



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Finance

**Minutes of Proceedings**

**15 April 2026**

**Meeting Location:** Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:** Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Eoin Tennyson MLA

**Apologies:** Harry Harvey MLA

**Virtual:** Steve Aiken MLA

Gerry Carroll MLA

Jemma Dolan MLA

**In Attendance:** Peter Hall Committee Clerk

Fiona Rooney Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk

Clairita Frazer Assistant Assembly Clerk

Tom Armstrong Assistant Assembly Clerk

Stephen Magee Clerical Supervisor

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:03pm in public session.

**1. Apologies.**

As above.

**2. Declaration of Interests.**

None

**3. Chairperson's Business.**

**3.1. Minister of Finance – Written Ministerial Statement on Public Expenditure Treasury Funding available 2026-29/30**

The Committee noted a Written Ministerial Statement on Public Expenditure Treasury Funding available 2026-29/30, pending clarification on a number of issues from the Department of Finance.

**3.2. Consumer Council – Corporate Plan Stakeholder Consultation Event**

The Committee noted a copy of the Consumer Council Corporate Plan Stakeholder Consultation Event.

**3.3. Charge UK**

The Committee considered a request to brief Members on the application of business rates from Charge UK.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to send the correspondence to the Department of Finance to ask if there is any policy locus within the subject matter. On receipt of clarification, the Committee would then consider copying the correspondence to the Infrastructure and Economy Committees.

### **3.4. Recruitment of Commissioners to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland regarding the appointment of four new Commissioners to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

### **3.5. Senior Civil Service moves – Department of Finance**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Finance regarding forthcoming moves within the Senior Civil Service.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the senior Departmental staff conveying thanks and best wishes on their forthcoming moves.

### **3.6. High Fuel Costs**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance to ask if it has made specific representation to His Majesty's Treasury in relation to high fuel costs support.

## **4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

## **5. Matters Arising**

### **5.1. Minister of Finance – Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill.

### **5.2. DALO Extract – Meeting 11<sup>th</sup> February 2026**

The Committee noted the DALO Extract issued following the meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2026.

### **5.3. DALO Readout Response – 11<sup>th</sup> February 2026 – Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) Report**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding a further response to the NIAO Report “Leading and Resourcing in the Northern Ireland Civil Service”

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek further detail on responsibility and accountability lines for the objectives, responsibilities and actions outlined in the response. Members also agreed to incorporate the Department’s response into the evidence for the Performance and Culture of the NICS Inquiry.

### **5.4. DALO Extract – Meeting 11<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

The Committee noted the DALO Extract issued following the meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

### **5.5. DALO Readout Response – 11<sup>th</sup> March 2026 – Valuations and Recent Property Disposals**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding disparity between recent valuations and final sale amounts for Departmental assets, pending an oral briefing with Departmental officials on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2026.

### **5.21. AQW 3770/22-27 Update on Disposals under Civil Service Estate Strategy**

The Committee noted a Assembly Written Answer from the Minister of Finance to Diane Forsythe, deputy Chairperson regarding recent disposals under the Civil Service Estate Strategy, pending an oral briefing with Departmental officials on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2026.

### **5.6. DALO Readout Response – 11 March 2026 – SEUPB Accounts**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding the length of time taken to certify SEUPB Accounts.

### **5.7. DALO Readout Response – 11 March 2026 – DP Generalist Post Recruitment**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding a recent NICS Recruitment Campaign for Generalist DP Posts.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for clarification on data reporting for temporary promotions and agency staff in post.

### **5.8. DALO Extract – Meeting 18<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

The Committee noted the DALO Extract issued following the meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

**5.9. DALO Readout Response – 18 March 2026 – Duty Relief Exemption**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding information held about the Duty Relief Exemption for Small Parcels.

**5.10. DALO Readout Response – 18 March 2026 – Alternative Mourne Gateway Project**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding updates on the alternative Mourne Gateway Project.

**5.12. Department of Finance – City & Growth Deals**

The Committee noted an update from the Department of Finance on City & Growth Deals.

Eoin Tennyson joined the meeting at 2:27pm.

The Committee considered the next 4 items collectively:

**5.11. Department of Finance – Update on Local Growth Fund**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding the Local Growth Fund.

**5.22. Minister of Finance – Local Growth Fund**

The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Finance regarding the Local Growth Fund.

**5.17. Minister for Devolution, Faith and Communities – Local Growth Fund**

The Committee noted a response from the Minister for Devolution, Faith and Communities on the Local Growth Fund.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:28pm.

### **5.23. Minister for Devolution, Faith and Communities - Local Growth Fund**

The Committee noted a further response from the Minister for Devolution, Faith and Communities.

### **5.13. Department of Finance – Update on Member Appointments**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance on the extension of appointments to the Independent Fiscal Council.

### **5.14. Communities Committee – The Children’s Services Co-operation act (Northern Ireland) 2015 – Pooled Budgets**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance to the Communities Committee regarding the use of pooled budgets.

### **5.15. Committee for the Executive Office – Ending Violence Against Women and Girls**

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Executive Office Committee to the Minister of Finance asking for information on the Department of Finance’s work under the Ending of Violence Against Women and Girls Framework.

