



Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Finance

Dr Caoimhe Archibald MLA
Minister for Finance
Department of Finance
Clare House
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Belfast
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4th March 2024

Our Ref.: 2024/009

Dear Caoimhe,

Budget Process

At its meeting on 28th February 2024, the Committee agreed that I should write to you raising some issues around the Budget Process. Members have acknowledged that the timing of the Executive's Restoration has created added complexities to an already difficult Budget Process. The Committee has already supported Accelerated Passage for the Budget 2023-24 Bill in recognition of that. However, the Committee would be grateful if you could provide some clarifications as Members are keen to undertake their statutory scrutiny role.

You have indicated publicly that you expect to bring forward a draft budget for 2024-25 prior to the end of April. The Committee would be grateful if you could confirm to Members that this is the case. If it is, then do you also intend to set out the quantum of UKG funds made available for the 2024-25 budget two weeks prior to the presentation of a draft budget, as per protocol.

You will be aware that Section 64 of the NI Act 1998 requires that:

64. - (1) *The Minister of Finance and Personnel shall, before the beginning of each financial year, lay before the Assembly a draft budget, that is to say, a programme of expenditure proposals for that year which has been agreed by the Executive Committee in accordance with paragraph 20 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement.*

As this has not been the case, Members would seek an urgent update on whether this creates a legal issue, or if there is a remedy to this that has already been established.

**Matthew O'Toole, Chairperson, Committee for Finance,
Northern Ireland Assembly
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When briefing the Committee previously, officials indicated that there would be limited consultation on the draft budget for 2024-25. Members would appreciate clarity on what consultation might be planned, including an estimated timescale and duration. Additionally, Members would appreciate a timescale for bringing forward the Main Estimates.

The Committee is grateful for the pro-active approach that you and your officials have adopted with regard to providing briefing, and Members welcome the continuation of this to ensure that the Committee can provide the timely support and advise on the Budget Process that is required.

The Committee looks forward to a response at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

[Signed]

Matthew O'Toole MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance