



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

14 February 2024

Meeting Location: Room 21 Parliament Buildings Belfast

Present:

- Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)
- Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Eóin Tennyson MLA
- Phillip Brett MLA
- Paul Frew MLA
- Gerry Carroll MLA
- Nicola Brogan MLA
- Deirdre Hargey MLA
- Steve Aiken MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance:

- Peter Hall Committee Clerk
- Clairita Frazer Assistant Committee Clerk

Stephen Magee Clerical Supervisor

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:05pm in closed session

1. Committee procedures and Practices

The Committee Clerk briefed Members on a number of Committee procedures and practices.

2. Briefing by The Examiner of Statutory Rules

The Examiner of Statutory Rules joined the meeting at 2:16pm

The Examiner of Statutory Rules briefed the Committee on her role and the work of her office.

The Examiner of Statutory Rules left the meeting at 2:38pm

The meeting moved into public session at 2:39pm

The Chairperson highlighted the following decisions taken in closed session:

Agreed Members noted arrangements for Committee meetings and agreed that Committee meetings should be held in public session unless the Committee agrees that there is an overriding reason for proceedings to be closed;

Noted Members noted Committee staff contact details;

Noted Members noted Outcomes of an Effective Committee;

Agreed Members agreed a Committee approach to dealing with correspondence and requests for meetings which are not linked to strategic priorities or statutory duties;

Agreed Members agreed to adopt a Committee approach to preparation and witness questioning;

Agreed Members agreed to adopt a Committee protocol on conduct and courtesy at committee meetings;

Noted Members noted the Committee “X” account and potential uses for it.

3. Apologies

No apologies were received.

Agreed Members agreed to move to agenda item 4 **Chairperson’s Business** to the end of the meeting.

4. Declaration of Interests

The Committee Clerk briefed Committee Members on the requirement to declare interests under Standing Order 69(5).

5. Committee Membership

Noted The Committee noted the current list of Committee Membership

6. Committee Procedures and practices

Noted The Committee noted the following guidance papers:

Guide to the Powers and Operation of Statutory Committees for Chairpersons and Members

Guide to the Role of the Chairperson

Guide for Members on the Role and Functions of the Committee Office

Guidance on Timescales for Interaction between Committees and Departments

Guidance on Handling Statutory Rules for chairpersons and Members of Statutory Committees

7. Delegation of technical scrutiny to the Examiner of Statutory Rules (ESR)

Agreed Members agreed the following motion:

“That the Committee for Finance, under Standing Order 43, resolves to delegate to the Examiner of Statutory Rules the technical scrutiny of statutory rules referred to the Committee under the above-mentioned Standing Order. The Committee further resolves that in carrying out this function the Examiner shall be authorised to report her technical findings on each statutory rule to the Assembly, and to the relevant Department, as well as to the Committee itself and to publish her report.”

Agreed Members agreed to consider agenda item 9 **Committee for Finance Legacy report 2017-22** at the Committee meeting on 21 February 2024.

8. SL1 The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered SL1 – The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.

Agreed Members agreed to seek a briefing from the Department on the proposed Statutory Rule.

Noted The Committee noted that they would be considering a number of Statutory Rules which were made and laid during the dissolution of the Assembly and that the Committee did not have an opportunity to consider these at the usual SL1 stage. The Committee would also be considering the rules subject to Examiner of Statutory Rules report.

9. SR 2022/204 Public Service Pensions (Employer Cost Cap and Specified Restricted Scheme) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

Agreed That the Committee for Finance has considered SR 2022/204 The Public Service Pensions (Employer Cost Cap and Specified Restricted Scheme)

Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has no objection to the Rule.

10. The Public Service Pensions Directions (Exercise of Powers, Compensation and Information) Directions (NI) 2023

The Committee noted the above directions.

11. The Public Service Pensions (Valuations and Employer Cost Cap) Directions (NI) 2023

The Committee noted the above directions.

Agreed Members agreed to seek a briefing from the Department of Finance on the McCloud Judgement.

12. SR 2023/141 The Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Remediable Service) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

Agreed The Committee for Finance considered SR 2023/141 The Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Remediable Service) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has no objection to the Rule.

13. SR 2023/54 The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order

Agreed The Committee for Finance considered SR 2023/54 The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 and agreed to seek clarification from the Department of Finance on the revaluation rate used for Firefighters pension schemes. Members also agreed to write to the Fire Brigades Union to seek views on the revaluation rate used.

14. SR 2023/58 The Pensions Increase (Review) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023

Noted The Committee noted SR 2023/58 The Pensions Increase (Review) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 and agreed to defer consideration pending receipt of clarification on SR 2023/54.

15. SR 2022/220 The Whole of Government Accounts - Designation of Bodies

Agreed The Committee for Finance considered SR 2022/220 The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order 2022 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has no objection to the Rule.

16. SR 2023/89 The Whole of Government Accounts - Designation of Bodies

Agreed The Committee for Finance considered SR 2023/89 The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order 2023 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has no objection to the Rule.

17. SR 2022/256 The Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001 (Estimates and Accounts) (Designation of Bodies) Order 2022;

Agreed The Committee for Finance considered SR 2022/256 The Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001 (Estimates and Accounts) (Designation of Bodies) Order 2022 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has no objection to the Rule.

18. SR 2023/53 The Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001 (Estimates and Accounts) (Designation of Bodies) Order 2023

Agreed The Committee for Finance considered SR 2023/53 The Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001 (Estimates and Accounts) (Designation of Bodies) Order 2023 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has no objection to the Rule.

