



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

28 May 2025

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)
Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Phillip Brett MLA
Paul Frew MLA
Deirdre Hargey MLA
Eoin Tennyson MLA

Apologies: None

Virtual: Steve Aiken MLA
Gerry Carroll MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA

In Attendance: Peter Hall Committee Clerk

Clairita Frazer Assistant Assembly Clerk

Tom Armstrong Assistant Assembly Clerk

Stephen Magee Clerical Supervisor

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 1.09pm in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Declaration of Interests

None.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1. Financial Conduct Authority - Invitation

The Committee noted an invitation from the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), to a lunchtime networking reception to celebrate the FCA Strategy 2025-30, on 12th June 2025.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 1.10pm.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 21st May 2025.

5. Matters Arising

5.1. Department of Finance – Land and Property Service Corporate Plan

The Committee noted a copy of the Land and Property Services' Corporate Plan. Members also noted an amended job title for the Deputy Secretary of Land and Property Services.

6. Northern Ireland Banking & Financial Services Landscape Inquiry – Oral Briefing – Financial Conduct Authority

Agreed: Members agreed that the oral briefing should be reported by Hansard

The Committee considered a written submission from the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to its Banking & Financial Services Landscape Inquiry and a copy of the FCA Financial Lives Survey 2024, which had been emailed to Members in advance of the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that both the written submission and survey would be added to the Inquiry's evidence base, Committee webpages and report in due course.

The following witness joined the meeting at 1.12pm:

Emad Aladhal Director, Retail Banking, Financial Conduct Authority

The witness briefed the Committee on the FCA's role within the Banking and Financial Landscape. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

A number of issues were discussed including; access to cash and bank accounts, banking in the context of cross border consumers, lending to small and micro businesses and the need for regulators to be cognisant of Northern Ireland specific issues.

Eoin Tennyson joined the meeting at 1.21pm.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 1.31pm.

Phillip Brett joined the meeting at 1.32pm.

Jemma Dolan left the meeting at 2.00pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witness for his attendance and the witness left the meeting at 2.01pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek additional information from the FCA on a number of issues including: issues relating to cross border matters, the FCA perimeter report and the FCA report on lending.

The Committee considered further information from the Association of British Insurers provided following its oral evidence session on 7th May, including information on the Access to Insurance Sub-Committee, practical operation of the “Flood Re” Fund, details of localised criteria used to determine premiums and the work of the Insurance Sub-Committee as part of the Financial Inclusion Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the information to the Committee’s evidence base for the Inquiry, Committee webpages and report in due course. The Committee also agreed to copy the information to the Infrastructure and Economy Committees.

The Committee considered further information from Barclay’s provided following its oral evidence session on 9th April, including information on ethical focus, cross border banking, support for charities, and banks’ appetite for risk.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the information to the Committee’s evidence base for the Inquiry, Committee webpages and report in due course.

The Committee noted a Hansard transcript of the oral evidence session with Finance Innovation Lab at the meeting on 21st May and that it would be added to the Committee’s Inquiry report in due course.

7. NICS Estate Strategy – 1st Review – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance

The Committee noted a progress update paper from the Department of Finance provided in advance of the session and a copy of the NICS Office Estate Strategy.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.05pm:

Sharon Smyth	Deputy Secretary of Construction & Procurement Delivery (CPD);
Desi McDonnell	Director of Properties Division, CPD; and
Niall Hobbs	Deputy Director of Properties Division (Head of Office Estates) CPD

The officials briefed the Committee on progress towards the 31 March 2028 key performance indicators within the NICS Office Estate Strategy. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

A number of issues were discussed including; recent sales of NICS buildings, preparations for stage 2 of the strategy, impact of hybrid working policy, cross-departmental engagement and parallel work with Jobs and Benefits Offices (JBO) and local councils.

Phillip Brett left the meeting at 2.52pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance and the officials left the meeting at 2.56pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request regular updates on the strategy and to seek additional information on the listing status of Marlborough House in Craigavon and an update on discussions in relation to the JBO in Bangor.

8. Main Estimates 2025-26 and Budget (No.2) Bill 2025 – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance

Agreed: Members agreed that the oral briefing should be reported by Hansard.

The Committee considered relevant correspondence from the Minister of Finance, a briefing paper provided in advance of the session by the Department of Finance with a number of enclosures including the 2025-26 Main Estimates, Budget Bill, Explanatory and Financial Memorandum, Expenditure authorised under Sole Authority of the Bill and the Estimates Memorandums for the Main Estimates.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.57pm:

Patrick Neeson Head of Supply Division, Public Spending Group,
Department of Finance; and

Janis Marynowski Principal, Supply, Public Spending Group, Department of
Finance.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Main Estimates and Budget (No.2) Bill. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

A number of issues were discussed including; rationale for the Minister's request for accelerated passage for the Budget Bill, June monitoring, Vote on Account, Sole Authority and forthcoming legislation from the Department of Finance.

