rating Measures to support budget sustainability by raising additional revenue – Oral Briefing from Departmental officials.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2:31pm;

Sharon Magee, Deputy Secretary, Land and Property Services (LPS)

Andrew McAvoy, Director, LPS

Christine Farrell, Registrar of Titles, LPS.

The officials briefed the Committee on the responses to the consultation on Non-Domestic and Domestic Rating Measures to support budget sustainability by raising additional revenue. Officials also provided detail on Land Registration Employer Liability Cases.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including the main themes raised in the consultation responses and the timeline for publication of the consultation report.

Steve Aiken declared an interest as a former Chief Executive at the Dublin City University Educational Trust.

In the course of discussions, Steven Aiken also declared a relevant constituent interest.

Nicola Brogan left the meeting at 3:25pm

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 3:26pm

The officials left the meeting at 3:36pm

The Committee moved into public session at 3:38pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a further briefing on the issue when the consultation report had been published.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a written briefing from the Department of Finance on Covid-related grants. The Chair indicated that he would correspond directly with the officials in relation to rating of certain premises in the 'Tribeca' area of Belfast.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 3:38pm

7. Consultation on Financial Context for Revenue Raising – Oral Briefing from Departmental officials

The following officials joined the meeting at 3:38pm;

Joanne McBurney, Deputy Secretary, Public Spending Directorate, Department of Finance;

Maryann Smith, Director Public Spending Directorate, Department of Finance; and

Kerri Smyth, Head of Branch Public Spending Directorate, Department of Finance.

The officials briefed the Committee on responses to the consultation on the Financial Context for Revenue Raising.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including the timeline for publication of the Sustainability Plan and June Monitoring.

Steve Aiken left the meeting at 4:00pm

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 4:01pm

Phillip Brett left the meeting at 4:04pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a written briefing on the Sustainability Plan when this was available and to request an update on the timing of June Monitoring to ensure that Members are aware prior to any public announcement.

Maryann Smith and Kerri Smyth left the meeting at 4:09pm. Joanne McBurney remained to brief Members on the next Agenda item.

8. City and Region Growth Deals – Oral Briefing from Departmental officials

The following official joined the meeting at 4:10pm and along with Joanne McBurney briefed the Committee on the City and Region Growth Deals;

Jillian Gilmore, Director, Public Spending Directorate, Department of Finance.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including the role of the Department of Finance in respect of the Deals, funding and increased costs.

The officials left the meeting at 4:34pm.

9. Correspondence

There were no items of correspondence.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme, as drafted.

The Committee noted a number of briefings previously confirmed up to 3 July 2024 had now been changed by the Department;

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold an oral briefing on the Public Sector Transformation Board on 26 June 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold an oral briefing on Building Regulations on 3 July 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold an oral briefing on the Department of Finance Business Plan on 3 July 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule RaISe Module 4 Public Finance Scrutiny on 19 June 2024.

Members reflected on the importance of holding the oral briefing with the Head of the Civil Service before the summer recess, which had yet to be confirmed by the Executive Office.

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

11. Any Other Business.

11.1 Budget scrutiny matters.

The Clerk updated the Committee in relation to previous incidences of Budget Bills not proceeding via accelerated passage.

The Clerk also updated the Committee on informal communications with Statutory Committee Clerks regarding information and briefing from their respective Departments in respect of post-budget allocations, Departmental business plans and June Monitoring.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to all Statutory Committees to formally request detail of information and briefing flowing from their respective Departments on post-budget allocations, Departmental business plans and June Monitoring.

12. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 19 June 2024 at 2:00pm in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45pm.

Matthew O'Toole MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

19 June 2024