



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

12 November 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Jemma Dolan MLA (until 4:09pm)

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Eoin Tennyson MLA

Apologies: None

Virtual: Steve Aiken MLA

Gerry Carroll MLA

Jemma Dolan MLA (from 4:17pm)

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

Stephen Magee Clerical Supervisor

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:08 pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

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

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1. Correspondence from the Department of Finance Permanent Secretary

The Committee considered correspondence from the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Finance outlining the parameters of an oral briefing to the Committee. The Committee noted that the briefing would take place at next week's meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the correspondence with other Statutory Committees.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 5 November 2025.

5. Matters Arising

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 2:12pm to consider the first 3 items of Matters Arising.

5.1. Correspondence from an individual

The Committee considered correspondence from an individual which had been sent to the Committee public inbox and Clerk.

Eoin Tennyson joined the meeting at 2:19pm.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:22pm.

Steve Aiken declared an interest as being in receipt of correspondence from the same individual.

5.2. DALO Extract from 2 July 2025

The Committee noted an extract of the DALO Extract issued following the meeting on 2 July 2025.

5.3. Department of Finance – Internal Audit Reports

The Committee considered internal audit reports which had been requested following consideration of the Department of Finance Annual Report and Accounts for 2024-25.

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

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2:29pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into open session at 2:34pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to raise issues related to Internal Audit Reports commissioned by the Department of Finance with the Permanent Secretary whilst he is at Committee next week – this would be in open session. Members also agreed to schedule an oral briefing with Internal Audit within the Department of Finance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that future correspondence from the individual would be distributed to Members via an electronic folder on ECP. Members also directed the Committee Clerk to contact the PSNI regarding this matter.

5.4. DALO Readout Extract – Meeting of 8th October 2025.

The Committee noted an extract from the DALO Readout issued following the meeting on 8th October 2025.

5.5. Department of Finance – India Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance explaining that there is no differentiation between GB and NI with regards to CETA.

5.6. DALO Readout Response – Strategic Asset Management Unit (SAMU) interaction with the NICS Estate Strategy

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding a request for information on how SAMU interacts with the NICS Estate Strategy, pending a visit to Land and Property Services on 14th January 2026.

5.7. DALO Readout Response – Marlborough House

The Committee noted an assurance from the Department for Finance that it will keep the Committee informed of developments in relation to Marlborough House.

5.8. DALO Readout Response – “Tell Us Once” Service

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the possibility of extending bereavement services to facilitate a “Tell Us Once” service in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a further update from the Department of Finance in due course.

Agreed: During discussions, the Committee also agreed to expediate the requested update in relation to Casement Park.

5.9. DALO Extract – Meeting of 15th October 2025

The Committee noted an extract from the DALO Readout issued following the meeting on 15th October 2025.

5.10. DALO Readout Response – Assembly & Executive Review Committee (AERC) Cross-Cutting Executive Strategies Review

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding its recent Report “Aligning Budget to PfG” and linkage to the AERC Review on Cross-Cutting Executive Strategies.

5.11. DALO Readout Response – Rating Policy Follow-up Requests

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance relating to Rating Policy.

5.29. DALO Readout Response – Procurement of replacement Agency Worker Contract

The Committee considered information from the Department of Finance regarding the replacement Agency Worker Contract in the NICS, noting that this could feature as part of the Committee’s People Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a detailed breakdown of the £300m cost identified as “Lot 2 Administration roles (excluding DfC) and Corporate Functions” within the cost of the contract.

5.12. DALO Readout Extract – 22nd October 2025

The Committee noted an extract from the DALO Readout issued following the meeting on 22nd October 2025.

5.13. DALO Readout Response – Water, Sustainable Drainage and Flood Management Bill

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding its policy locus within the provisions of the Water, Sustainable Drainage and Flood Management Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information from the Department of Finance in relation to the financial aspects of the Bill’s provisions.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Infrastructure Committee with a view on the Bill’s provisions.

5.14. DALO readout Response – AO Recruitment Pilot

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance in relation to the AO Recruitment Pilot.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information from the Department of Finance on a number of issues, including the value of the Talent Dog contract, AI tools used by Talent Dog, level of support from Talent Dog and safeguards regarding GDPR and Data retention. Members also noted that a senior HR official attending with the Permanent Secretary at next week’s meeting, could be in a position to answer questions on this matter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to obtain an update on the pilot in due course, given its linkage with the Committee’s People Inquiry.

5.31. DALO Readout Response – Shared Property Management

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance in relation to progress with legislation associated with Shared Property Management.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest given associated issues within his constituency.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for detail on the broad legislative provisions and to ensure that the Committee is kept up to date with this matter.

5.32. DALO Readout Response – Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill

The Committee noted an update from the Department of Finance regarding the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill.

5.15. Department for Finance - Access to the Bar of NI for Students

5.16. Committee for Justice – Access to the Bar for NI Students.

Brian Kingston declared an interest as a current Member of the Justice Committee.

The Committee considered a copy of the response from the Department of Finance to the Committee for Justice regarding Access to the Bar for NI students and the original correspondence from the Committee for Justice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Finance regarding a potential policy anomaly concerning the regulation of the legal profession.

5.17. Department of Finance - City & Growth Deals Quarterly Progress Report

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

The Committee considered the latest quarterly progress report for the City & Growth Deals. Members also considered a response from the Belfast Region City Deal Executive Board regarding the timeframe for an alternative Mourne Gondola Project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to highlight issues in relation to the alternative Mourne Gondola Project and in relation to the Mid-South West Growth Deal with the Department of Finance.

