



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

18 February 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Eoin Tennyson MLA

Apologies: None

Virtual: Steve Aiken MLA

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 1:08pm in public session.

1. Apologies.

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests.

None.

3. Chairperson's Business.

3.1. Minister of Finance – Written Ministerial Statement – Regional Rate 2026-27

The Committee noted notification of a Written Ministerial Statement and the Statement itself, made by the Minister of Finance in relation to the setting of the Regional Rate 2026-27.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 1:12pm.

3.2. Minister of Finance – Notice of Intention to make an Oral Statement to the Assembly regarding the NSMC SEUPB sectoral format

The Committee considered notification of a Ministerial Oral Statement and the Statement itself, made by the Finance Minister which related to the outcomes of the North South Ministerial Council Special EU Programmes sectoral format which took place on 23 January 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an explanation for the delay in presentation of the SEUPB Annual Accounts for 2024.

The Committee noted receipt of correspondence from the Minister of Finance providing clarification around the Reserve Claim for 2025-26. Members indicated that it would be discussed further later in the meeting.

3.3. Minister of Finance – Local Growth Fund – Community and Voluntary Sector

The Committee considered correspondence from the Finance Minister on the Local Growth Fund and its impact on the Community and Voluntary Sector.

The Committee also considered 2 related items under **agenda item 5: Matters Arising**.

5.11. DALO Readout Response – Local Growth Fund

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance relating to funding of the Local Growth Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information on match funding previously provided by the Northern Ireland Executive for previous funds e.g. the European Social Fund.

5.12. DALO Readout Response – Pride of Place Announcement

The Committee considered clarification on Pride of Place funding.

3.4. House of Commons Library – Local Growth Funds

The Committee noted a research briefing from the House of Commons Library on Local Growth Funds.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from the Department of Finance on the Local Growth Fund when the position has been agreed.

3.5. Belfast Telegraph and Irish News Articles - Bank of London

The Committee noted press coverage related to governance matters in the Bank of London.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.

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

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 1:33pm

5. Matters Arising

5.1. DALO extract - Meeting on 4 February 2026

The Committee noted a DALO extract from the Committee meeting on 4 February.

5.2. DALO Readout Response – Impact on Block Grant following the scrapping of 2 child limit

The Committee considered a response from Department of Finance regarding the impact of the abolition of the 2 child limit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy this information to the Communities Committee given direct relevance to its remit.

5.3. DALO Readout Response – Department of Education 5 Year Budget Strategy

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the purpose of the 5 year Budget Strategy published by the Department of Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to all Statutory Committees highlighting the position in respect of 5 year financial sustainability plans.

5.4. DALO Readout Response – Reval 2026

The Committee considered a response from Department of Finance regarding the Finance Minister's decision to stop the Reval 2026 process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if sectoral engagement is occurring in relation to a change in Revaluation methodology.

5.5. Department of Finance – City and Growth Deals Quarterly Update

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the City and Growth Deals Quarterly Progress Report previously considered at the Committee meeting on 12 November 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to obtain a further detailed update specifically on the governance agreement for the Mid-South West Growth Deal asking that the Department of Finance keep the Committee fully up to date in relation to this issue and in relation to the alternative Mourne Gateway Project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to **agenda item 5: Matters Arising** later in the meeting.

6. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Final Committee Deliberations and Options Paper

The Committee considered a number of papers provided to assist with their deliberations on the Bill, including a clerk's memo outlining options and various items of correspondence from the Department of Finance.

The Chairperson informed Members that he had tabled an amendment to the Bill in his position as Leader of the Opposition.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session for deliberations in respect of the Bill.

The Bill Clerk joined the meeting at 1:50pm.

The Committee moved into closed session at 1:51pm.

Diane Forsthye joined the meeting at 1:52pm.

Eoin Tennyson joined the meeting at 1:53pm.

Members discussed the Bill on a Clause by Clause basis and reflected on deliberations to date.

The Committee remained in closed session for the next agenda item.

7. Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill – Final Committee Deliberations

The Committee considered a number of papers provided to assist with their deliberations on the Bill, including a Clause by Clause table of issues identified during Committee Stage.

Members discussed on the Bill on a Clause by Clause basis and reflected on deliberations to date.

The Committee returned to open session at 2:58pm.

