



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

2 July 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

- Present:** Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)
Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Phillip Brett MLA
Gerry Carroll MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA
Paul Frew MLA
Deirdre Hargey MLA
- Apologies:** Eoin Tennyson MLA
- Virtual:** Steve Aiken 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 2:05pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

None.

3. Chairperson's Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session for consideration of the first item of Chairperson's Business which relates to a private informal meeting.

The Committee moved into closed session at 2:06pm.

3.1. Note of Informal meeting with the Secretary of State

The Chairperson provided the Committee with an overview of discussions during an informal meeting with the Secretary of State. Members also considered a note of the meeting which took place on Thursday 26th June 2025.

Paul Frew joined the meeting at 2:15pm.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:18pm.

The Committee moved back into open session at 2:22pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State to highlight a number of issues discussed by Members.

3.2. Department of Finance – Update on Public Sector Transformation Board

The Committee considered an update provided by the Department of Finance on the Public Sector Transformation Board.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek clarification from the Department of Finance on the Executive’s Chief Scientific and Technology Adviser and on the definition of “consultation with Executive colleagues” in the context of funding allocations by the Public Sector Transformation Board.

3.3. Minister for Communities – NI Community Infrastructure Fund

The Committee noted a written statement made by the Communities Minister, announcing the launch of a new community infrastructure grant scheme for the voluntary and community sector to refurbish and improve community buildings and facilities.

3.4. The Executive Office Committee – Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill

The Committee considered correspondence from the Executive Office Committee which is undertaking the Committee Stage for a Bill to make provision relating to a Truth Recovery Public Inquiry into Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses between 1922 and 1995; to establish the Truth Recovery Redress Service and to enable payments to be made to or in respect of certain persons; and for connected purposes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if it has any locus in respect of the Bill. Members also asked the Clerk to liaise with the Executive Office Committee Clerk to ensure that survivors outside of Northern Ireland were being considered as part of the Committee Stage.

3.5. Minister of Finance – Oral Statement 2024-25 Provisional Outturn and 2025-26 June Monitoring Round

The Committee considered an Oral Statement made by the Finance Minister on 30 June regarding 2024-25 Provisional Outturn and 2025-26 June Monitoring.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a number of items from the Department of Finance including: a comparative table of bids made and met in the June Monitoring Round; clarity on the funding allocation for the A5 road project; and information in relation to unspent and unused Financial Transaction Capital.

3.6. Freedom of Information Requests during summer recess

The Committee considered its approach to Freedom of Information Requests received by the Committee during the summer recess period.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to submit views on the releasing or withholding of information in any non-routine or contentious Freedom of Information requests received by the Committee.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 25 June 2025.

5. Matters Arising

5.1. DALO Readout Extract – Meeting of 10th June 2025

The Committee noted an extract from the DALO Readout issued following the Committee meeting on 10th June 2025.

5.2. DALO Readout Response – Data (Use and Access) Bill – Legislative Consent Motion (LCM)

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance on a number of issues raised during consideration of the Data (Use and Access) Bill LCM. Members asked the Clerk to provide an update on LCM trackers and related matters after summer recess.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office Committee regarding a central LCM tracker. Members also agreed that LCMs would be highlighted on the Committee's Forward Work Programme in a more specific way going forward.

5.3. DALO Readout Extract – Meeting of 11th June 2025

The Committee noted an extract from the DALO Readout issued following the Committee meeting on 11th June 2025.

5.4. DALO Readout Response – Motor Insurance Taskforce

The Committee considered an update from the Department of Finance regarding a meeting between devolved Ministers and the Motor Insurance Taskforce.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the update to the Infrastructure Committee for its information.

5.5 DALO Readout Response – Public Sector Transformation Board

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding the Public Sector Transformation Board.

Paul Frew left the meeting at 2:46pm.

5.6 DALO Readout Response – Baby Loss Certificates

The Committee considered information from the Department of Finance regarding charging provision within the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the information provided into the Committee's report on the Bill in due course.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance again for any further reasons for including charging provisions in the Bill.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 2:51pm.

5.7 DALO Readout Response – Hydrogen Hubs Project

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the Hydrogen Hubs Projects (HyTech NI).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the information provided to the Economy Committee for its information.

Gerry Carroll rejoined the meeting at 2:52pm.

5.8 DALO Readout Response – Follow-up information – Oral Briefing on Service Delivery Brochure: IT

The Committee noted follow-up information from the Department of Finance following an oral briefing on the IT aspects of the Service Delivery Brochure.

5.9. Department of Finance – Review of Energy Efficiency Requirements and related areas of Building Regulations

The Committee considered a Department of Finance consultation report following a 20-week public consultation on a Discussion Document reviewing Energy Efficiency requirements and related areas of Building Regulations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing on this matter when the forward work programme permits.

Paul Frew rejoined the meeting at 2:53pm.

5.10. Department of Finance – Breakdown of Early Payment Discount

The Committee noted information from the Department of Finance on Early Payment Discount broken down by Council area.

