



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

7 October 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Harry Harvey MLA

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Áine Murphy MLA

Apologies: Eóin Tennyson MLA

Virtual: Dr Steve Aiken MBE MLA

Gerry Carroll MLA

In Attendance: Peter Hall Committee Clerk

Fiona Rooney Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk

Tom Armstrong Assistant Assembly Clerk

Clairita Frazer Assistant Assembly Clerk

Marion Johnson Clerical Supervisor

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 1:49pm in public session.

1. Apologies.

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests.

None.

3. Marriage and Civil Partnership – Oral Briefing – Department of Finance

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard would report the session.

Members noted a Clerk's Memo and several background papers for the session, including a DALO readout response/briefing paper provided by the Department of Finance and copies of all the written submissions to the Committee's Call for Evidence on the Bill. Members also noted Hansard Transcripts of oral evidence sessions from the meetings on 23rd and 30th September, which would be added to the Committee report in due course.

Harry Harvey joined the meeting at 1:50pm.

The following officials joined the meeting, at 1:50pm;

Catherine Nixon Head of Civil Law Reform Division, Departmental
Solicitors Office

Martin Tyrell Policy Advisor, Civil Law Reform Division,
Departmental Solicitors Office

Fidelma O'Hagan

Principal Legal Officer, Civil Law Reform Division,
Departmental Solicitors Office

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session, and several issues were discussed including; the Dignity Framework, fees for ceremonies, involvement of the Registrar General, criteria for recognition and criminal offence of under 18 marriages.

Brian Kingston joined the meeting at 1:51pm.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2:08pm.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:24pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 2:34pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the DALO readout response/Departmental briefing paper to the evidence base of the Committee Stage of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 2:36pm.

Members discussed issues relating to the Bill including further correspondence received from the NI Humanists and from Humanists Together following their oral briefings at the meeting on 23rd September.

The Committee returned to open session at 2:57pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing with the Registrar General at next week's meeting, if possible. On that basis, the informal Clause by Clause for the Bill would be postponed until 21st October.

Members noted that the next 4 agenda items would be taken together.

- 4. Department of Finance – Land & Property Services – Oral Briefing**
- 5. SL1 – The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2027**
- 6. SL1 – The Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2027**
- 7. SL1 – The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2027**

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard would report the session.

The Committee noted that the Director of Rating Policy would provide an update on the process for the Business Growth Accelerator and Non-Domestic Vacant Rating Liability consultations. The Director would also provide briefing on the 3 proposed Statutory Rules (SL1s) on the agenda today.

The following official joined the meeting, at 2:58pm;

Andrew McAvoy	Director of Rating Policy, Land and Property Service, Department of Finance
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The official briefed the Committee on the findings of the Department of Finance's consultation on the Business Growth Accelerator and Non-Domestic Vacant Rating Liability.

The official also briefed Members on a proposed Statutory Rule to set the amount of the domestic and non-domestic regional rate, a proposed Statutory Rule to continue the "Back in Business" Scheme, and a proposed Statutory Rule to continue the rates exemption for separate entries in the Valuation List associated with automatic telling machines in designated rural areas.

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session, and several issues were discussed including; high-level results from both consultations, Reval 26, the valuation process, holiday home exceptions, and the 3 proposed statutory rules.

The Committee considered a DALO readout response on the Reval 27 and associated timelines.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek additional information on the numbers of businesses with a Net Annual Value (NAV) currently under review by Land and Property Services.

The Chairperson thanked the official for their attendance, and the official left the meeting at 3:49pm.

The Committee noted that the Department of Finance proposes to make three statutory rules: The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2027, The Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2027 and The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2027. Members noted that the Department of Finance had submitted a SL1 letter, a draft Statutory Rule and draft Explanatory and Financial Memorandum for each rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a call for views for the SL1s, and to publish the SL1s, the draft Statutory Rules and any relevant documents from the Department of Finance on the Committee's website.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Committee staff would seek information from the Department of Finance, where necessary, on any matters raised during the SL1 stage, including in the call for views.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish any responses received to the Committee call for views on the SL1s, after they have been considered by the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note receipt of the proposed statutory rules and to consider them at the meeting on 4th November 2026.

8. Performance and Culture of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Inquiry – Committee Deliberations

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard would report the session.

The Committee considered a Hansard Transcript from the Committee deliberations on the Inquiry from the meeting on 23rd September.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that this would be added to the evidence base for the Inquiry, in due course.

9. Chairperson's Business

9.1 Libraries Deliver: Impact, Outcomes and Value for Communities

The Committee noted an invitation to a drop-in event to showcase the work of libraries, on Tuesday 3rd November from 12noon-3pm in Room 115, Parliament Buildings.

9.2 Senedd Finance Committee – Meeting of the Devolved Chairs

The Committee considered correspondence from the Chair of the Welsh Finance Committee regarding engagement between the Chairs of the Devolved Finance Committees.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to accept the offer of an online meeting with all Chairs, including the Welsh Finance Committee Chair.

10. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 30th September 2026.

11. Matters Arising

11.1. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 6th May – Jade's Law

Members considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the current position in relation to Jade's Law.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy the response to both the Health and Justice Committees.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to request that the Department of Finance keeps it fully up to date with this matter, particularly the consultation process.

