



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

20 May 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Dr Steve Aiken MBE MLA

Jemma Dolan MLA

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

Eoin Tennyson MLA

Apologies: Brian Kingston MLA

Virtual: Gerry Carroll MLA

In Attendance: Peter Hall Committee Clerk

Fiona Rooney Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk

Clairita Frazer Assistant Assembly Clerk

Tom Armstrong Assistant Assembly Clerk

Marion Johnson Clerical Supervisor

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 1:15pm in public session.

1. Apologies.

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests.

None.

3. Performance and Culture of the NICS – Oral Briefing from the Head of the Civil Service (HOCS)

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard would provide a transcript of the oral evidence session.

The Committee considered papers provided to assist with the session, including a written statement from HOCS, a DALO Readout Response on the NICS People Strategy, various Northern Ireland Audit Office reports, a Pivotal Report on Policy Delivery, and an article published by University of Ulster on Devolution in Northern Ireland.

Members also considered Hansard transcripts of recent oral briefings with Pivotal and University of Ulster.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add new items to the evidence base for the Inquiry.

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance to a Committee query about a recent newspaper article, noting the request for consideration of the matter in closed session.

The following officials joined the meeting at 1:18pm;

Dr Jayne Brady MBE	Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service;
Jill Minne	Deputy Secretary, People and Organisational Development, Department of Finance; and
Catherine Shannon	Deputy Secretary, NICS HR, Department of Finance.

The officials briefed the Committee on the NIAO report Leading and Resourcing the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the wider Inquiry into the Performance and Culture of the NICS.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including; temporary promotions in the NICS, recruitment, accountability, sickness absence, Senior Civil Service salary, performance management and skills and culture within the NICS.

Eoin Tennyson joined the meeting at 2:17pm.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 3:16pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 3:27pm to discuss a response from the Department of Finance to a Committee query regarding a recent newspaper article.

Catherine Shannon left the meeting at 3:27pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 3:37pm.

The Committee suspended at 3:37pm.

Steve Aiken left the meeting at 3:37pm.

The Committee resumed in open session at 3:49pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a number of follow-up items from the Department of Finance including an assessment of the NICS Board, information on the next phase of the NICS Board, vacancy levels and salary details for Senior Civil Servants.

The Committee considered 2 submissions to the Inquiry from individuals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add these submissions to the evidence base of the NICS Inquiry.

4. Review of Arm's Length Bodies (ALB) – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard would provide a transcript of the oral evidence session.

The Committee considered papers provided to assist with the session, including an updated written briefing from the Department and a written briefing paper previously submitted by the Department.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3:50pm;

Tony Simpson Deputy Secretary; Strategic Policy & Reform, (SPAR);
Helen Toner Director, SPAR; and
Stuart Stevenson Treasury Officer of Accounts.

The officials briefed the Committee on the current status of the ALB Review.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including; expected outputs, legislative tools potentially required and next steps.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a further update briefing at an appropriate time.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 4:18pm.

5. Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill – Consideration of Papers

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard would provide a transcript of the oral evidence session.

The Committee considered a Convention Rights Memorandum from the Assembly Legal Service, setting out the clauses or provisions of Schedules to the Bill which call for particular scrutiny by the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this to the evidence base for the Committee's Report on the Bill in due course. Members also agreed to ask the Department of Finance to provide clarifying detail as suggested in the Memorandum.

The Committee noted NIL responses to its Call for Evidence on the Bill from the Economy, Education and Infrastructure Committees; which would be added to the Committee's Report on the Bill in due course.

The Committee considered a Hansard transcript of Committee Stage approach deliberations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the transcript to the evidence base for the Committee Stage of the Bill and Report in due course.

6. SL1 – The Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Remedial Service) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee considered a clerk's memo (scrutiny paper) on the Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Remedial Service) (Amendment) Regulations 2026 and related papers. Members noted the purpose of the proposed statutory rule and that no responses had been received to the Committee's Citizen Space Survey on the proposed rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the merits of the proposal and that the Department make the rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish its decision and inform the Department of Finance accordingly.

7. Draft SR 2026/XX The Baby Loss Certificate Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee considered a statutory rule laid by the Department of Finance: Draft SR 2026/XX The Baby Loss Certificate Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 which

will provide the means to enable the provision of a Baby Loss Certificate to those who have lost a baby prior to the end of the 24th week of pregnancy.

Members noted that the rule was subject to affirmative resolution procedure and that the Assembly debate on the Rules was scheduled for Tuesday 26th May 2026.

Members also noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules has indicated, in her 65th Report, that the Rule is not required to be drawn to the special attention of the Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee for Finance has considered Draft SR2026/XX The Baby Loss Certificate Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance in relation to events to publicise the launch of the Baby Loss Certificate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance to update Members on the events to mark the launch of the Baby Loss Certificate Scheme.

8. Outturn and Forecast Outturn – Written Briefing

Members expressed their disappointment that the written briefing on the Outturn and Forecast Outturn had not been provided by the Department of Finance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance to provide this urgently, indicating the rationale for the delay.

