



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

5 November 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Apologies: None

Virtual: Steve Aiken MLA

Gerry Carroll MLA

Jemma Dolan MLA

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Eoin Tennyson 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 2:07 pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

None.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1. Expert Panel – Review of Public Procurement Governance Arrangements

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and deputy Chairperson would meet with the Expert Panel reviewing the procurement governance structures in response to a recent Public Accounts Committee Report. Given the deputy Chairperson's current membership of the Public Accounts Committee, her attendance would be subject to an assessment of a potential conflict of interest.

3.2. Anglewise – Campaign to secure a reduction in Corporation Tax

The Committee considered an invitation from Chartered Accountants Ireland to brief the Committee on its campaign to secure a reduction in Corporation Tax.

Steve Aiken indicated that he would be meeting with the Chartered Accountants Ireland to discuss this issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to explore the potential for a joint informal briefing on the matter with the Committee for the Economy. Members also agreed to forward the Chartered Accountants paper to both the NEVIN Institute and NICICTU, indicating that the Finance Committee would be exploring this matter further.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2:16pm.

3.3. House of Commons Library publication – Public Finance Economic Indicators 21 October 2025

The Committee noted a House of Commons Library publication on UKG public finances.

3.4. Public Petition – “Scrap the Rates Exemption for Big Business”

The Committee noted correspondence from The Speaker to the Committee Chair regarding a public petition titled ‘Scrap the Rates Exemption for Big Business’ which was laid in the Assembly on Monday 20 October 2025 by Gerry Carroll MLA.

3.5. Ministerial Oral Briefing 10 December 2025

The Committee discussed potential topics to explore with the Minister of Finance at the oral briefing scheduled for 10 December 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that a list of topics would be circulated to Members for consideration.

3.6. Minister of Education visit to Israel

The Committee discussed the Education Minister's visit to a school in Israel and the various investigations into this visit.

Diane Forsthye declared an interest as the Assembly Private Secretary to the Education Minister.

Steve Aiken declared an interest as he had participated in the same trip to Israel.

Matthew O'Toole proposed and put the following question:

That the Committee writes to the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Finance (copied to the Head of the Civil Service) to discuss issues relating to the Education Minister's visit to a school in Israel in terms of use of NI Civil Service resources and civil servants' impartiality, the NICS Code of Ethics and obligations under the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act NI

The Committee divided: Ayes 5; Noes 4; Abstain 0

AYES

Matthew O'Toole

Gerry Carroll

Jemma Dolan

Deirdre Hargey

Eoin Tennyson

NOES

Diane Forsythe

Steve Aiken

Harry Harvey

Brian Kingston

The motion was carried.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write as per the motion above.

Diane Forsthye proposed and the following question was put:

That the Committee writes to the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Finance (copied to the Head of the Civil Service) to discuss issues relating to use of NI Civil Service resources and civil servants' impartiality regarding the Minister of the Economy's Direction to Invest NI to provide an assurance that it does not support projects that manufacture Arms or their component parts for supply to Israel.

The Committee divided: Ayes 4; Noes 5; Abstain 0

AYES

Diane Forsythe

Steve Aiken

Harry Harvey

Brian Kingston

NOES

Matthew O'Toole

Gerry Carroll

Jemma Dolan

Deirdre Hargey

Eoin Tennyson

The motion was not carried and the question fell.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 22 October 2025.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 Minister for Finance – Outcome of request for Access to Treasury Reserve

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding a request for access to the Treasury Reserve in 2025-26 for the PSNI data breach compensation.

5.21. DALO Readout Response – Reserve Claim – PSNI Data Breach Compensation

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance with further information in relation to the PSNI Data Breach Compensation. This matter would be discussed further with the Minister of Finance at the oral briefing on 10 December 2025.

5.22. DALO Readout Response – Reserve Claim – Redress Scheme

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding a potential Reserve Claim for the Redress Scheme for those affected by Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this response to the Executive Office Committee for its information.

5.2. Minister of Finance – Response to Committee Inquiry into Banking and Financial Service Landscape

The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Finance to the Committee's Inquiry into Banking and Financial Services Landscape.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing with Departmental officials in 6 months' time to assess progress towards addressing the Committee's recommendations.

5.23. DALO Readout Response – Economy Minister

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding a formal response from the Finance Minister to the Committee's Inquiry into Banking and Financial Services Landscape.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to **agenda item 7: Oral briefing with Department of Finance officials on the Public Office (Accountability) Bill LCM.**

Agreed: Members agreed that the oral briefings during today's meeting should be reported by Hansard.

7. Legislative Consent Memorandum – Public Office (Accountability) Bill – Oral briefing from Department of Finance officials

Members noted a number of relevant background papers including correspondence from the Minister of Finance, a Legislative Consent Memorandum laid by the Department of Finance and a revised Legislative Consent Memorandum laid by the Department of Finance.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2:53pm:

- David Hughes; Director of Corporate Services; and
- Jonathan McNaught; Corporate Services Division

The officials provided the Committee with oral evidence on a Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Public Office (Accountability) Bill.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including the timescale for amendments to the Westminster Bill, stakeholder engagement, the consultation process and a Department of Health specific Bill.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 3:22pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a definite timeline for the Executive decision-making in respect of the LCM from the Department of Finance.

