



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Finance

### Minutes of Proceedings

3 December 2025

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

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

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Steve Aiken MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Eoin Tennyson MLA

**Apologies:** Harry Harvey MLA

**Virtual:** Gerry Carroll MLA

Jemma Dolan MLA

Deirdre Hargey 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 2:08pm in public session.

**1. Apologies.**

As above.

**2. Declaration of Interests.**

None.

**3. Chairperson's Business.**

**3.1. Minister of Finance Oral Statement - Autumn Budget**

The Committee noted a copy of the Minister of Finance's Oral Statement made in the Assembly on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2025 on the Autumn Budget. Members also noted that Departmental officials would be attending next week's Committee meeting with the Minister.

**3.2. House of Commons Library Budget Summary**

The Committee noted a House of Commons Library research briefing on the Autumn Budget 2025.

### **3.3. Department of Finance – Minute on Loan Write-Off: Presbyterian Mutual Society**

The Committee noted a Department of Finance Minute regarding a loan write off to the Presbyterian Mutual Society. The Clerk updated Members on the process for signifying an objection to the minute.

Eoin Tennyson joined the meeting at 2:15pm.

### **3.4. Chairperson’s Liaison Group Guidance on Delegated Legislation**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Chairperson’s Liaison Group regarding new Guidance for Departments on Delegated Legislation. The Clerk provided further detail on what the changes would mean for Committee scrutiny and timescales.

### **3.5. NIC-ICTU Response to a proposal for reduction in Northern Ireland’s rate of Corporation Tax**

### **3.6. NERI Response to proposal for reduction in Northern Ireland’s rate of Corporation Tax**

The Committee considered responses from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC) and from the Nevin Economic Research Institute to a proposal for a reduced rate of Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the responses to the Committee for the Economy in advance of the joint informal briefing with Angelwise on the proposal for a reduced rate of Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland.

**3.7. NERI Research paper – ‘Beyond Budget Balancing: Towards a Sustainable Fiscal Settlement for Northern Ireland’**

**3.8. NERI Research paper – ‘Fiscal Sustainability for Northern Ireland’**

The Committee noted research papers from the Nevin Economic Research Institute ‘Beyond Budget Balancing: Towards a Sustainable Fiscal Settlement for Northern Ireland’ and ‘Fiscal Sustainability for Northern Ireland . The Elusive Quest?’

**3.9. Stewart Dickson MLA - Social Value Act: Consultation Analysis**

The Committee considered correspondence from Stewart Dickson MLA providing an analysis of the consultation on his proposed Private Member’s Bill (PMB) to legislate for Social Value in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Stewart Dickson MLA to seek an update on the anticipated timescale for introduction of this PMB.

**3.10. Invitation from Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission**

The Committee noted an invitation from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to the launch of its research report ‘Windsor Framework Article 2: Enforcement and Remedies’ on Tuesday 16 December 2025.

**4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 26 November 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move to Agenda Item 6 and to consider the next 5 agenda items together given their related nature.

6. **SL1 The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026**
7. **SL1 The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**
8. **SL1 The Rates (Making and Levying of Different Rates) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**
9. **SL1 The Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026**
10. **SL1: The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**

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

Members noted that the Department of Finance had submitted proposals for 5 Statutory Rules relating to Rating Policy for the new financial year.

The following official joined the meeting at 2:24pm

Andrew McAvoy, Director of Rating Policy, Land & Property Service

The official provided the Committee with oral evidence on the 5 proposed Statutory Rules.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including Reval 2026, future departmental consultations and District Council's use of rate setting mechanisms.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:26pm.

Jemma Dolan left the meeting at 2:39pm.

The Committee considered the SL1 The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026,. Members noted that the Rule will set out in legislation the amount of

the domestic and non-domestic regional rates for the year ending 31 March 2027 and that it will stipulate the regional rate for domestic and non-domestic property, expressed in terms of “pence per pound”, that will apply for the 2026/27 rating year.

The Committee noted that the proposed Statutory Rule will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure before the Assembly.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposed statutory rule: The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026.

