



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

18 March 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Steve Aiken MLA

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Eoin Tennyson MLA

Apologies: None

Virtual: Gerry Carroll MLA

Jemma Dolan 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 2:03pm in public session.

1. Apologies.

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests.

Diane Forsythe declared an interest as her father is a member on the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

Jemma Dolan joined the meeting at 2:05pm.

3. Chairperson's Business.

3.3. Treasury Allocations of £81m and £17m

The Committee discussed recent comments by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about flexibility in the use of Treasury allocations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to obtain urgent clarification on the extent of flexibility in the use of the allocations. Members also agreed to seek urgent response from the Department of Finance to the Committee's previous request for clarity on the status of additional Treasury funding.

3.1. Minister of Finance – Notification and Written Statement: Cash Advance from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund

The Committee considered notification of a statement and the Written Ministerial Statement itself, on a Cash Advance from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund to the Department of Education.

Agreed: Given the relevance to recent deliberations during the Committee Stage for the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill, the Committee agreed to seek clarification from the Department of Finance on what the Cash Advance will be used for within the Department of Education.

3.2. Correspondence from the Speaker to the Minister of Finance – Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill

The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly to the Minister of Finance regarding the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill, noting that it would be introduced on Monday 16th March 2026. Members also noted that an oral briefing on the Bill from Departmental officials would take place on Wednesday 22nd April 2026, subject to 2nd Stage on the Bill taking place on 20th April 2026.

3.4. Ministerial comments on Judiciary

The Chairperson indicated to the Committee that he would be pursuing comments made by the Finance Minister during Question Time on Monday 16th March 2026, relating to the Judiciary, as an MLA.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 11th March 2026.

5. Matters Arising

5.1. Correspondence from the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury

The Committee considered correspondence from the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury regarding the removal of duty relief exemption for small parcels and EU proposals to introduce a €2 handling fee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy the correspondence to the Department of Finance, asking if that Department has any information or updates in relation to this matter.

5.2. Assembly Business Office – Departmental Minutes on Contingent Liability

The Committee considered correspondence from the Assembly Business Office on Departmental Minutes on Contingent Liability. The Clerk updated Members on a recent meeting with a senior Department of Finance official to discuss departmental compliance with Minutes on Contingent Liability.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2:19pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to alert the Procedures Committee to an apparent lack of defined Assembly procedures for all MLAs to signify objections to Departmental Minutes on Contingent Liability. The Committee also agreed to alert Statutory Committees to the importance of scrutinising Contingent Liability within Department's Annual Reports and Accounts.

Harry Harvey joined the meeting at 2:20pm.

5.3. DALO extract - Meeting on 25th February 2026

The Committee noted a DALO extract from the Committee meeting on 25th February 2026.

5.4. DALO Readout Response – Local Growth Fund

The Committee considered a response from Department of Finance regarding Ministerial discussions and engagement around the Local Growth Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) around the funding spilt within the Local Growth Fund, attaching the report referenced at 5.5 below. The Committee also agreed to write to the Minister of Finance to ask about contingency plans in place for the end of the financial year and lack of funding for the Voluntary and Community Sector as a result of issues with the Local Growth Fund.

The Clerk updated Members on discussions with other jurisdictions regarding a potential joint letter to the MHCLG on the Local Growth Fund and work carried related to the Fund.

5.5. Welsh Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee – Report on the Local Growth Fund

The Committee considered this report; as well as the issues and concerns outlined within the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include this report in the previously detailed correspondence to MHCLG at 5.4 above.

5.6. Communities Committee – Children Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015 – Pooled Budgets

The Committee noted correspondence from the Communities Committee to the Department of Finance regarding the use of pooled budgets across departments to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.

5.7. Irish News Article – Alternative Mourne Gateway Project

The Committee considered an Irish News Article published today on the alternative Mourne Gateway Project.

Harry Harvey left the meeting at 2:35pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for a further update on the alternative project following the meeting with Tourism NI Board which would take place on 19th March 2026.

6. SL1 The Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001 (Estimates and Accounts) (Designation of Bodies) Order 2026

The Committee noted that the Department of Finance proposes to make a statutory rule: The Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001 (Estimates and Accounts) (Designation of Bodies) Order 2026 which will officially list certain public bodies whose spending must be included in Government Departments' budgets and financial accounts for the year ending 31 March 2027. Members noted that the Department of Finance had submitted a SL1 letter, a draft Statutory Rule and draft Explanatory and Financial Memorandum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a call for views for the SL1, and to publish the SL1, the draft Statutory Rule 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 SL1, after they have been considered by the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note receipt of the proposed statutory rule and to consider it at the meeting on 15th April 2026.