9. Chairperson's Business.

9.1. Minister of Finance – Guidance to Departments in absence of a budget for 2026-27

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding Contingency Planning Envelopes provided to Departments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy this correspondence to other Statutory Committees. Members also agreed to ask the Minister of Finance for a further update during the oral briefing on 3rd June and, in the meantime, to request that the Department of Finance provide an urgent written update on contingency budget planning, necessary Budget Bills and engagement with UKG.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the new Chief Secretary of the Treasury, copying to the Northern Ireland Office, Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and Treasury Select Committee.

9.2. Notification of Intention to make an oral statement

The Committee noted the Minister of Finance's intention to make an oral statement on the most recent round of Transformation Funding.

11.7. DALO Readout Response – 29 April – Transformation Funding

11.8. DALO Readout Response – 22 April - Transformation Funding

The Committee noted 2 responses from the Department of Finance regarding Transformation Funding, noting the Minister's intention to make an oral statement to the Assembly in the coming days.

9.3. Chairpersons Liaison Group

The Committee noted the agenda for the Chairpersons Liaison Group meeting which took place on Tuesday 19th May 2026.

9.4. Committee visit to Integr8 Programme at Goodwood House

The Committee noted a NICS Intranet Article on its recent visit to the Integr8 Programme at Goodwood House.

10. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 6th May 2026.

11. Matters Arising

11.1. Minister of Finance – Response to Northern Ireland Affairs Committee – Open Book Exercise

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Finance to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee regarding the publication and findings of the Open Book Exercise.

11.2. DALO Readout Response – 22nd April 2026 – Open Book Exercise

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding the Open Book Exercise.

11.3. DALO Extract – 29 April 2026

The Committee noted the DALO Extract issued following the Committee meeting on 29 April 2026.

Eoin Tennyson left the meeting at 4:45pm.

11.4. DALO Readout Response – 29 April 2026 – NICS Estate Strategy

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance on the alignment between the NICS Estate Strategy and the Strategic Asset Management Unit.

Members noted that the Department was due to provide an oral briefing on the NICS Office Estate Strategy at next week's meeting.

11.5. DALO Readout Response – 29 April 2026 – AO Pilot

The Committee considered an update from the Department of Finance regarding its way forward, addressing recommendations within the Evaluation Report on the AO Pilot.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this response to the evidence base for the NICS Inquiry.

11.6. DALO Readout Response – 29 April 2026 – Quarterly Sickness Absence Publications

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance on the publication of quarterly sickness absence statistics. Members discussed the continued need for publication of this dataset.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to express its strong preference that the quarterly sickness absence statistics continue to be collated and published in some form. The Committee also agreed to add the information provided to the evidence base for the NICS Inquiry.

11.9. DALO Readout Response – 29 April 2026 – Banking & Financial Services Inquiry – Follow-up briefing

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance providing further detail on a number of issues discussed in a follow-up briefing on its Banking & Financial Services Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance about input to the Enhancing Financial Services Bill, as referenced in the Kings Speech 2026. Members also agreed to receive regular updates from the Department of Finance on the recommendations within the Committee's Banking and Financial Services Inquiry.

11.10. DALO Extract – 22 April 2026

The Committee noted the DALO Extract issued following the Committee meeting on 22 April 2026.

11.11. DALO Readout Response – 22 April 2026 – Support for Energy Costs

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the status of the £81m allocated for delivery of a comparable scheme to the GB Energy Company Obligation Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the Economy Committee and to ask the Department of Finance for sight of the business case submitted to Treasury and continued updates in this regard.

11.12. Department of Finance – Legislative Consent Motion Tracker

The Committee noted the latest Legislative Consent Motion tracker provided by the Department of Finance.

11.13. Economy Committee – Mid South West Region Growth Deal

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Economy Committee to the Finance Minister regarding the progress of the Mid South West Region Growth Deal.

11.14. Procedures Committee – Departmental Minutes on Contingent Liabilities

The Committee noted correspondence from the Procedures Committee on procedures to raise objections to Departmental Minutes on Contingent Liabilities.

11.15. Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill

The Committee noted the Annotated Marshalled List and Minutes of Proceedings for the Consideration Stage of the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill.

12. Correspondence

i. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding legislative reform for the provision of interim lump sums during financial remedy proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Finance for its assessment of the proposal's viability.

ii. The Committee noted that the Justice Committee had forwarded similar correspondence to both the Finance and Justice Departments asking for an assessment of the proposal.

iii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding MLA Pay Determination.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to inform the individual that MLA pay determination is made by an independent body and it would not be appropriate for the Finance Committee to deal with this.

iv. The Committee noted correspondence from that individual.

v. The Committee noted a Hansard transcript from the oral briefing on follow-up to the Committee's Banking and Financial Services Inquiry.

13. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its Forward Work Programme and a number of upcoming briefings.

Members noted forthcoming Plenary Business and departmental briefings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Department of Finance on the delay in appointing a new Legal Services Oversight Commissioner. Members also agreed that the Forward Work Programme should be amended accordingly and published on the Committee webpages.

14. Any Other Business

Some Members expressed their thanks to Committee Staff for making the necessary arrangements for the Committee's visit to the Balmoral Show on Wednesday 13th May 2026.

15. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 27th May 2026 at 2pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:59pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

27th May 2026