11.2. Department of Finance - DALO Readout Responses – 16th September – Follow-up information Business Plan Oral Briefing

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance with follow-up information on Citizen Contact Strategy, Recruitment Reform, Reval 27 and sickness absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the information on sickness absence to evidence base for the NICS Inquiry.

11.3. Department of Finance – City & Growth Deals Quarterly Progress Report

The Committee noted the latest City & Growth Deals Quarterly Progress Report.

11.4. Department of Finance – Copy correspondence to the Northern Ireland Assembly Audit Committee

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Department of Finance to the Northern Ireland Assembly Audit Committee outlining views on information gathering submissions for 2026/27-2029/30 from the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, Northern Ireland Audit Office and Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 4:05pm.

11.5. Department of Finance – Press Release – New Legal Services Oversight Commissioner

The Committee noted a press release from the Department of Finance regarding the appointment of a new Legal Services Oversight Commissioner, pending an oral briefing with the new and previous Commissioner on 4th November.

11.6. Communities Committee – Anti-Poverty Strategy

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Communities Committee to the Department of Finance regarding financial bids for planned actions associated with the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

11.7. Communities Committee – Fermanagh & Omagh District Council – Rural Affairs Research

The Committee noted correspondence from the Communities Committee to all Statutory Committees regarding research on rural affairs.

The Clerk updated Members on previous agreements by this Committee and undertook to update Members in due course.

11.8. Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (HOCS) – Transformation Fund Briefing Paper

The Committee considered a copy of the Briefing Paper supplied by HOCS for last week's oral briefing on the Transformation Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for further information on the £66m needed to fund an additional 5 projects which could not be funded from the initial £235m funding envelope.

11.9. Department of Finance - DALO Readout Response – 21st January – Reserve Claims

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance in relation to funding requirements and use of reserve claims to meet the funding requirements for those affected by Mother & Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if the Chief Secretary to the Treasury responded to the Minister of Finance's request in this regard.

11.10. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 9th September – Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest given the project's linkage to his constituency.

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance in relation to funding for the Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge Project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an urgent update from the Department of Finance on projects which were impacted by the A5 Court Case.

11.11. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 9th September – Breaches of 2026-27 Vote on Account

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance in relation to breaches of the Vote on Account.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 4:17pm.

11.12. – 11.16 Department of Finance – DALO Readout Responses – 9th September - Call for Evidence on Bills.

The Committee considered several responses from the Department of Finance to the following Calls for Evidence; Charities (Amendment) Bill, Housing (Amendment) Bill, Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill, Renewable Electricity Bill and Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy the information provided to the respective Statutory Committee.

11.17. Department of Finance - DALO Readout Responses – 23rd September – Procurement of Replacement Contract for the Supply of Agency

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance in relation to the replacement contract for the supply of agency (workers) to the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this matter again as part of the NICS Inquiry and to copy the information provided to other Statutory Committees.

Deirdre Hargey rejoined the meeting at 4:22pm.

11.18. Minister for Infrastructure – Terms of Reference for Forensic Audit into the Governance Systems in Northern Ireland Water

The Committee considered a Written Ministerial Statement from the Infrastructure Minister regarding the Terms of Reference for the Forensic Audit into the Governance Systems in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would liaise with the Clerk to the Infrastructure Committee to discuss engagement around this issue and report back to Members in due course.

11.19. Hansard Transcript – Public Office (Accountability) Bill – Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM)

The Committee noted a Hansard Transcript from last week's agreement on the Addendum for the Public Office (Accountability) Bill Report – LCM.

11.20. Hansard Transcript – Department of Finance – Oral Briefing on Department's own financial position

The Committee noted a Hansard Transcript from last week's oral briefing on the Department of Finance's own financial position.

Members discussed the current budgetary situation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an urgent update from the Department of Finance on the current budget discussions, preferably in advance of next week's meeting.

12. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from Government Accounts Branch enclosing a copy of the Public Income and Expenditure Account.
- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding the Dormant Assets NI Fund and the National Lottery Community Fund Annual Report and Accounts 2025/26.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek additional information from the Department of Finance on the balance of grant commitments in the Report and Accounts.

- iii. The Committee noted the 74th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.
- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from Protective Mothers NI.
- v. The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Executive Office Committee enclosing its correspondence to the Finance Minister regarding The Dromore Group.
- vi. The Committee noted the September update from the Youth Assembly.

vii. The Committee considered the Hansard Transcript from the oral briefing on the Cyber Security & Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the transcript to the Addendum on the LCM Report which will be considered at next week's meeting.

viii. The Committee noted the Department of Finance – Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission.

ix. The Committee noted the 2026 2nd Update from the Competition & Markets Authority.

13. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme and several upcoming briefings.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance in respect of an informal closed meeting with the Department of Finance Permanent Secretary.

The Committee discussed forthcoming events to mark Baby Loss Awareness Week.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to start the Committee meeting on 11th November at the earlier time of 1pm.

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

14. Any Other Business

The Committee noted that the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill had now received Royal Assent; The Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Act (Northern Ireland) 2026 became law on 7th October 2026 and that it is Chapter 8.

15. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 14th October 2026 at 2pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:36pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

14th October 2026