



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Finance

### Minutes of Proceedings

30 April 2025

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

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

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Paul Frew MLA

Eoin Tennyson MLA

**Online:** Gerry Carroll MLA

Jemma Dolan MLA

Deirdre Hargey MLA

**Apologies:** Steve Aiken MLA

Phillip Brett 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 2.12pm in public session.

## **1. Apologies**

As above.

The Chairperson sent the Committee's best wishes to Steve Aiken for a speedy recovery.

## **2. Declaration of Interests**

In relation to relevant agenda items, Diane Forsythe, the deputy Chairperson declared an interest as a current member of the Public Accounts Committee.

## **3. Chairperson's Business**

### **3.1. Correspondence from Interparliamentary Finance Committee Forum to Chief Secretary to the Treasury**

The Committee considered draft correspondence from the Interparliamentary Finance Committee Forum to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to issue the correspondence as soon as all three devolved Committees had agreed the contents.

### **3.2. Response from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland**

The Committee considered correspondence from Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP inviting the Committee to a meeting with him and the NIO Permanent Secretary to informally discuss matters relating to the Executive Restoration Package and Public Sector Transformation Board.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to reply to the Secretary of State welcoming and accepting his invitation to meet informally as an initial step of engagement and to put on record his acceptance of the contents of Devolution Note 12 regarding UK Government ministerial appearances before Committees of devolved legislatures.

### **3.3. Minister of Finance – Rate Bill Incorrect URL**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding an incorrect URL contained on bills sent to ratepayers and an internal Departmental review. Members noted that a further update would be provided as the internal review concludes. Members voiced their concerns about this incident and discussed the need to explore the exact circumstances of how it had arisen.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek additional information and clarification on a number of issues from the Department of Finance. Members also indicated that they may discuss the issue further with the Minister of Finance when he attends Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

### **3.4. Minister of Finance – Intention to make a statement to the Assembly and Statement on the 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in Special EU Programmes sectoral format.**

The Committee noted the Minister's intention to make a statement to the Assembly and a copy of the statement on the 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in Special EU Programmes sectoral format which was made on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2025.

### **3.5. Written Ministerial Statement – The Executive Legislation Programme 2024-25**

The Committee noted a written Ministerial Statement on the Executive Legislation Programme for 2024-25.

### **3.6. Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Report – Funding and Delivery of Public Services in NI**

The Committee noted a report published by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Report – Funding and Delivery of Public Services in NI.

### **3.7. British Business Bank / Enterprise NI SME Access to Finance Report**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add the joint report by the British Business Bank and Enterprise Northern Ireland on NI SME Access to Finance to its evidence base for the Banking and Financial Services Landscape Inquiry.

### **3.8. Dáil Finance (Provision of Access to Cash Infrastructure) Bill**

The Committee considered a copy of the Explanatory Memorandum for the Dáil Finance (Provision of Access to Cash Infrastructure) Bill 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to commission comparative research examining how the Dáil Bill equates with relevant UK legislation.

### **3.9. Welsh Parliament Finance Committee Report - Financial Transactions Capital and Welsh Parliament response to Finance Committee Report on FTC**

The Committee considered the Welsh Parliament Finance Committee Report on Financial Transactions Capital and the Welsh Parliament's response to the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward both reports to the Department of Finance to highlight the recommendations within and potential use of Financial Transactions Capital funding.

### **3.10. Department of Finance Press Release – “Back in Business” Rate Relief Scheme**

The Committee considered a press release from the Department of Finance regarding the extension of the “Back in Business” Rate Relief Scheme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Department of Finance on the likely timescale for sight, publication and action on the “Cost of Doing Business” research by Gareth Hetherington which was commissioned by the previous Finance Minister and was due to be completed by the end of March 2025.

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 9<sup>th</sup> April 2025.

## **5. Matters Arising**

### **5.1. Minister of Finance – Capital Overspend Position**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding the sales of Clarence Court and Victoria Hall.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move into closed session to discuss the correspondence in greater detail.

The Committee moved into closed session at 2.35pm and returned to open session at 2.46pm

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek additional information from the Department of Finance on a number of issues in order to fully understand the context of the position including information on the current status of sales and the rationale for departmental actions in this regard.

## **5.2. Minister of Finance – Final Budget 2025-26**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding Final Budget allocation for Programme for Government priorities.