The Chairperson thanked the Bill Clerk and the Bill Clerk left the meeting at 2:59pm.

Agreed: In relation to the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill, the Committee agreed that the Clerk would provide departmental officials with an indication of the Committee's position in advance of the oral evidence session at next week's meeting.

Agreed: In relation to the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill, the Committee agreed to postpone the final evidence session with departmental officials until 4th March 2026 and to return to deliberations from Clause 6 onwards at next week's meeting.

8. SL1 – The Pensions Increase (Review) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee considered a clerk's memo (scrutiny paper) on the Pensions Increase (Review) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 and related papers. Members

noted the purpose of the proposed statutory rule and that no responses had been received to the Committee's Citizen Space Survey on the proposed rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the merits of the proposal and that the Department make the rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish its decision and inform the Department of Finance accordingly.

9. SL1 – The Public Service Pensions Revaluation Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee considered a clerk's memo (scrutiny paper) on Public Service Pensions Revaluation (Northern Ireland) 2026 and related papers. Members noted the purpose of the proposed statutory rule and that no responses had been received to the Committee's Citizen Space Survey on the proposed rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the merits of the proposal and that the Department make the rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish its decision and inform the Department of Finance accordingly.

10. Draft Budget 2026-2029/30 – Joint Oral Briefing with University of Ulster Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC), Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) and Pivotal

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

The Committee noted a number of papers including a clerk's memo and Written Ministerial Statement on Proposed draft Budget and Reserve Claim. Members also noted written evidence provided by Pivotal in advance of the session, a Pivotal Report on Northern Ireland's multi-year budget, a NERI report on Budget, a Hansard Transcript of Northern Ireland Questions on 11th February 2026 and a Written Ministerial Statement from the Education Minister on the 5 year Education Budget Strategy.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:01pm;

Gareth Hetherington	Director, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC);
Paul MacFlynn	Co-Director, Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI);
Dr Lisa Wilson	Senior Economist NERI; and
Ann Watt*	Pivotal Public Policy Forum

*Ann Watt joined via Zoom

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the draft multi-year budget.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including transformation, revenue raising, tax raising powers, social and economic impacts.

Gareth Hetherington declared an interest given his membership of the Public Sector Transformation Board.

Deirdre Hargey declared an interest given her involvement in starting a Community Wealth Building Initiative in the last Assembly Mandate.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 4:24pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance, and the witnesses left the meeting at 4:26pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that all the relevant Hansard transcripts would be included in the Committee's Report on the draft Budget in due course.

11. Draft Budget, 2025-26 Spring Supplementary Estimates (SSE's) and 2026-27 Vote on Account – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance

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

The Committee noted a number of papers provided by the Department of Finance in advance of today's session including correspondence from the Finance Minister

regarding accelerated passage for the Budget Bill 2026, correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding the 2025-26 January In Year Technical Exercise, a response from the Committee for Infrastructure regarding December Monitoring, a Written Ministerial Statement from the Finance Minister on Reserve Claim and Spring Supplementary Estimates and HMT Consolidated Budgeting Guidance. Members also noted papers which had been received from the Department of Finance subsequent to the issue of the main pack which included the Northern Ireland SSE's and other supporting documentation.

Deirdre Hargey rejoined the meeting at 4:28pm.

The following officials joined the meeting at 4:29pm;

Joanne McBurney	Deputy Secretary, Public Spending Directorate,;
Maryann Smith	Director of Central Expenditure Division;
Patrick Neeson	Head of Supply Division, Public Spending Group (PSG);
Ian Fleming**	Supply Deputy Director, PSG; and
Janis Marynowski**	Supply Officer, PSG.

**Ian Fleming and Janis Marynowski joined the meeting via Zoom

The officials briefed the Committee on the Draft Multi-Year budget, Spring Supplementary Estimates, Vote on Account and Budget Bill 2026.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including agreement of a multi-year budget, potential reduction of overspend and fiscal sustainability.

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 4:44pm and Diane Forsthye assumed the Chair.

Matthew O'Toole returned to the meeting and resumed the Chair at 4:48pm.

Brian Kingston left the meeting at 4:50pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 5:00pm.