The Committee considered The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 which will amend the Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 and would serve to extend the existing Small Business Rate Relief Scheme (SBRR) for the 2025/26 rating year through to 31st March 2027.

Members noted that the proposed rule will be subject to negative resolution procedure before the Assembly.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposed statutory rule: The Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

The Committee considered The Rates (Making and Levying of Different Rates) Regulations (NI) which will update the optional conversion factors that Councils may wish to use when setting their district rates and will allow one rate setting decision to be made by a district council in relation to both parts of their taxbase (domestic and non-domestic).

Members noted that the proposed rule will be subject to negative resolution procedure before the Assembly and that it will be made in early January coming into operation shortly thereafter. Finally, Members noted that the Rule cannot be made until the outcomes of Revaluation 2026 are known.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposed statutory rule: The Rates (Making and Levying of Different Rates) Regulations (NI).

The Committee considered The Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 which will continue the 'Back in Business' scheme for the period up to 31 March 2027.

The Committee noted that the proposed rule will be subject to affirmative resolution procedure before the Assembly.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposed statutory rule: The Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026.

The Committee considered The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 which will retain a micro-policy within the rating system, whereby a rates exemption is applied for separate entries in the Valuation List associated with automatic telling machine in a designated rural area. Members noted that the rule will specify a later end-date so that the exemption will continue until 31st March 2027.

The Committee noted that the proposed rule will be subject to affirmative resolution procedure before the Assembly.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposed statutory rule: The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

The Chairperson thanked the official for their attendance, and the official left the meeting at 2:55pm

#### **11. NI Fiscal Council Bill – Oral briefing from Ulster University Economic Policy Centre and Pivotal/Written briefing from Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI)**

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

Members noted a number of relevant background papers, including a submission from the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) to the NI Fiscal Council Bill, the Department of Finance's response to the UUEPC's submission, the

Department of Finance's response to the OECD's submission to the NI Fiscal Council Bill and a copy of the OECD's submission to the Bill.

Members also noted Hansard Transcripts of oral evidence sessions with the NI Fiscal Council and with the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council which would be added to the evidence base of the Committee Stage of the Bill in due course.

The Committee noted that written comments from NERI on the Bill were expected soon.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:56pm

Gareth Hetherington Director, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre; and

Ann Watt Director, Pivotal Public Policy Forum

The witnesses provided the Committee with oral evidence on the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including economic forecasting, budgetary independence and dispute resolution mechanisms.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance, and the witnesses left the meeting at 3:54pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to return to agenda item 5.

## **5. Matters Arising.**

### **5.1. Minister of Finance – Departmental Remit**

The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Finance regarding his Department's responsibility for civil law reform and regulation of the legal profession.



## **5.2. & 5.9. DALO Extract – Meeting 12 November 2025**

The Committee noted an extract from the DALO Readout issued following the meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

## **5.3. DALO Readout Response – Replacement of Agency Worker Contract**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the identified costs as part of the contract value of the replacement of the agency worker contract.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider this further as part of the Inquiry on Civil Service Reform.

## **5.4. DALO Readout Response - Administrative Officer Recruitment Pilot**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding Talent Dog input into the NICS Administrative Officer Recruitment Pilot. Members noted that an update on this pilot would be scheduled in the new year.

## **5.10. DALO Readout Response – City and Growth Quarterly Progress Report.**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding utilisation of funding for an alternative project for the Mourne Mountains Gateway Project and delay in establishing the Programme Board for the Mid-South West Growth Deal.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to keep a watching brief on updates in relation to both matters.

## **5.11. DALO Readout Response – Multi-Year Budget**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the timeframe for a Multi-Year Budget.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request an urgent written update on this matter in advance of the Minister's Oral Briefing at next week's meeting.

#### **5.12. DALO Readout Response – Revised Outturn & Forecast Outturn Revised Guidelines**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the impact of revised guidelines on Outturn and Forecast Outturn.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the response to the Education and Health Committees.