5.11. House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee - US administration imposition of global reciprocal tariffs: Implications for the Windsor Framework and Northern Ireland

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as he had recently given evidence to the House of Lord NI Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Chairperson of the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee to the Secretary of State regarding US administration imposition of global reciprocal tariffs: Implications for the Windsor Framework and Northern Ireland.

5.12. Fiscal Council – UK Spending Review 2025 Outcome

The Committee considered correspondence from the Fiscal Council regarding its assessment of implications of the UK Spending Review 2025 outcome.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to other Statutory Committees and the NI Assembly Audit Committee.

Phillip Brett left the meeting at 2:56pm.

5.13. Department of Finance – Budget 2026-2029/30 Information Gathering

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance to all Departments commissioning returns which will inform the Executive's consideration of Budget 2026-2029/30; setting the resource budgets for 2026-27 to 2028-29 and capital budgets for 2026-27 to 2029-30.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy the correspondence to other Statutory Committees and the NI Assembly Audit Committee.

Agreed: Members also agreed to seek a briefing from the Department of Finance on its own budget position following submission of its return to the wider strategic exercise.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an early oral briefing from the Department of Finance on the outcome of this information gathering exercise. Members agreed that this briefing should cover how a multi-year budget will interact with the Fiscal Framework, Fiscal Devolution, Revenue Raising and Departmental 5-year plans, as well as any new ring-fenced funding identified. Members also agreed to request a high-level overview of which Departments met the deadline for response to the information gathering exercise.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule its informal meeting with NICS Finance Directors for 17th September 2025.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 3:01pm.

5.14. Committee for the Economy – Post 19 SEN Support

The Committee noted correspondence from the Economy Committee to individuals regarding post 19 SEN Support.

6. SR 2025/104 The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025

The Committee considered SR 2025/104 The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 which will enable the Department of Finance to request information from those Departments and bodies designated (in the Schedule to the Order) and to pass the information provided to HM Treasury for use in the preparation of the Whole of Government Accounts. The Committee considered correspondence from the Examiner of Statutory Rules which

indicated that the Rule does not require to be drawn to the special attention of the Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2025/104 The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 and had no objection to the Rule.

Phillip Brett rejoined the meeting at 3:04pm.

7. SR 2025/109 The Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025

The Committee considered SR 2025/109 The Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 which will increase employee contribution bands in order to meet the required Employee Contribution Scheme Yield.. The Committee considered correspondence from the Examiner of Statutory Rules which indicated that the Rule does require to be drawn to the special attention of the Assembly as it was laid in breach of the 21-day rule, however the Examiner is content with the explanation provided by the Department of Finance.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2025/109 The Public Service (Civil Servants and Others) Pensions (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 and had no objection to the Rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to the oral briefing from the Department of Finance on Service Delivery Brochure: Procurement

10. Service Delivery Brochure: Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance: Procurement

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

The Committee noted background information including a briefing paper from the Department of Finance on its Service Delivery Brochure with particular reference to Procurement. Members also considered correspondence from the Department regarding a statutory instrument to update the Procurement Thresholds and correspondence from the Department of Finance on a Cabinet Office consultation on proposals to bring forward reforms to public procurement in respect of opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises and voluntary, community and social enterprises.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3:07pm:

Sharon Smyth	Deputy Secretary, Department of Finance (DoF);
Stewart Heaney	Director of Construction Division, DoF;
Donna Williams	Director of Supplies and Services Division, DoF; and
Donna Kavanagh	Director of Commercial Delivery Group and Procurement Policy Division, DoF.

The officials briefed the Committee on a number of procurement related items with reference to the Department of Finance's Service Delivery Brochure. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Diane Forsythe declared an interest as a Member of the Public Accounts Committee.

Deirdre Hargey rejoined the meeting at 3:33pm.

A number of issues were discussed including; post A5 court judgement, staffing matters in Construction and Procurement Delivery, engagement with SMEs, Key Performance Indicators, key achievements and social value contracts.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to consideration of the Forward Work Programme

14. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to meet at the earlier time of 1pm on 10 and 17 September 2025 to facilitate anticipated business.

Phillp Brett left the meeting at 3:52pm.

Members noted that the order of RaISe Bill Briefings had now been confirmed for 10 and 17 September.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for an indicative schedule of secondary legislation and for details of any items of business (including prioritisation) the Department would like the Committee to consider from September to December 2025.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider Correspondence.

13. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Minister of Finance regarding engagement with the Treasury on the Invest to Save Initiative.
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee which indicated that it had released from primacy; the NI Audit Office report "Heath and Social Care Imaging Services in Northern Ireland".

- iii. The Committee noted a press release from Construction Employers Federation regarding its response to the Department of Infrastructure's consultation: Developer Contributions for Wastewater Infrastructure.
- iv. The Committee noted a joint position paper from NI Chamber, Construction Employer's Federation and NI Federation of Housing Associations on wastewater infrastructure.
- v. The Committee noted the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency Annual Report and Accounts for 2024-25.
- vi. The Committee considered the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman Annual Report and Accounts for 2024-25.