Members were content that an oral briefing from officials was not necessary at this stage.

Harry Harvey rejoined the meeting at 2:38pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the next two related agenda items together.

7. SR 2026/30 The Deaths and Still-Births (Signing of Certificates) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

8. 2026/32 (C1) The Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss (2026 Act) (Commencement) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee considered a Statutory Rule laid by the Department of Finance which will provide the framework for the signing, by medical practitioners and midwives, of a Certificate of Still-Birth or a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death. Members noted that the Rule was subject to the negative resolution procedure and that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had, in her 59th Report, indicated that the Rule did not require to be drawn to the Assembly's attention.

Agreed: The Committee for Finance agreed that it has considered SR 2026/30 The Deaths and Still-Births (Signing of Certificates) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and that it has no objection to the Rule.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance indicating that it has made the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss (2026 Act) (Commencement) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026. Members also noted that General Registrar Office (GRO) officials were working at pace to ensure that the required policies and technical infrastructure are in place to make the Baby Loss Certificate Scheme operational once the Baby Loss Certificate Scheme Regulations are agreed by the Assembly. The Committee noted that it is GRO's intention to provide the draft regulations to the Committee prior to Easter Recess.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule consideration of the Baby Loss Certificate Regulations at next week's meeting, subject to receipt of appropriate papers from the Department of Finance.

Steve Aiken joined the meeting at 2:41pm.

9. Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill – Consideration of Committee Report

The Committee considered a number of papers provided to assist with their deliberations on the Report, including a copy of the Bill and the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum for the Bill, a Clause by Clause table for the Bill and a Hansard transcript of the Clause by Clause consideration of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard should report on the session.

The Chairperson discussed some amendments to the Bill Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the amendments would be reflected in the final report.

Title Page, Contents Page, Powers, Membership and List of Abbreviations and Acronyms.

The Committee considered the Title page, Contents Page, Powers, Membership and List of Abbreviations and Acronyms as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Title page, Contents Page, Powers, Membership and List of Abbreviations and Acronyms stand part of the Report

Executive Summary.

The Committee considered the Executive Summary as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Executive Summary, as amended stand part of the Report.

Introduction.

The Committee considered the Introduction as drafted.

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

Committee Approach.

The Committee considered the Committee Approach section as drafted.

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

Consideration of the Bill.

The Committee considered the Consideration of the Bill section as drafted.

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

Clause by Clause Consideration.

The Committee considered the Clause by Clause Consideration section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clause by Clause Consideration section stand part of the Report.

Clause by Clause Scrutiny of the Bill.

The Committee considered the Clause by Clause Scrutiny of the Bill section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clause by Clause Scrutiny of the Bill section, as amended stand part of the Report.

Appendices.

The Committee considered the Appendices section as drafted. Members noted that these would be updated with today's Minutes of Proceedings.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Report on the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill be the 10th Report of the Committee for Finance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the report would be laid in the Assembly Business Office and published on the Committee webpages in due course.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy the Bill report to the Minister of Finance in advance of the Consideration Stage of the Bill.

10. Budget 2026-2029/30 – Consideration of evidence from other Statutory Committees

The Committee considered a response from the Communities Committee on its scrutiny of the Department for Communities draft Budget 2026-2029/30.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the response to its report on the draft Budget 2026-2029/30.

The Clerk undertook to follow-up outstanding responses from some Statutory Committees.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider at next week' meeting how to proceed.

11. Inquiry into Performance and Culture of the Northern Ireland Civil Service

The Committee considered draft Citizen Space questions for the Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee discussed and agreed a number of revisions and that the revised questions would be considered at next week's meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the Citizen Space survey with Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance, the FDA Union when published; and to seek advice from the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trades Unions regarding other trade unions that might appropriate to contact about the survey.

The Committee considered an email received, as part of the Inquiry, into the extensive use of temporary promotions at Grade 6, in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this further as part of the Inquiry.

12. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted Hansard transcripts of recent oral evidence sessions with the Director of Rating Policy and on the Clause by Clause Consideration of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill.
- ii. The Committee noted a Hansard Transcript of a recent Committee session on the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill Committee report which would be added to the relevant appendix of the Committee report.
- iii. The Committee noted the 60th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

13. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme and noted a number of upcoming briefings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an urgent update from the Department of Finance on whether or not the Executive's remaining capital budget will be fully spent by the end of the financial year.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the meeting pack for Wednesday 15th April would be issued on Monday 13th April 2026.

14. Any Other Business

Harry Harvey reflected on the Forget Me Not Event held on Saturday 14th March 2026, which he attended on behalf of the Committee.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 3:16pm.

15. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 25th March 2026 at 2pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:17pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

25th March 2026