

## Work of the Committee Part 2 - Budget Monitoring Role

### KEY:

N: Narrator  
CM: Conor Murphy  
AL: Anna Lo  
AM: Alban Maginness  
MM: Michelle McIlveen

CM: The Finance Committee not only looks at how the Department of Finance spends its budget, but because the Department of Finance is an overarching role over all of the departments on how they spend their budgets, then we have that overarching scrutiny role as well. We don't go into the individual budgets that other Committees will do, but we have that overarching role in terms of how the budget process works.

One of the strong contentions I think everyone involved, including people in the Executive Ministers have, is that the budget process we have is very complex, complicated, not so transparent, not easy to follow. It's not very easy to, say, follow a certain tranche of money that's been allocated for a policy objective and how it's been spent and how effective it has been, and to measure that. And that's what we should be doing here as people who hold the Executive to account. So we're trying to change the budget process to try and make it much more transparent for people and much easier to follow.

AM: I think that we have a system here which is friendly in terms of outside engagement and engagement with the citizen. And it's really up to citizens, if they're interested, if they feel minded to engage with the Assembly Committee. And they can do so in many different ways, and can do so effectively if they put their minds to it. Because Committees are always interested in hearing the views of ordinary people as well as sectoral players in whatever area we're talking about.

MM: The work of the Committees is very transparent and there's an opportunity for the public to, either to view Committee proceedings online or to listen to any of the recordings. On the basis of that, we are very open to receiving comment from the public, and certainly they can influence our thinking in relation to our Inquiries, or through the legislative process as we're going through the Bill stage.

CM: The Committees are open to engagement with anybody. And we quite frequently get either lobby groups, or even individual members of the public writing to us. And obviously the Committee can't deal with every single individual issue that's brought to it, but if there's a serious enough issue being brought forward, if there's perhaps significant enough representation from across the community, then the Committee will obviously get interested. And we do invite people up to give evidence to us.

- AL: So on various issues, we have asked stakeholders to write into us, and then maybe following a written submission, we invite them to come in on an individual basis to give us briefings or we have something called a Stakeholders Event.
- MM: The challenges primarily, I think, for any Committee is the fact that because they're made up of a variety of parties, and there'll always be a party interest in that, but generally speaking we try to come to a consensus view on the variety of issues. But we also have issues around quorum, and because of the diversity of some of the Committees and the amount of work which are presented to us, particularly around Inquiries, time can also be a factor which causes a problem for a Committee.
- AL: There are many challenges, there are of course challenges when, for example, Committees can't agree on issues, when Party politics, or interests of individual constituents come into play, then, you know, that can cause a bit of tension. But in our Committee I think so far it's been very good and we look at issues rather than maybe, you know, what other factors come into play.
- N: There is much evidence that Committees have a considerable impact on the policies and actions of ministers and departments across all work areas, from legislation, to budget scrutiny, and policy development. This level of scrutiny and the potential for locally elected politicians, and the public, to shape policy and legislation was not a feature of Direct Rule.