## **5.3. Minister of Finance - NICS People Strategy 2025-30**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding the development of the NICS People Strategy 2025-30.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek clarification from the Department of Finance on a number of issues including how the NICS People Strategy links to existing NICS targets.

## **5.4. DALO Readout of requests made following 26<sup>th</sup> March meeting**

The Committee noted the DALO readout extract issued following the Committee meeting on 26th March 2025.

## **5.5. DALO Readout response- Inter-Ministerial Standing Committee (F:ISC)**

The Committee noted a response regarding the Minister of Finance's recent attendance at the F:ISC held in Cardiff on 27<sup>th</sup> February, pending the oral briefing with the Minister on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

## **5.6. DALO Readout response – Capital Easements due to legal challenge**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding a legal challenge to the proposed award of the Small Works Framework Agreement.

### **5.7. DALO Readout response – Professor Holtham’s Review of level of need analysis**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding Professor Holtham’s review of the level of need analysis. Some Members voiced their concern that the timescale for the Review was inadequate given the range of complex issues to be considered.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Department of Finance on the Review, including on the project milestones outlined in the terms of reference as well as an assurance that the timeframe allowed for the Review was adequate.

### **5.8. DALO Readout of requests made following 2<sup>nd</sup> April meeting**

The Committee noted the DALO readout extract issued following the Committee meeting on 2nd April 2025.

### **5.9. DALO Readout response – Community Asset Transfer**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding details of successful projects stemming from Community Asset Transfer.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the response to the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs as per that Committee’s original request. The Committee also agreed to seek an update briefing from the Department of Finance on replacement UK Government Funds following the Comprehensive Spending Review in June.

### **5.10. DALO Readout of requests made following 9<sup>th</sup> April meeting**

The Committee noted the DALO readout extract issued following the Committee meeting on 9th April 2025.

#### **5.11. DALO Readout response – Public Accounts Committee Report on Major Capital Projects**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding a Memorandum of Reply to the Public Accounts Committee Report on Major Capital Projects. Members discussed the urgent need for recommendations to be implemented.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if it has recommended to other departments that they should be cognisant of recommendations in the Public Accounts Committee report, before the Memorandum of Reply is finalised, particularly given the continuing overspend in this regard.

#### **5.12. DALO Readout response – TEO Committee: Ending Violence against Women & Girls**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding activity and funding related to delivery of the Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the response to the Executive Office Committee as per that Committee's original request.

#### **5.13. Department of the Economy – Registering of New Companies**

The Committee noted information from the Department of the Economy on the process to licence and regulate telecommunications and gas companies.

#### **5.14. Department for Communities – Financial Transaction Capital**

The Committee noted clarification provided by the Department for Communities regarding funding for the purchase of an additional 600 new homes over the next three years.



### **5.15. Public Accounts Committee – Primacy of Reports**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee regarding primacy of reports.

### **5.16. Committee for Infrastructure – WMS Public Expenditure Final Budget 2025-26**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure to the Department of Finance regarding disaggregation of funding allocations for the 2025-26 financial year under Programme for Government.

### **5.17. Committee for Infrastructure – Motor Insurance Taskforce**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure to the Department of Finance in relation to the Motor Insurance Taskforce.

### **5.18. UK Finance Submission to Banking and Financial Landscape Inquiry**

The Committee considered a revised submission to the Banking and Financial Landscape Inquiry from UK Finance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add this amended submission to the evidence base for the Committee's Inquiry and published on the Committee's webpages.

### **5.19. Correspondence from Building Society Association & Progressive Building Society – Banking and Financial Landscape Inquiry**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Building Society Association and from the Progressive Building Society following oral evidence sessions on the Banking and Financial Landscape Inquiry on 9<sup>th</sup> April.

## **6. Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill – Oral Briefing by Assembly Bill Clerk**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding consultation on the provision to enable a Baby Loss Certification Scheme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move into closed session to receive an overview briefing from a member of the Assembly Bill Office

The Committee moved into closed session at 3.08pm

The following Assembly official joined the meeting at 3.08pm:

Liz Marsh

Bill Clerk

The Committee were provided with an overview briefing on the role of the Bill Office, that of the Bill Clerk and of the Committee during all stages of a Bill. The Bill Clerk also briefed Members on component parts of the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill.

The Chairperson thanked the official for her attendance. The official left the meeting at 3.53pm.