### **5.16. House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee – Follow-up Inquiry on Strengthening Northern Ireland’s Voice in the Context of the Windsor Framework**

The Committee noted correspondence from the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and Minister for the Cabinet Office regarding evidence gathered in relation to business support and the Windsor Framework.

Steve Aiken declared an interest as a Member of the Windsor Framework and Democratic Scrutiny Committee.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 2:43pm.

### **5.18. Letter from Financial Secretary to the Treasury to the Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Financial Secretary to the Treasury to the Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee regarding the EU removal of duty relief for low value imports.

Brian Kingston proposed that the Committee write to His Majesty's Treasury outlining the Committee's strong opposition to remove the threshold of duty relief for small parcels and reflecting the Committee's support for the Government's work in this area.

The Committee divided: Ayes 3; Noes 4; Abstain 0

#### **AYES**

Steve Aiken

Diane Forsythe

Brian Kingston

#### **NOES**

Gerry Carroll

Jemma Dolan

Matthew O'Toole

Eoin Tennyson

The proposal fell.

Matthew O'Toole proposed that the Committee write to the Northern Ireland Scrutiny House of Lords Committee thanking it for its correspondence, noting the Committee's interest in this matter, acknowledging that there is a divergence of views on this subject within the Finance Committee and requesting that the Finance Committee is kept up to date with any developments in this area.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6; Noes 0; Abstain 1

#### **AYES**

Steve Aiken

Gerry Carroll

#### **ABSTAIN**

Brian Kingston

Jemma Dolan

Diane Forsthye

Matthew O'Toole

Eoin Tennyson

The proposal was carried.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland House of Lords Scrutiny Committee as outlined in the proposal carried.

Deirdre Hargey rejoined the meeting at 2:57pm.

#### **5.19. Northern Ireland Affairs Committee to His Majesty's Treasury – Energy Bill**

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee to the Chancellor regarding energy bills support.

#### **5.20. Department of Finance – Banking Roundtable Report**

The Committee noted the Minister of Finance's Report on a recent Banking Roundtable.

#### **5.24. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Notice of Amendments**

The Committee noted amendments tabled by the Minister of Finance to the Consideration Stage of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move to Agenda Item 12: Oral briefing with Department of Finance officials.

## **12. Multi-Year Budget, 'Open Book' Exercise and Reserve Claim – 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 a number of papers provided to assist with the session, including a Clerk's Memo, a DALO Readout Response from the Department of Finance, a submission from a Member of the Public regarding Domestic Rates Max Capital Value and Budget and a series of six briefing papers from RaISe on the draft Budget.

The following Department of Finance officials joined the meeting at 3:00pm;

Joanne McBurney Deputy Secretary, Public Spending Division

Patrick Neeson Assistant Secretary, Public Spending Division

Maryann Smith Director, Central Expenditure Division.

The officials briefed the Committee on several issues related to the agreement of a multi-year budget.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including; multi-year budget, Secretary of State attendance at a forthcoming Executive meeting, repayment of Reserve Claim, Transformation Funding, 'Open Book' Exercise and Level of Need analysis.

Members passed on their best wishes to Joanne McBurney on her move to new post in the Department of Health.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 3:50pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request confirmation of the drawdown of the Vote on Account, to date and to seek a briefing from relevant officials regarding the level of need analysis. Members also agreed to incorporate the RaISe briefing papers into the Committee's Report on the 2026-2029/30 draft Budget.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to request a copy of the 'Open Book' Exercise Report.

Eoin Tennyson left the meeting at 3:51pm.

### **13. Report on the Minister of Finance's 2026-29/30 draft Budget – Agreement of Committee Report**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that Hansard should report on the session.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Executive Office Committee regarding its oral briefing with Departmental officials on the draft budget and December Monitoring. Members noted that inputs from the Economy and Health Committee would be incorporated into the Report on receipt.

The Committee discussed the draft Report and that agreement would be subject to further updates and/or additions by way of addendum.

Title Page, Contents Page, Powers, Membership.

The Committee considered the Title page, Contents Page, Powers and Membership as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Title page, Contents Page, Powers and Membership stand part of the Report

Introduction Section.

The Committee considered the Introduction as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Introduction stand part of the Report.

The Draft Budget 2026-29/30 Section.

The Committee considered the Draft Budget 2026-29/30 section as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Draft Budget 2026-29/30 section stand part of the Report.

Committee for Finance Approach Section.

The Committee considered the Committee for Finance Approach section as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Committee for Finance Approach section stand part of the Report.

Statutory and Audit Committee Section.

The Committee considered the Statutory and Audit Committee section as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Statutory and Audit Committee section stand part of the Report.

Committee Scrutiny Summary Section.

The Committee considered the Committee Scrutiny Summary section as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Committee Scrutiny Summary section, as drafted stand part of the Report.

Appendices.

The Committee considered the Appendices section as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Appendices section stand part of the Report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Report on the Minister of Finance's 2026-29/30 draft Budget be the 11<sup>th</sup> Report of the Committee for Finance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the report would be laid in the Assembly Business Office and published on the Committee webpages in due course.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the Bill report to the Minister of Finance in advance of any Plenary Debate on an associated Committee Motion. Members also agreed to consider a Motion in due course.

