



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

15 October 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)
Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Gerry Carroll MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA (until 4:03pm)
Deirdre Hargey MLA (from 2:34pm)
Harry Harvey MLA
Brian Kingston MLA

Apologies: None

Virtual: Steve Aiken MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA (from 4:10pm)
Deirdre Hargey MLA (until 2:33pm)
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

Stephen Magee Clerical Supervisor

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:11pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

None.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Department of Finance – Assembly Motions

The Committee noted that the Minister of Finance would be responding to 2 Assembly Motions on Tuesday 21st October; one on the Local Growth Fund and one on Reducing the Level of Unpaid Taxes.

3.2 Strategic Planning Meeting – 22nd October

The Committee noted arrangements for its Strategic Planning meeting on 22nd October 2025, the focus of which would be future Committee Inquiry themes.

3.3 Baby Loss Awareness Week

The Chairperson reflected on events which took place during Baby Loss Awareness Week, thanking Committee Staff for their work in this regard. The Chairperson also advised Members of a Remembrance Service to mark Baby Loss Awareness Week which would take place at 7.30pm (that night) in the Stormont Hotel, Belfast.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to both the Assembly Speaker and Assembly Commission to explore the possibility of lighting up Parliament Buildings during Baby Loss Awareness Week 2026, along with a memorial in the Great Hall for the week which the public could access.

Members also noted that Consideration Stage for the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill was now scheduled for 4th November 2025.

3.4. Correspondence to the Secretary of State – Budget Announcement

The Committee noted that previous correspondence to the Secretary of State regarding a Budget Announcement had been referred to HM Treasury for reply.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State asking him to encourage the Chief Secretary of the Treasury to respond to the Committee's correspondence.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 8 October 2025.

5. Matters Arising

5.1. Committee for Finance – End of Session Report 2024/25

The Committee considered revised appendices for its End of Session Report for 2024-25.

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

5.2. Department of Finance – Procurement of replacement agency worker contract

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding the procurement of a new agency worker contract for NI Departments, some Arm's Length Bodies and Non-Departmental Public Bodies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for further information on a number of issues related to this procurement, including detail on; how the value of the contract had changed, drivers of any change in value and on the Department for Communities contract. Information would also be sought in respect of the appointment of civil servants to time-limited posts.

5.3. Department of Finance – Procurement Thresholds Update

The Committee noted an update from the Department of Finance in relation to provision within a Statutory Instrument to amend Procurement Thresholds in line with the Government Procurement Agreement.

5.4. DALO Readout Extract 24 September 2025

The Committee noted an extract from the DALO Readout following the meeting on 24 September 2025, noting that a response in relation to the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill was still outstanding. Members also noted that officials had indicated that queries on Budget related matters had been covered by officials during an oral briefing session on 1st October 2025.

5.5. Committee for Communities – Reform of Building Regulations

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Department of Finance requesting an update on the progress of Building Regulations Reform.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 2:33pm.

5.6. Marie Curie & Advice NI – “Tell Us Once”

The Committee noted copy correspondence from Marie Curie and Advice NI to the Minister of Finance regarding the “Tell Us Once” Service.

5.7. Correspondence – Family Court Handling of Domestic Abuse

The Committee noted copy correspondence from an individual to Doug Beattie MLA and Joanne Bunting MLA regarding perceived failures in the justice system.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2:34pm.

5.8. Assembly and Executive Review Committee

Matthew O’Toole declared an interest as a Member of the Assembly & Executive Review Committee (AERC).

The Committee considered a reply from the Department of Finance to the AERC’s Review on Cross-cutting Executive Strategies and Review into the Development of a formal process and guidance on the handling of Westminster Statutory Instruments which include a role for the Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance to ask if its recent report “Aligning Budget to Programme for Government” could be considered as a useful source for the AERC’s Review on Cross-Cutting Executive Strategies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send the Department of Finance report “Aligning Budget to Programme for Government” to the AERC, asking for detail on responses from other Departments to its Review on Cross-Cutting Executive Strategies.

5.9. Public Accounts Committee – Primacy over NI Audit Office (NIAO) Reports

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

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

5.10 Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Diane Forsthye declared an interest as her father is a Member of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

The Committee considered correspondence from Newry, Mourne and Down District Council regarding an alternative funding proposal for the Mournes Gondola Project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Belfast Region City and Growth Executive Board to ask if their understanding about the timescale for an alternative proposal is similar to that of the Council and Department of Finance.

6. NI Fiscal Council Bill – Committee Deliberations

The Committee considered the Department of Finance's response to comments from the NI Fiscal Council on the NI Fiscal Council Bill.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:54pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy the Department's response to the NI Fiscal Council.

The Committee considered the Department of Finance's response to comments from the NI Assembly Audit Committee on classification of the NI Fiscal Council.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy the Department's response to the NI Assembly Audit Committee. The Committee also agreed to add the Institute of Government's Report on Non-Ministerial Departments to the evidence base for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

7. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Committee Deliberations

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance to scrutiny points included in a RaISe briefing paper on the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy the response provided in relation to Clause 20 to the NI Assembly Audit Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further clarification from the Department of Finance on the proposed increase to the contingency limit for Consolidated Fund advances.

The Committee noted that responses from the Department of Finance in relation to queries raised during the meeting on 24th September, remained outstanding.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would write to the DALO in respect of the delay in the provisions of papers to the Committee.

Members noted that the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee had taken evidence on Clause 16 of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill and would shortly provide this Committee with a report on its deliberations in this regard.

8. Update on Strategic Review of Rating – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance

Members noted a number of relevant background papers including a Hansard transcript of a previous rating policy briefing, correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding the supplementary consultation on Domestic Rating Policy and the Land and Property Services Strategic Review of Rating - Terms of Reference.

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

Andrew McAvoy, Director of Rating Policy, Land and Property Services.

Eoin Tennyson joined the meeting at 3:09pm.

The official provided the Committee with oral evidence on work carried out over the summer recess period in relation to the Strategic Review of Rating Policy. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including engagement with stakeholders, next steps, business support, industrial derating, rating exemption for Halls of Residence, council initiatives, listed buildings and how the rating sector can support communities and social enterprise development.

Gerry Carroll declared an interest as he had lodged a number of petitions in the NI Assembly regarding Industrial Derating Policy.

Jemma Dolan left the meeting at 4:03pm.

The Chairperson thanked the official for their attendance, and the official left the meeting at 4:09pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request some further information from the Department of Finance including information on rating policy for Halls of Residence, including change of use and how rating policy can support community development activity. Members also agreed to seek information on Rates Liability for Parliament Buildings.

9. Legislative Programme for Autumn/Winter 2024-25 – Written Briefing from the Department of Finance

The Committee noted that the written briefing on the Legislative Programme for Autumn/Winter 2024/25 had not been received from the Department of Finance in time to be considered at today's meeting. This matter would be addressed in the previously agreed correspondence from the Committee Clerk to the DALO.

Jemma Dolan joined the meeting at 4:10pm.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a Hansard transcript of a Department of Finance Oral Briefing on Budget 2026-2030; and
- ii. The Committee noted the 47th Report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

11. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

The Committee Clerk updated Members on the oral briefing with the Minister of Finance and on indicative date for a visit to LPS as well as anticipated dates for briefing on Legislative Consent Motions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing with the Minister of Finance on 10th December 2025 and to schedule a visit to LPS on 14th January 2026.

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 22 October 2025 at 2.00pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings with a strategic planning session to take place before the meeting; at 12.30pm in the Private Dining Room, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:14pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

22 October 2025