The Committee considered the Department of Finance's request for it to grant Accelerated Passage for the Budget Bill (Northern Ireland) 2026 and deliberated on whether or not there had been appropriate consultation with it in respect of public expenditure covered by the Bill.

The question was put that that the Committee for Finance is content that there has been appropriate consultation with it in respect of the public expenditure proposals covered in the Budget Bill 2026 and is willing to grant the requested Accelerated Passage for the Bill

Agreed: The Committee agreed that there had been, "appropriate consultation in respect of public expenditure", with respect to the Budget Bill 2026, as per Standing Order 42(2), and that it should proceed by accelerated passage and that the Chairperson would write to the Speaker to this effect, copying the letter to the Minister of Finance for his information.

12. Draft Budget 2026-2029/30 – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance

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

The Committee noted a briefing paper provided by the Department of Finance in advance of today's session on the Department of Finance draft Budget 2026-2030 position.

The following officials joined the meeting at 5:04pm;

Gavin Patrick Director of Finance Division; and

Cathy Murtagh Finance Business Partner.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Department of Finance's own budget position.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including the percentage increase in Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit, staffing implications and categorisation of spend.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 5:22pm.

13. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a Hansard transcript of the oral evidence session on Reval 2026 with Hospitality Ulster, Northern Ireland Hotels Federation and Retail NI.
- ii. The Committee noted the 56th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

14. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

Members noted that Statutory Rules relating to the new Rating Year would be considered in the coming weeks and that the Assembly debate in respect of the Regional Rate was scheduled for Tuesday 10th March 2026.

Members also noted that a proposed statutory rule would need to be considered within a limited period, not adhering to the new practices around delegated legislation. With this in mind, an oral briefing from officials would be scheduled for next week's meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Northern Ireland Audit Office to provide an oral briefing on its report: "Leading and Resourcing in the Northern Ireland Civil Service"

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a research briefing on Gender Budgeting for late April/early May.

Members noted that there was a delay in receiving Royal Assent for the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill which officials could address at next week's oral evidence session.

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

Steve Aiken left the meeting at 5:26pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to **agenda item 5: Matters Arising**

5.6. Committee on Procedures - LCM issues

The Committee noted a response from the Committee on Procedures regarding ongoing work to address issues raised around the Legislative Consent Process.

Diane Forsythe declared an interest as the deputy Chair of the Public Accounts Committee.

5.7. Public Accounts Committee (PAC) – Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) Report: Major IT Projects in Northern Ireland

The Committee noted correspondence from PAC indicating their intention to undertake an inquiry into the NIAO report: Major IT Projects in Northern Ireland. Members noted that the Clerk would continue to liaise with the Public Accounts Committee Clerk in this regard.

5.8. Public Accounts Committee (PAC) – Retention and Release of Reports

The Committee noted correspondence from PAC regarding the retention and release of Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) reports, in particular its agreement to release the NIAO Report: Leading and Resourcing in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, also noting previous agreement to invite the NIAO to provide an oral briefing on the report.

5.13. Public Accounts Committee (PAC) – Correspondence to the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS)

The Committee noted correspondence from PAC to the Head of the NICS, given related matters in the Committee's Inquiry into Performance and Culture of the NICS.

5.9. House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee – Correspondence to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The Committee noted correspondence from the House of Lords Scrutiny Committee to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland regarding the impact of the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and System for Greenhouse Gas Emission Allowance Trading with the Union.

5.10. Association of British Insurers (ABI) – Motor Insurance Tracker

The Committee noted correspondence from the ABI regarding the publication of the Quarter 4 2025 UK wide motor insurance tracker.

5.14. Minister of Finance – Response to Economy Committee

The Committee noted a response from the Finance Minister to the Economy Committee Chair regarding the economic impact of the implementation of Reval 2026, for the hospitality and tourism sectors.

5.15. DALO Readout Response – Swift Nesting Bricks in new buildings

The Committee noted a response from the Finance Minister to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, regarding Scottish legislative provision for Swift Nesting Bricks in new buildings.

5.16. DALO Readout Response – Victoria Hall and Property Disposal

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the recent disposal of Victoria Hall.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to express its concern about the information provided and ask the Department of Finance for further detail on the valuation and final sale comparison.

15. Any Other Business

None.

16. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 25th February 2026 at 1pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:38pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

25th February 2026