The Committee returned to the remaining Agenda items.

## **6. SL1 The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee considered a clerk's memo (scrutiny paper) on the Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 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. SL1 The Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Remediable Service) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee noted that the Department of Finance proposes to make a statutory rule: The Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Remediable Service) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 which will make minor, technical and clarificatory amendments to legislation relating to the McCloud remedy, principally the 'Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Remediable Service) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023'. Members noted that the Department of Finance had submitted a SL1 letter, a draft Statutory Rule and draft Explanatory and Financial Memorandum.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to issue a call for views for the SL1, and to publish the SL1, the draft Statutory Rule and any relevant documents from the Department of Finance on the Committee's website.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that Committee staff would seek information from the Department of Finance, where necessary, on any matters raised during the SL1 stage, including in the call for views.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to publish any responses received to the Committee call for views on the SL1, after they have been considered by the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note receipt of the proposed statutory rule and to consider it at the meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2026.

Members were content that an oral briefing from officials was not necessary at this stage.

Eoin Tennyson rejoined the meeting at 4:00pm.

## **8. SL1 The Baby Loss Certificates Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee noted that the Department of Finance proposes to make a statutory rule: The Baby Loss Certificates Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 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 Department of Finance had submitted a SL1 letter, a draft Statutory Rule and draft Explanatory and Financial Memorandum.

Members discussed the need to expedite the agreed process for delegated legislation on this issue.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to issue a call for views for the SL1, and to publish the SL1, the draft Statutory Rule and any relevant documents from the Department of Finance on the Committee's website.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that Committee staff would seek information from the Department of Finance, where necessary, on any matters raised during the SL1 stage, including in the call for views.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to publish any responses received to the Committee call for views on the SL1, after they have been considered by the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note receipt of the proposed statutory rule and to consider it at the meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2026, allowing the production of certificates to be expedited.

**Agreed:** Members discussed issues around how certificates would be displayed and agreed to request a short oral briefing from relevant Departmental officials.

## **9. SL1 The Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001 (Estimates and Accounts) (Designation of Bodies) Order 2026**

The Committee considered a clerk's memo (scrutiny paper) on the Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001 (Estimates and Accounts)

(Designation of Bodies) Order 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.

**10. 2026/49 The Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001 (Estimates and Accounts) (Designation of Bodies) Order 2026**

The Committee considered a Statutory Rule laid by the Department of Finance which will list certain public bodies whose spending must be included in Government Departments' budgets and financial accounts, for the year ending 31 March 2027. Members noted that the Rule was subject to the negative resolution procedure and the Department has stated that there have been no changes to policy content since the SL1 was submitted to the Committee Clerk.

Members also noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had, in her 61<sup>st</sup> Report, indicated that the Rule did not require to be drawn to the Assembly's attention.

**Agreed:** The Committee for Finance agreed that it has considered SR 2026/49 The Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001 (Estimates and Accounts) (Designation of Bodies) Order 2026 and that it has no objection to the Rule.

**11. 2026/64 The Pensions Increase (Review) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee noted that the Department had formally laid a Statutory Rules to provide for the annual increase in public service pensions in Northern Ireland and that this was not subject to any Assembly Resolution procedure.

#### **14. Performance and Culture of the NICS Inquiry – Committee Deliberations**

The Committee noted a number of NIL returns to the Performance and Culture of the NICS Inquiry. Members also considered the Hansard Transcript of the oral briefing with Department of Finance officials on the NICS People Strategy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add this to the evidence base for the Inquiry in due course.

#### **15. Correspondence**

i. The Committee considered correspondence from the Justice Committee on its Call for Evidence on the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill.

Brian Kingston declared an interest as a Member of the Justice Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if it has any remit on the Bill provisions, before considering a response to the Committee for Justice.

ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office to the Department of Finance on work undertaken in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant.

iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Communities Committee to the Minister of Finance regarding a scheme to assist with fuel costs.

iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Education Committee on its Call for Evidence on the General Teaching Council Bill

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if it has any remit on the Bill provisions, before considering a response to the Committee for Education.

v. The Committee noted the Financial Conduct Authority's Annual Work Programme and Perimeter Report.

vi. The Committee noted an update from the Youth Assembly – March 2026.

vii. The Committee noted an invitation from the Independent Autism Reviewer for Northern Ireland to the launch of its first report on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2026.

## **16. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme and noted a number of upcoming briefings, including; next week's visit and external meeting, the rescheduling of an oral briefing from the Legal Services Commissioner, a written update on the AO Recruitment Pilot, oral briefings on the Performance and Culture of the NICS Inquiry and a RaISe briefing on Gender Budgeting Research.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an informal meeting with the Bank of Ireland on Cyber Security and Fraud, in due course.

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

## **17. Any Other Business**

None.

## **18. Date and Time of next meeting**

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2026 at 2pm in Goodwood House, Belfast.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:14pm.

**Matthew O'Toole**

**Chairperson, Committee for Finance**

**22<sup>nd</sup> April 2026**