



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill:
Committee Report

11 March 2026

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Matthew O'Toole (Chairperson)
Ms Diane Forsythe (Deputy Chairperson)
Dr Steve Aiken
Mr Gerry Carroll
Miss Jemma Dolan
Miss Deirdre Hargey
Mr Harry Harvey
Mr Brian Kingston

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): We are going to do a final consideration of the report. Members are agreed that Hansard should record this, yes? I refer members to the following papers: the draft report; the clause-by-clause table on the Bill; the Hansard transcript of the oral evidence session on 25 February; a copy of the Bill; and a copy of the explanatory and financial memorandum. The draft Committee report has been amended since last week's meeting to include comments that were made during those deliberations. At page 356, you will see a draft copy of the report. Formatting and typographical errors will be amended and corrected, so do not get out your spotter's badge. Pedants will not be rewarded in this session.

The Committee Clerk: Chair, we will pass it to the Communications Office, which will do further accessibility formatting. This is not necessarily how it will actually look in the end, because Comms has to do an accessibility audit, if you like. We have done what we can with it. Comms will do a further search for errors, and we will do that as well before it goes for final publication. There will be a lot of eyes on it, but that is not always a guarantee.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): OK, we are going to go through formal clause-by-clause. As we have done with previous reports, I will go through each section and ask members whether they are content. That will be an opportunity for members to say whether they would like to see a change made, whether they are content or whether they are not content. If members are not content, they can indicate that. We can divide on any part of the Committee report if we need to, but I hope that that will not be necessary. We are able to indicate, including via the Hansard report, whether there is any dissent or whether any member does not endorse a particular position. That can be and will be reflected in the Hansard report, because Hansard is recording the session.

Ms Forsythe: I want to raise an issue before we go through the report. It was my understanding — I contacted the Clerk about this — that, on the move to make the clause on travel concession passes subject to draft affirmative procedure, DFI officials agreed that an amendment should be introduced either by DFI or by the Department of Finance. However, I have not seen that come through yet, and I am bit concerned about where it is. I feel strongly that we need that amendment. Any move to bring in any sort of consideration of this should be brought to the Assembly Floor so that Members have the

chance to speak on the issue of charging for travel concession passes. As it sits, it is going to be brought in with no opportunity for Members to vote on it. We have been consistent throughout in saying that we are not happy with it. It is my understanding that an amendment was to be introduced, and I have not seen that yet. This late in the day, I am a bit concerned about where it is at.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): There are a couple of things. First, the Bill report makes clear that the Committee's view is that the clause should be subject to the draft affirmative procedure. That is reflected already in the report. I share your frustration that we have not seen the amendment yet. It is open to us to sign off the content of the report, which makes clear that we want to make this subject to the draft affirmative procedure by way of an amendment. We will ask today for an urgent update from the Department on the text of the amendment and say that the Committee's clear view is that there should be an amendment to that effect. If Consideration Stage was scheduled and this amendment had not been produced, we, as a Committee, would have to look at drafting our own amendment, because that is the view of the Committee.

Ms Forsythe: Chair, would we still have time to do that? I am just concerned about the timescale.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): I think that we would. We have arrived at a view. We have unpacked and clarified the purpose of clause 17. It is not to make people who get SmartPasses pay for their journeys now; it is to cover the administrative costs.

The Committee Clerk: Chair, paragraph 108 deals with that, if members want to look at it.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): OK. Of course, I knew that anyway, but I have been reminded, rather than told, that, in reference to clause 17, paragraph 108 of the draft report reads:

"The Committee for Infrastructure formally stated its preference for the Affirmative Resolution procedure, and the Finance Committee pressed the Department for Infrastructure on this point. In response, it" —

"it" being the Department for Infrastructure, whose officials came and gave evidence in person a month or two ago —

"agreed to move to the Affirmative Resolution procedure for the fee-setting regulations, recognising the need for greater transparency and Assembly scrutiny."

This is an opportunity for us to remind the Department for Infrastructure that it made us a promise that it would introduce that amendment. Notwithstanding the fact that we are about to go back and do formal clause-by-clause, I suggest that we say to the Department that we would like to see the text of the amendment as soon as possible, and certainly before our next meeting. In parallel, we will say to the Bill Clerk that, should the Department not be able to provide that, either by design or due to the fact that it did not quite get the message, we will need to move quickly to develop a Committee amendment. If necessary, we will have an additional Committee session to agree the text of that amendment ahead of Consideration Stage. Are members content with that?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): I presume that the Department for Infrastructure is not listening to this session. Hopefully, our departmental Assembly liaison officer is and can pass that on to it.

The Committee Clerk: I think that, when we had the officials up, their understanding was that they would correspond with DOF and that, ultimately, the Finance Minister would move any amendment. We will seek clarification from DOF on whether that is happening and whether we can get a set of words for it.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): I would rather that one of the Departments does it, by the way. They promised to do it. We have enough to do. I do not want us to have to do it and schedule an extra meeting just because they have not done the thing that they said they were going to do. This is not our offering to do it for them. This is our saying, "Where's the thing that you promised us?"

OK, members. We are just going to go — woah, what have I done? I did not mean to open up that. In any case, I have opened up some news story rather than —. OK. We will go back now.

Ms Forsythe: Is this the restart?

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): No, it is not the restart.

The Committee Clerk: Do not tempt fate by saying that.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): No, do not.

We will move on to the draft Committee report. Are members content that the title page, the "Contents" page, the "Powers and Membership" page and the list of acronyms and abbreviations stand part of the report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): Are members content that the "Executive Summary" section, paragraphs 1 to 13, stand part of the report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): Are members content that the "Introduction" section, paragraphs 14 to 16, stand part of the report?

Members indicated assent.

Dr Aiken: Apologies, Chair. My computer has just gone dead.

The Committee Clerk: That will be the restart.

Dr Aiken: Yes. Crack on. It is OK.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): Fine.

Are members content that the "Committee Approach" section, paragraphs 17 to 19, stand part of the report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): Are members content that the "Consideration of the Bill" section, paragraphs 30 to 36, stand part of the report?

Members indicated assent.

Are members content that the "Clause by Clause Consideration of the Bill" section, paragraphs 37 to 128, stand part of the Bill?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): Are members content that the "Clause by Clause Scrutiny of the Bill" section, paragraphs 129 to 152, stand part of the report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): Next is the appendices. We will update them with today's minutes of proceedings and minutes of evidence, including what we are discussing now. Are members content that the appendices stand part of the report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): Finally, are members content that the report on the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill be the ninth report from the Committee for Finance?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr O'Toole): I assume that everyone is agreed that the report be laid in the Business Office and published on the Committee web page and that a copy of the report be sent to the Minister of Finance in advance of Consideration Stage? Are members content?

Members indicated assent.