The Committee returned to public session at 3.53pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek a copy of the Keeling schedule for the Bill and to consider an indicative timetable for Committee consideration at next week's meeting.

## **7. Budget – Issues regarding Budget Bills – Legal Advice**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move into closed session to consider legal advice on issues regarding Budget Bills.

The Committee moved into closed session at 3.54pm and returned to public session at 3.58pm.

## **8. Procurement Strategy – Oral Briefing from Department of Finance Officials**

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.59pm:

Donna Kavanagh	Director Policy and Performance Construction and Procurement Delivery; and
Paul Browne	Deputy Director Policy and Performance Division.

The Committee considered a briefing paper from the Department of Finance provided in advance of the session.

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the Procurement Strategy. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including read across from recommendations in the Public Accounts Committee report, improvements to SME access to procurement, prompt payment, capability and capacity in the NICS, transparency in procurement practices, Crown involvement within procurement in NI and social value within procurement policy.

Members noted that the Procurement Strategy had been tabled by the Minister of Finance in anticipation of Executive Consideration on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance. The officials left the meeting at 4.31pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek additional information from the Department of Finance on the impact of the 2021 Procurement Policy Note 01/21 Scoring Social Value.

## **9. Outturn and Forecast Outturn Data – Written briefing from the Department of Finance**

The Committee considered a written briefing on the Outturn and Forecast Outturn data for March 2025. Members also considered correspondence from the Minister of

Finance regarding February outturn and forecast outturn data variances and on NI Water's finances.

The Committee noted that the next briefing on the outturn and forecast outturn is scheduled to be an oral briefing and will take place on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2025. This briefing would also cover the Main Estimates and Budget (No.2) Bill which is expected to be introduced by the Department of Finance week commencing 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request that it is kept informed especially in terms of Department of Infrastructure and wider NI Water situation as well as on engagement between the Department of Finance and Department of Infrastructure in this regard.

Paul Frew left the meeting at 4.35pm.

Some Members voiced concern about valuation of Student Loan assets.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek a snapshot update of the current status of the Treasury officer of Accounts 'dashboard' with respect to adherence to statutory deadlines regarding the preparation and publication of annual accounts.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the written briefing with all statutory Committees and the Public Accounts Committee. The Committee also agreed to share the Minister's correspondence regarding February outturn and forecast outturn data variances and on NI Water's finances, with the Committee for Infrastructure.

Paul Frew returned to the meeting at 4.40pm.

## **10. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from the Chair of the Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland regarding the potential effect of the United States administration's global reciprocal tariffs on Northern Ireland and on the operation of the Windsor Framework.
- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure regarding a Review of Arm's Length Bodies.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Department on the current status of the Review of Arm's Lengths Bodies.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Minister for Finance regarding income fees and charges generated by the Department of Communities' recent funding announcement.
- iv. The Committee noted Hansard Transcripts from oral briefings which took place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April and 9<sup>th</sup> April 2025 in respect of the Committee's Inquiry into the Northern Ireland Banking and Financial Services Landscape; from the Kilkeel Chamber of Commerce, from representatives of Building Societies, UK Finance and Banks.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add the transcripts to the evidence base for its Inquiry into Banking and Financial Services Landscape.

- v. The Committee noted the 37<sup>th</sup> Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.
- vi. The Committee noted the Brussels Report – January to March 2025.

## **11. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme, as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the following briefings are added to the Committee's forward work programme;

- Legal Oversight Commission – Subordinate Legislation – 21<sup>st</sup> May 2025; and
- NICS Estate Strategy – 1<sup>st</sup> Review – 28<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

Members considered the large amount of business scheduled for consideration at meetings on 7<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> May.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to bring its meetings on 7<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> May at the earlier time of 1pm to facilitate scheduled business.

**Agreed:** In respect of the Banking & Financial Landscapes Inquiry, the Committee agreed to seek written comments from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and also that an oral evidence session with the Financial Conduct Authority should be confirmed as soon as possible.

The Committee noted that the Balmoral Show on 14<sup>th</sup> May would be an opportunity to survey members of the public on issues relevant to the Banking and Financial Services Landscape Inquiry.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that a visit and external meeting would take place at Studio Ulster on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> June.

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

## **12. Any Other Business**

None.

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

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2025 at 1.00pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.50pm.

**Matthew O'Toole**

**Chairperson, Committee for Finance**

**7<sup>th</sup> May 2025**