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

Agreed The Committee for Finance considered SR 2024/7 The Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001 (Estimates and Accounts) (Designation of Bodies) Order 2024 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has no objection to the Rule.

20. SR 2022/225 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Registration of Deaths and Still-Births) (Extension) (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022;

21. SR 2023/49 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Registration of Deaths and Still-Births) (Extension) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023;

22. SR 2023/137 The Coronavirus Act - Registration of Deaths and Still-Births

The Committee considered SR 2023/137 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Registration of Deaths and Still-Births) (Extension) (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023, SR 2023/49 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Registration of Deaths and Still-Births) (Extension) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 and SR 2023/137 The Coronavirus Act - Registration of Deaths and Still-Births.

Agreed Members agreed to defer consideration pending clarification from the Department of Finance on the continued extension of the provisions and potential to make them permanent through an appropriate legislative vehicle.

23. SR 2022/295 Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

Agreed The Committee for Finance considered SR 2022/295 Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations (Northern

Ireland) 2022 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has no objection to the Rule.

24. SR 2023/1 The Rates (Making and Levying of Different Rates) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

Agreed The Committee for Finance has considered SR 2023/1 The Rates (Making and Levying of Different Rates) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has no objection to the Rule.

Agreed Members agreed to seek an explanation from the Department of Finance on rationale for the optional conversion factors being at least 1% lower.

Paul Frew left the meeting at 3:24pm.

25. SR 2023/39 The Rate Relief (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

Agreed The Committee considered SR 2023/39 The Rate Relief (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and agreed to request a briefing by Departmental officials at the Committee meeting on 21 February 2024.

Paul Frew re-joined the meeting at 3:28pm.

Philip Brett left the meeting at 3:29pm.

26. SR 2023/198 The Rates (Localised Flooding) (Emergency Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

Agreed The Committee for Finance considered SR 2023/198 The Rates (Localised Flooding) (Emergency Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has no objection to the Rule.

27. SR 2023/199 The Rates (Localised Flooding No.2) (Emergency Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

Agreed The Committee for Finance considered SR 2023/199 The Rates (Localised Flooding No.2) (Emergency Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has no objection to the Rule.

Philip Brett re-joined the meeting at 3:30pm

28. SR 2024/1 The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

Agreed The Committee for Finance considered SR 2024/1 The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has no objection to the Rule.

29. SR 2024/2 The New NAV List (Time of Valuation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024

Agreed The Committee for Finance considered SR 2024/1 The New NAV List (Time of Valuation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules has no objection to the Rule.

Agreed Members agreed that the First Day Briefing from the Department should be reported by Hansard.

30. First Day Briefing from the Department of Finance

The following officials joined the meeting at 3:34pm

Neil Gibson, Permanent Secretary, Department of Finance;

Tony Simpson, Director, Strategic Policy and Reform, Department of Finance and

Joanne McBurney, Director, Public Spending Directorate, Department of Finance

The officials briefed the Committee on background information on the remit, structure and functions of the Department of Finance and key issues it faces. Officials also discussed details of the financial package which accompanied the restoration of the Executive on 13 February 2024.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Steve Aiken left the meeting at 4:43pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The officials left the meeting at 4:46pm.

Agreed The Committee agreed to write to the Speaker to highlight the request from the Department of Finance to grant Accelerated Passage for the 2024 Budget Bill. Furthermore, to inform consideration of this request, Members agreed to hold an additional meeting on Monday 19 February 2024 at 12noon in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

Agreed The Committee agreed to seek clarification on the Consolidated Fund and how it is used by Government Departments.

31. Chairperson's Business

Item 1 - Invitation – Northern Ireland Water

The Chairperson referred the Committee to an invitation for the Committee to attend a tour of one of the NI Water Treatment Works across NI and/or the Belfast Waste Water Treatment Works in Duncrue Industrial Estate.

Agreed Members agreed to respond directly to NI Water if they wished to participate.

Item 2 - Informal Meeting with Minister of Finance

The Chairperson updated Members on discussions during an informal meeting with the Deputy Chair and Minister of Finance on 7 February 2024.

Item 3 - Brexit Papers for Committee for Finance

Agreed The Committee agreed to pursue the specific actions related to the Department of Finance remit with officials, requesting briefing on these issues.

Item 4 - Public Expenditure Terminology

Agreed The Committee noted the Department of Finance publication: Public Expenditure Terminology and agreed to request hard copies of same.

Item 5 - Recent Department of Finance Consultations

Agreed The Committee noted a list of recent Department of Finance consultations and agreed to request briefing on those consultations, which have not yet resulted in policy change.

Item 6 – Interparliamentary Forum

Agreed The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and Committee Clerk would attend the Interparliamentary Forum to be held on Thursday 29 February 2024 at the House of Lords.

Item 7 – Engagement with UK Treasury

Agreed The Committee agreed to consider a draft letter to the UK Treasury at its meeting on 19 February 2024.

32. Draft Forward Work Programme

Agreed The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme as drafted.

Noted The Committee noted that a strategic priority session would be planned before the end of May 2024.

33. Correspondence

Agreed The Committee agreed to dispose of correspondence items via email.

34. Any Other Business

None.

35. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Monday 19 February 2024 at 12noon in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:17pm.

Matthew O'Toole MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

21 February 2024