#### **5.6. Department of Finance – 2025-26 December Monitoring Round**

The Committee considered a briefing paper from the Department of Finance on its 2025-26 December Monitoring Round position.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request further information from the Department of Finance regarding the Rate Rebate budget and to consider scheduling an oral briefing on the Department's own budget as part of the Committee's scrutiny of the overall budget in the New Year.

#### **5.7. Department of Finance – Reform of Building Regulations**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance to the Communities Committee regarding uplifts to Building Regulations.

#### **5.8. Cash Access UK - Committee Inquiry into the Northern Ireland Banking and Financial Services Landscape.**

The Committee considered a response from Cash Access UK regarding recommendations in the Committee for Finance Report on its Inquiry into the Northern Ireland Banking and Financial Services Landscape.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest due to a recent meeting, in his political party capacity, with the Financial Conduct Authority to discuss related issues.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request an update on the Minister of Finance's recent Banking Roundtable.

#### **5.13. DALO Extract – Meeting 5 November 2025**

The Committee noted an extract from the DALO Readout issued following the meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

#### **5.14. DALO Readout Response – Consultation on Use Needs Census 2031**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding its consultation on User Needs Census 2031.

#### **5.15. DALO Extract – Meeting 8<sup>th</sup> October**

The Committee noted an extract from the DALO Readout issued following the meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

#### **5.16. DALO Readout Response – Casement Park**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding funding of Casement Park and its accounting treatment.

The Committee noted that a written briefing on the "Tell Us Once" Service was expected from the Department of Finance.

#### **5.17. Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill**

The Chairperson placed on record his thanks to the Committee, Committee and for Cross-Party Support which ensure the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill reached its Final Stage in the Assembly on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move into closed session for the next agenda item.

The Committee moved into closed session at 4:25pm.

## **12. Civil Service Reform – Consideration of Terms of Reference for Committee Inquiry**

The Committee gave initial consideration to a draft Terms of Reference for a Committee Inquiry into Northern Ireland Civil Service Reform. A discussion by Committee Members followed.

Steve Aiken left the meeting at 4:48pm.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 4:49pm.

The Committee returned to open session at 4:50pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Terms of Reference would be reframed slightly to take account of Members comments.

## **13. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Committee Deliberations**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure regarding Clause 17 of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill. The Chairperson placed on record the Committee's thanks to the Infrastructure Committee for the correspondence. Members noted that Department of Infrastructure officials would be providing oral evidence to the Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add the response to the Evidence base for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance to a research paper focusing on Clause 18 of the Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add the response to the Evidence base for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

**Agreed:** During discussions, The Committee agreed to write to other relevant jurisdictions to ask for their comments on engagement with their respective Independent Fiscal Institutions as a part of its scrutiny of the Fiscal Council Bill.

Jemma Dolan returned to the meeting at 4:55pm.

#### **14. Review of Arm's Length Bodies - Written Briefing from the Department of Finance**

The Committee considered a written briefing paper from the Department of Finance on a Review of Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs). Members noted that agreement reached at last week's meeting to seek clarity from the Department of Finance on comments made by the Finance Minister during Question Time on the Review of ALBs and to write to other Executive Ministers regarding the Review. Members also noted that an oral briefing on the Review and next steps is scheduled for April 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the briefing paper to other Statutory Committees.

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance to the Communities Committee regarding work on the Review of ALBs.

#### **15. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted a Hansard transcript of the Permanent Secretary briefing on 19 November 2025;
- ii. The Committee noted the Department of Finance Retention and Disposal Schedule;
- iii. The Committee noted the NICS Register of Special Advisors' Interests which had been forwarded to the Committee by the Assembly Business Office and the Department of Finance; and
- iv. The Committee noted the 51<sup>st</sup> Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

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

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme and noted future items to be scheduled including departmental briefings scheduled for the New Year; including earlier start times for meetings in January and February.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to begin next week's meeting at 1:30pm in order to allow for a prompt start to the oral briefing with the Minister of Finance at 2pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Forward Work Programme should be 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 10<sup>th</sup> December 2025 at 1:30pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:08pm.

**Matthew O'Toole**

**Chairperson, Committee for Finance**

**10 December 2025**