5.18. Department of Finance – Infrastructure Committee

The Committee considered a copy of the Minister of Finance's response to the Infrastructure Committee regarding the October Monitoring Round and Multi-Year Budgets.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an assurance from the Department of Finance in relation to the timing of the Multi-Year Budget.

5.19. Committee for Communities – UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Department of Finance and Department for the Economy regarding concerns about the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which is ending in March 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy all correspondence related to the Shared Prosperity Fund and Growth Mission Fund to the Communities Committee.

5.20. Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) – Review of Handling of Statutory Instruments and Terms of Reference.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as a current Member of the AERC.

The Committee considered correspondence from AERC regarding its Review of the Handling of Statutory Instruments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to inform AERC about consideration of Statutory Instruments in the Finance Committee.

5.21. Assembly and Executive Review Committee – Review of Assembly Committee Engagement on Cross-Cutting Executive Strategies.

The Committee noted a list of Departments which have made substantive written submissions to the AERC Review.

5.22. Fiscal Council – Response to the Department of Finance Report “Aligning Budget to Programme for Government”

The Committee noted the Fiscal Council’s assessment of the Department of Finance’s Report “Aligning Budget to Programme for Government”.

5.23. Chief Secretary to the Treasury (CST) – NI Assembly Budget Announcement and Growth Mission Fund

The Committee considered correspondence from the CST regarding the Budget Announcement and Growth Mission Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the correspondence with both the Economy and Communities Committees.

5.24. Lord Carlile of Berriew House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee - EU Related Scrutiny Arrangements.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Chair of the NI Scrutiny Committee regarding an end to Committee scrutiny.

5.25. Lord Carlile of Berriew House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee – EU related scrutiny: Tobacco and Tobacco related products.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Chair of the NI Scrutiny Committee regarding Committee scrutiny.

5.26. Department of Finance – Revised Outturn and Forecast Outturn 2025-26 Guidelines

The Committee considered revised guidelines on Outturn and Forecast Outturn issued by the Department of Finance. Members placed on record their concerns regarding the timing of these revised guidelines and implications for departmental returns.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek clarity from the Department of Finance on a number of issues related to this, including clarity on how the recent announcement by the Health Minister will be managed in light of the revised guidelines. Members also agreed to copy the revised guidelines to other Statutory Committees and the Assembly Audit Committee.

5.27. Department of Finance – LCM Tracker

The Committee noted the latest bi-monthly LCM tracker supplied by the Department of Finance.

5.28. Department of Finance – Consultation Report on Baby Loss Certificate Scheme

The Committee considered a consultation report on the Baby Loss Certificate Scheme published by the Department of Finance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to obtain a definite timescale for draft regulations from the Department of Finance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to **agenda item 7: Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill**.

7. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Committee Deliberations

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard would provide a transcript of this agenda item.

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, the Executive Office Committee and the Education Committee. Members discussed responses from all Statutory Committees regarding scrutiny of the Bill's Clauses and if any issues needed further exploration.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to revert to the Executive Office Committee, Education Committee and Infrastructure Committee to ask if those Committees had completed their scrutiny of the relevant Clauses within the Bill and if they were satisfied with same.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule oral evidence session with officials from the Department of Education, Infrastructure and Executive Office to explore relevant issues in the Bill. In the case of the Department of Education, officials would also be asked to address the proposed extension to Clause 11 of the Bill.

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

The Committee also considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the rationale for requesting an increase to the contingency limit for Consolidated Fund advances.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this response to the evidence base for the Bill.

Agreed: Members agreed that the research paper would be added to the Bill's evidence base, Committee webpages and Committee Report in due course.

Harry Harvey left the meeting at 3:53pm.

The following official joined the meeting at 3:53pm:

Nathan Mulholland Research Officer, RaISe

The official provided the Committee with a brief overview of the RaISe paper and its conclusions. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance to provide a formal response to the points raised in the research paper.

Jemma Dolan left the meeting at 4:10pm.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding amendments to Clause 11, the removal of Clause 20 of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill and a DALO Readout response on same. Members also noted correspondence from the Department of Finance to the Assembly Audit Committee on reconsideration of wider governance arrangements for the NI Audit Office.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance welcoming the removal of Clause 20 of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill.

The Committee noted legal advice sought on Clause 20 of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add all items considered in this regard, to the evidence base for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

8. NI Fiscal Council Bill – Committee Deliberations and Consideration of Legal Advice

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 4:13pm to consider legal advice on whether or not it would be lawful for the Assembly Audit Committee to provide a budget scrutiny function for the NI Fiscal Council.

The Committee considered and discussed the legal advice provided.

Diane Forsthye declared an interest as a current Member of the Assembly Audit Committee.

Jemma Dolan joined the meeting virtually at 4:17pm.

The Committee moved into open session at 4:20pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give further consideration to this matter in due course.

The Committee considered a formal response from the Assembly Audit Committee on the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss this matter further at next week's meeting when it receives oral evidence from the NI Fiscal Council on the Bill.

The Committee returned to **agenda item 6 – Public Procurement**.

6. Public Procurement – Possible Exemption of Ports from Procurement Legislation & Cabinet Office Proposals for Public Procurement Reform – Department of Finance Written Briefing

The Committee noted that the scheduled oral briefing had been cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances and that a written briefing was provided instead.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule the oral briefing to the New Year.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to copy the briefing paper on a possible exemption of Ports from Procurement Legislation to the Infrastructure Committee.

9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the 46th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

The Committee Clerk updated Members on anticipated oral briefings related to the NI Fiscal Council Bill.

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

11. Any Other Business

None.

12. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 19 November 2025 at 2.00pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:25pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

19 November 2025