8. Committee Inquiry – Civil Service Reform

The Committee considered potential themes which could form part of the Committee's Inquiry into Civil Service Reform.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider draft Terms of Reference for the Inquiry in due course before considering any research commissions required.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to **agenda item 5: Matters Arising before the next oral briefing.**

5.3. Department of Finance – Consultation on User Needs Census 2031

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance outlining its proposal to commence, from 28 October 2025, a 14- week consultation to gather insights into user needs for future census statistics, to assist with the development of proposals for a census in 2031.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for the absence of references to veterans and service leavers.

5.4. Department of Finance – December Monitoring Round

The Committee noted a copy of the December Monitoring Round Commissioning letter from the Department of Finance to all Departments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a breakdown of which departments meet the 20 November deadline for response.

5.5. Department of Finance – Minute on Loan Write Off

The Committee noted a Department of Finance Minute on Loan Write Off for the Presbyterian Mutual Society which was presented to the Northern Ireland Assembly Business Office on 22 October 2025.

5.24. Presbyterian Mutual Society Write-Off

The Committee considered information from the Department of Finance on the background to the Presbyterian Mutual Society Loan Write-Off.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request clarification from the Department of Finance on any audit carried out on continuing liability for similar organisations in Northern Ireland.

5.6. DALO Readout Extract – Meeting of 30th April 2025

The Committee noted an extract from the DALO Readout following the meeting on 30th April 2025.

5.7. DALO Readout Response – Review of Arm’s Length Bodies

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance providing an update on the current status of the Review of Arm’s Length Bodies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if the current review was a new exercise or a continuation of the exercise referenced in New Decade New Approach and if the review would examine back office functions. Members also agreed to share the information from the Department of Finance with other statutory Committees and to obtain an update from the Department of Finance when the exercise is completed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to **agenda item 9: Oral Briefing with the OECD on the NI Fiscal Council Bill.**

9. NI Fiscal Council Bill – Oral briefing with Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and Committee Deliberations

The Committee noted a submission from the OECD to the Committee's Call for Evidence on the NI Fiscal Council Bill, the Department of Finance response to the OECD submission and previous information provided by the Department of Finance on Independence (and budget setting).

The following witness joined the meeting at 3:45pm via Zoom:

Scherie Nicol Lead, Independent Fiscal Institutions, Public Management and Budgeting Division, Directorate for Public Governance, OECD.

The witness provided a briefing on issues raised in the OECD submission to the NI Fiscal Council Bill.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including alignment with the OECD principles for Independent Fiscal Institutions, terms of appointment, budget setting, forecasting powers and parliamentary engagement.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 4:25pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witness for their attendance, and the witness left the meeting at 4:31pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send all the relevant OECD papers and the Hansard transcript of today's session to the Irish Fiscal Council in advance of its oral briefing with the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to **agenda item 10: Oral Briefing with Department of Finance officials on the Divorce Consultation.**

10. Divorce consultation; Outcome and update on analysis of responses - Oral briefing from Department of Finance officials

Members noted that a briefing paper from the Department of Finance had been provided in advance of today's session.

The following officials joined the meeting at 4:32pm:

Michael Foster	Head of Civil Law Reform;
Martin Tyrrell	Policy Advisor; and
Maurice Dowling	Policy Advisor

The officials provided the Committee with an update on the outcome of a public consultation to gather views on proposed reforms to Divorce and Dissolution of Civil Partnerships.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including further qualitative work requested by the Finance Minister, timeline for Executive consideration and potential for legislative change in the current mandate.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 4:55pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to **agenda item 6: Committee Deliberations on the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill.**

6. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Committee Deliberations

The Committee considered responses to its Call for Evidence on the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill from the Communities Committee, the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee and the Executive Office Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss potential scheduling of oral evidence sessions on the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill at next week's meeting.

The Committee considered a research paper prepared by Assembly Research and Library Service on Clause 18 of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing on the research paper at next week's meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that given the time, **the remaining business under agenda items 5, 6 and 9** would be considered at next week's meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to **agenda item 11: Correspondence.**

11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the Youth Assembly Newsletter for October 2025;
- ii. The Committee noted the Brussels NI Executive Report July – September 2025;
- iii. The Committee noted the Land and Property Services Trust Statement Rate Levy Accruals Accounts 2024-25; and

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a response from Land and Property Services to the issues raised by the C&AG.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to indicate to the individual that as per the Committee's agreed approach to correspondence not linked to strategic priorities or statutory duties; relevant Departments are best placed to respond to their concerns.

12. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

The Committee Clerk updated Members on a number of items relating to the work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Executive Office Committee to copy any correspondence regarding the Public Sector Transformation Board to this Committee.

The Committee noted that the Chairperson could no longer attend the 8th meeting of the Interparliamentary Forum in Wales on 28th November 2025.

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

13. Any Other Business

The deputy Chair read into the record a response the Chair of the Economy Committee had received from the Head of the Civil Service regarding the Economy Minister's Direction on trade with Israel.

14. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 12 November 2025 at 2.00pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:02pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

12 November 2025