



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Finance

### Minutes of Proceedings

**26 June 2024**

**Meeting Location:** Room 21, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:** Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Eóin Tennyson MLA

Phillip Brett MLA

Paul Frew MLA

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Steve Aiken MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Gerry Carroll MLA

Nicola Brogan MLA

**Apologies:** None

**In Attendance:** Peter Hall Committee Clerk

Clairita Frazer Assistant Assembly Clerk

Stephen Magee Clerical Supervisor

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:01pm in public session.

## **1. Apologies**

As above.

## **2. Declaration of Interests**

None.

## **3. Chairperson's Business**

3.1 The Committee noted that Louise Crilly had been temporarily promoted to Head of the Department Solicitors Office.

## **4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of 19 June 2024.

## **5. Reform of the NICS – Oral briefing by the Head of the Civil Service (HoCS)**

**Agreed:** Members agreed that the briefing should be reported by Hansard.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.04 pm;

**Jayne Brady**, Head of the Civil Service (HoCS);

**Neil Gibson**, Permanent Secretary, Department of Finance; and

**Jill Minne**, Director of People and Organisational Development, Department of Finance.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Reform of the Northern Ireland Civil Service – Functional and Strategic priorities.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:14pm.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as a Member of the Public Accounts Committee at the time of publication for its report on Capacity and Capability in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS).

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 2:38pm.

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

Phillip Brett left the meeting at 2:55pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including membership of the reconstituted NICS Board, the current status of the Programme for Government, timing for June Monitoring Round allocations and communication of associated announcements, NICS Pay Strategy, the recruitment process for Permanent Secretaries of Government Departments, NICS Record-keeping guidance and policy, enhanced performance management processes for Senior Civil Servants in the NICS, information flow between Departments and statutory Committees, NICS Apprenticeships, secondments and vacancies within the NICS.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek additional information and detail on a number of issues including; the Audit Regime for NICS Record-keeping policy; details of and copy of new NICS policy on retention & disposal of data (including clear information on who is accountable and responsible for monitoring policy); the “Use of Mobile Devices” policy & any interrelated policies; sight of the NICS Senior Civil Service Enhanced Performance Management Pro-Forma (including targets); any policy or guidance governing the information sent to statutory Committees from departments – and how the quality of this information is measured; details for and copy of the Benchmarking exercise used to develop new NICS Pay Strategy; details of the NICS Apprenticeship policy; up to date information on secondments from and to the NICS; up to date information on unfilled vacancies across the NICS; and confirmation on the handling of June/July Monitoring Round announcements.

The officials left the meeting at 4:20pm

## **6. Budget (No. 2) Bill – Committee Consideration of request for Accelerated Passage**

The Committee considered the Department of Finance’s request for it to grant Accelerated Passage for the Budget (No. 2) Bill (Northern Ireland) 2024 and deliberated on whether or not there had been appropriate consultation with it in respect of public expenditure covered by the Bill.

The Committee noted formal returns from the Agriculture, Economy, Infrastructure, Justice, Communities and Executive Office Committees in relation to their Departmental briefings on post-budget allocation, Business Plans and June Monitoring bids.

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 (No.2) Bill 2024 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 covered by the Budget (No.2) Bill (Northern Ireland) 2024; that it should proceed by accelerated passage and that the Chairperson would write to the Speaker to this effect.

## **7. Public Sector Transformation Board - Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance**

The following officials joined the meeting at 4:38pm;

**Tony Simpson**, Deputy Secretary, Strategic Policy and Reform (SPAR), Department of Finance;

**Aidan McMahon**, Director, Fiscal Policy Division, Department of Finance; and  
**Julianne Kieran**, Principal Economist, Strategic Policy Division, Department of Finance.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Interim Public Sector Transformation Board and on details of transformation proposals submitted to the Interim Board by Government Departments.

The Committee noted a list of the Department of Finance's transformation proposals to the Interim Board.

Members noted an assurance from the Minister of Finance that the Committee would be updated when there was progress in relation to supplementing the Interim Board with relevant experts as well as an indication that officials would provide regular updates to the Committee as appropriate going forward.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including; the anticipated timescale for awarding funding to transformation projects, potential measurement and impact of project outcomes and potential to lose unspent transformation funding in the 2024/25 financial year.

The Committee noted that the Department had already agreed to schedule an oral briefing with the Final Public Sector Transformation Board and this would be a feature of the draft Forward Work Programme for the autumn.

The officials left the meeting at 5:07pm.

## **8. Monthly Outturn – Written briefing from the Department of Finance**

The Committee noted a written briefing from the Department of Finance on the Monthly Outturn (April and May 2024).

Members discussed the format of the data provided and lack of profiled expenditure in actual terms which could impact on Committee scrutiny.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask if the Department of Finance could provide information and commentary on “actuals” or if “real-time management accounts”.

Members also agreed to request detail on the funding for Northern Ireland Protocol/Windsor Framework, given that it makes up a significant amount of Forecast Overspends – Non Ring-Fenced RDEL.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the monthly outturn provided to other statutory Committees including the Northern Ireland Assembly Audit Committee and that this would be a standing agreement going forward.

## **9. Matters Arising**

### **9.1 Department of Finance – Minister’s engagement with UK Financial Services Bodies and Banks**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding banking hubs.

Members discussed information provided by Cash Access UK on the Kilkeel Banking Hub and the fact that it did not specifically address accessibility to cash outside of working hours i.e. the availability of an ATM.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing with Cash Access UK in the autumn. The commissioned research on Financial Institutions would also be considered at this time.

## **9.2 Department of Finance – Special European Union Programmes Board (SEUPB) Annual Report and Accounts 2021**

The Committee noted the SEUPB Annual Report and Accounts for 2021 which were laid in the Assembly Business Office on 20 June 2024. Members also noted that further Committee queries had been addressed by the Department of Finance and would be considered at next week's meeting.

## **9.3 Department of Finance – Review of Defamation Act (NI) 2022**

The Committee noted a Department of Finance Report; Review of the Defamation Act (NI) 2022.

Nicola Brogan left the meeting at 5:18pm.

## **9.3 Department of Finance – June Monitoring Round Bids**

The Committee noted copies of the Department of Finance's June Monitoring Round bids. Members noted that not all Statutory Committees may have been provided with their Departments' bids submitted as part of the June Monitoring Round.

## **10. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy regarding the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI) Investing Activity Reports.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance to seek its assessment of whether or not it would be possible to have a more fulsome capture of financial movement within City & Growth Deals to enable Committee scrutiny.

- ii. The Committee noted the Nineteenth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

## **11. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme, as drafted.

Members noted that officials from the General Registrar Office would be briefing the Committee at next week's meeting on next steps to enact permanent legislative provision to allow for changes to civil registration legislation to enable electronic transfer of documents and registration of deaths and still births by telephone.

Members noted that the scheduled briefing on June Monitoring Round may have to be postponed in light of agreements reached by the Executive by that time.

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

## **12. Any Other Business**

None.

## **13. Date and Time of next meeting**

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 3 July 2024 at 1:00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:25pm.

**Matthew O'Toole MLA**



**Chairperson, Committee for Finance**

**3 July 2024**