Diane Forsythe declared an interest as a Member of the NI Assembly Audit Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this report to the NI Assembly Audit Committee.

- vii. The Committee noted a press release from the Equality Commission highlighting the publication of its views on the legal position in Northern Ireland following a review of the Supreme Court Judgement in "For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers".
- viii. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rule's 42nd Report.
- ix. The Committee considered the Department of Finance's Annual Report and Accounts for 2024-25.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Assembly Business Office for a summary of which Departments had laid their Annual Report and Accounts in the Assembly by summer recess. Members also agreed to seek copies of the Internal Audit Reports and Action Plans re the four 'limited' opinions issued in 2024-25, as well as details on the "follow-ups" of two previous 'limited' opinions. These are highlighted on Page 47 of the Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25.

- x. The Committee considered its approach to items of correspondence received over the summer recess period.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that any urgent matters could be agreed via correspondence over the summer recess period. Members also asked that correspondence be considered as a collective bundle at the first meeting following summer recess.

Agreed: The Committee moved to the oral briefing from the National Association of Funeral Directors.

11. Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill – Oral Briefing from the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD)

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

The Committee considered a briefing paper from the National Association of Funeral Directors. Members also considered a number of papers related to the Bill including; a response from the Department of Finance to questions raised during the oral briefing with the General Registrar on 7 May, a response from Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council and a Hansard Transcript from the Committee's deliberations on the Bill at the meeting on 18 June. Members also considered a response received from Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add these papers to the evidence base for the its report on the Bill. Members also agreed to ask the Department of Finance for its assessment of an amendment around terminology within the Births and Deaths Registration NI Order 1976 and on the need for clarity around matters relating to clauses 3-5 of the Bill.

Members also noted amendments for Consideration Stage of the Bill which had not yet been accepted by the Speaker.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4:00pm:

Stephen Larkin

President of the NI Federation; and

Nick Britten

Communications Lead, NAFD Northern Ireland
and Scotland (via Zoom)

The witnesses gave the Committee an overview of the benefits of temporary provisions allowing for electronic transfer and distribution of documents/certificates between Medical Practitioners, Registrars and Funeral Directors. A number of issues were discussed, including; efficiency, developments and learning from other parts of the UK, risks and delays, coroner involvement and Baby Loss Certificates.

Jemma Dolan left the meeting at 4:00pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance and the witnesses left the meeting at 4:32pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session to consider the both its approach to Committee Stage for two Bills at agenda items 8 and 9, and the contents of a draft Committee Inquiry Report at agenda item 12.

The Committee moved in closed session at 4:33pm.

8. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Consideration of Committee Stage Approach

9. NI Fiscal Council Bill – Consideration of Committee Stage Approach

The Committee considered its approach to a Call for Evidence, Citizen Space Survey questions and proposed stakeholders for both the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill and NI Fiscal Council Bill. Members also considered a draft cumulative timetable for Committee Stage of both Bills and draft Signposting Ads for both Calls for Evidence.

12. Banking and Financial Services Landscape Inquiry – Further Consideration of draft Report

The Committee considered a further draft of its Banking and Financial Services Landscape Inquiry Report. Members also considered a set of draft conclusions which were drawn together following discussions at last week's meeting.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 4:47pm.

The Committee returned to open session at: 4:54pm.

The Chairperson reflected on discussions during the closed session and outlined the following;

Agreed: In respect of the Committee Stage for the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill and NI Fiscal Council Bill, the Committee agreed to add the Children's Commissioner and Older Person's Commissioner to the list of stakeholders, as well as the Equality Commission and NI Human Rights Commission. The Committee also agreed the Call for Evidence, questions for the Citizen Space Survey and Signposting Ads. Members noted that the Call for Evidence would begin over the summer recess period.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request copies of the Delegated Powers Memorandum for both the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill and NI Fiscal Council Bill from the Department of Finance and on receipt of these, to ask the Examiner of Statutory Rules for advice in respect of both.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that Departmental officials attend the Committee meeting on 24 September to provide oral briefings on the principles of both Bills.

Agreed: In relation to the draft Committee report on the Banking and Financial Services Landscape Inquiry, the Committee agreed to write to the Economy Minister regarding the evidence received around the roles and potential of Credit Unions in light of the consultation that Minister has opened on Credit Unions. This correspondence will be copied to the Committee for the Economy. The Committee also agreed to write to the UK Government's Financial Inclusion Strategy Committee

to highlight issues that have been raised by the Inquiry which overlap with the Strategy Committee's remit.

The Committee considered follow-up information, from the Ulster Bank regarding cross-border banking issues, support for charities, risk investment, lending to SMEs and the autonomy of Ulster Bank regarding loans and from the Financial Conduct Authority following its oral evidence session on 28 May.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the information provided to the evidence base for the Banking and Financial Services Landscape Inquiry.

15. Any Other Business

None.

16. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 10 September 2025 at 1.00pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:57pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

10 September 2025