Phillip Brett joined the meeting at 2.59pm.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 3.07pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance and the officials left the meeting at 3.12pm.

The Committee considered the Department of Finance's request for it to grant Accelerated Passage for the Budget (No. 2) Bill (Northern Ireland) 2025 and deliberated on whether or not there had been appropriate consultation with it in respect of public expenditure covered by the Bill.

The question was put that that the Committee for Finance is content that there has been appropriate consultation with it in respect of the public expenditure proposals covered in the Budget (No.2) Bill 2025 and is willing to grant the requested Accelerated Passage for the Bill

Agreed The Committee agreed that there had been appropriate consultation in respect of public expenditure covered by the Budget (No.2) Bill (Northern Ireland) 2025 and that it should proceed by accelerated passage and that the Chairperson would write to the Speaker to this effect.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 3.15pm.

9. Monthly Outturn & Forecast Outturn March Restated (R13) Data – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance

The Committee considered a briefing paper provided by the Department of Finance in advance of the session, on the 2024-25 Public Expenditure Outturn & Forecast Outturn – March Restated (R13) position.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the briefing paper with other Statutory Committees and the Assembly Audit Committee.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.15pm:

Maryann Smith Director of Central Expenditure; and

Emer Rice Head of In-year Monitoring.

The officials briefed the Committee on the restated March outturn position from all Departments. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

A number of issues were discussed including; the overall block position, a capital easement due to delays with the A5 road project, learning for Departments going forward and other variance explanations provided by Departments.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 3.22pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance and the officials left the meeting at 3.32pm.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a Hansard transcript of the oral briefing from Assembly Research and Library Service on the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the transcript to the Committee Bill report and Bill folder.

- ii. The Committee noted the 40th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

11. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme, as drafted.

The Committee noted that an oral evidence session with a bereaved parent representative group would take place next week – 4th June. Members also noted that an informal meeting with Hospitality Ulster would take place at 1.30pm on the same day.

The Committee noted that an oral briefing on City & Growth Deals had been requested for 11th June and that whilst an oral briefing on the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review had been confirmed for 18th June, it was not yet clear if this would also cover the outcome of June Monitoring.

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

12. Legislative Consent Motion – Data (Use and Access) Bill – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance in relation to a Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) which had been laid in the Assembly Business Office that day. Members noted that arrangements had been made to receive an urgent oral briefing from Departmental officials given the timeframe involved.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 3.38pm to receive some procedural advice in this regard.

The Committee reconvened in open session at 3.57pm.

Agreed: Members agreed that the oral briefing should be reported by Hansard.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.57pm:

Paul Duffy	Deputy Secretary, Digital & Finance Shared Services;
Geraldine Devine	Director, Digital Security & Engagement; and
Colin Scott	Head of Information Governance.

The officials briefed the Committee on the process for and content of, the Legislative Consent Motion (LCM). The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

A number of issues were discussed including: the handling of the LCM, the purpose of the LCM, lack of scrutiny of the LCM, the delay bringing the LCM to Committee, queries raised by the Minister of Finance and stakeholders, the legislative process, potential concerns with the wider Westminster Bill and specific applicability to Northern Ireland.

Jemma Dolan joined the meeting at 4.24pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance and the officials left the meeting at 4.53pm.

The Committee discussed its position in relation to the LCM. Members reflected on their disappointment that this situation had arisen and about the consequences of

Northern Ireland not being in a position to grant legislative consent for provisions within the Bill. Members indicated that they did not have a clear understanding of the Bill, the aspects covered in the LCM as well as the status of the LCM itself.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that in light of the evidence given and its deliberations, Members were not in a position to take a view on the provisions within the LCM and that the Committee would reserve its position and not report on the LCM.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Finance seeking information on a number of issues including: a full account of the Department of Finance's actions in relation to the LCM; clarity on the LCM's current legal position, including anticipated actions of the UK Government in this regard; detail of concerns raised by stakeholders consulted by the Department and confirmation that those concerns have now been allayed, as well as detail of the specific clauses of the Bill which will apply to Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Speaker of the Assembly to convey the Committee's position in relation to the LCM, indicating that the Committee has reserved its position. This correspondence would be copied to the Assembly Business Office.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider a briefing from the Permanent Secretary on the issue.

Jemma Dolan left the meeting at 5.03pm.

The Clerk indicated that research on Legislative Consent Motions would be sourced and circulated to Members.

13. Any Other Business

None.

14. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 4th June 2025 at 2.00pm in Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings; with an informal meeting taking place at 1.30pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.05pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

4th June 2025