

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

TUESDAY, 23 AUGUST 2016
ROOM 29, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mrs Emma Little Pengelly (Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister MLA
Mr Jonathan Bell MLA
Mr Paul Girvan MLA
Mr Gerry Mullan MLA
Ms Caitríona Ruane MLA
Mr Philip Smith MLA
Mr Jim Wells MLA

In Attendance: Mr Jim McManus (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Phil Pateman (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Joe Westland (Clerical Supervisor)
Miss Heather Graham (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Ms Claire Hanna (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr John O'Dowd MLA
Mr Ross Hussy MLA

The meeting commenced at 10:32 am in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies are detailed above.

2. Sale of National Asset Management Agency assets in NI – Consideration of recent allegations made in the media relating to the former Chairperson of the previous Committee for Finance & Personnel

Members noted procedural advice from the Clerk to the Committee and considered the recent events as reported.

Following a discussion by Members, the Chairperson proposed the following:

‘That this Committee write to the Minister of Finance requesting that he provides all communications and exchanges between himself and the previous Chairperson of the Committee, or those acting on his behalf with other witnesses who gave evidence during the previous Committee’s review into the Sale of National Asset Management Agency assets in Northern Ireland.’

The question was put on this proposal.

The Committee divided:

Ayes	Noes	Abstained
Emma Little Pengelly	Caitríona Ruane	
Jim Allister		
Philip Smith		
Jonathan Bell		
Paul Girvan		
Gerry Mullan		
Jim Wells		

The proposal was carried.

The Committee noted that, in the view of Caitríona Ruane this approach falls outside of the Committee’s remit and any inquiry or investigation is the responsibility of the Commissioner for Standards.

Following a discussion by Members, the Chairperson proposed the following:

‘That this Committee write to the Minister of Finance requesting him to step aside from his current role until any investigation has been completed.’

The question was put on this proposal.

The Committee divided:

Ayes	Noes	Abstained
Emma Little Pengelly	Caitríona Ruane	
Jim Allister		
Philip Smith		
Jonathan Bell		

Paul Girvan		
Gerry Mullan		
Jim Wells		

The proposal was carried.

The Chairperson then proposed the following:

‘That this Committee writes to Minister O’Muilleoir and requesting that he attends a future meeting of the Committee to clarify his role in the matter’.

The Committee noted that Caitríona Ruane did not consider that Mr Ó Muilleoir would have any issue in attending before the Committee and was therefore supportive of the proposal but reiterated her earlier concern that the Committee’s approach may impede the established procedures or any investigations.

The question was put on this proposal.

The Committee divided:

Ayes	Noes	Abstained
Emma Little Pengelly		
Jim Allister		
Philip Smith		
Jonathan Bell		
Paul Girvan		
Gerry Mullan		
Caitríona Ruane		
Jim Wells		

The proposal was carried.

The Chairperson proposed the following:

‘That this Committee writes to the former Chairperson to establish: whether there was any other engagement with the witness concerned to include but not limited to direct messaging on social media, telephone conversations, meetings or briefing over and above what has already been reported; details of any direct or indirect exchanges or communications with any other individuals or organisations acting on the former Chairperson’s behalf; whether party colleagues were briefed on the content of such exchanges; and the identity of the holder of the email account huntcheontom@hotmail.com.’

The question was put on this proposal.

The Committee divided:

Ayes	Noes	Abstained
Emma Little Pengelly	Caitríona Ruane	
Jim Allister		
Philip Smith		
Jonathan Bell		
Paul Girvan		
Gerry Mullan		
Jim Wells		

The proposal was carried.

The Committee noted that Caitríona Ruane considers that, in writing to the former Chairperson, this Committee has crossed a line in terms of its remit, that responsibility for investigating this issue falls to the Commissioner for Standards and that her view is that the Committee should encourage those with relevant information to provide this to the Commissioner to facilitate any investigation.

Paul Girvan proposed the following:

‘That the agreed letter to the former Chairperson is amended to clarify whether, as former Chairperson he communicated any detail, or provided papers relevant to the exchange, to the then Clerk.’

The question was put on this proposal.

The Committee divided.

Ayes	Noes	Abstained
Emma Little Pengelly	Caitríona Ruane	
Jim Allister		
Philip Smith		
Jonathan Bell		
Paul Girvan		
Gerry Mullan		
Jim Wells		

The proposal was carried.

The Chairperson proposed the following:

‘That this Committee writes to the former Clerk to the Committee for Finance & Personnel to establish how contact with Mr Bryson was initiated and what communication there was with Mr Bryson; whether the former Chairperson communicated any exchanges he received to the Clerk; and whether he can provide any further insight into the matters under consideration.’

The question was put on this proposal.

The Committee divided.

Ayes	Noes	Abstained
Emma Little Pengelly	Caitríona Ruane	
Jim Allister		
Philip Smith		
Jonathan Bell		
Paul Girvan		
Gerry Mullan		
Jim Wells		

The proposal was carried.

Agreed: to write to the Irish News and the BBC to establish whether the transcripts published are the full transcripts and if not, to request the complete copies.

Agreed: to meet again on 7 September 2016 to progress this issue.

Agreed: that the Clerk will prepare a paper including options and advice for the next scheduled Committee meeting.

Agreed: to provide to the Committee any advice provided by the previous Clerk to the Committee for Finance & Personnel to the Chairperson in relation to the NAMA review.

3. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Finance and Personnel Committee will be held on Wednesday, 7 September 2016 at 11:00am, Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12:27 pm.

Mrs Emma Little Pengelly MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance
07 September 2016