



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

18 June 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

- Present:**
- Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)
 - Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
 - Phillip Brett MLA
 - Jemma Dolan MLA
 - Eoin Tennyson MLA
- Apologies:**
- Steve Aiken MLA
 - Paul Frew MLA
- Virtual:**
- Gerry Carroll MLA
 - Deirdre Hargey MLA
- In Attendance:**
- Peter Hall Committee Clerk
 - Clairita Frazer Assistant Assembly Clerk
 - Tom Armstrong Assistant Assembly Clerk
 - Stephen Magee Clerical Supervisor

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:10pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

None.

Given that the lack of decision-making quorum, the Committee moved to take oral evidence in relation to agenda items 6 to 8.

6. Draft SR The Legal Complaints and Regulation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 Regulations 2025 (Levy) Regulations 2025

7. Draft SR The Legal Complaints and Regulation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (Appeals) Regulations 2025

8. Draft SR The Legal Complaints and Regulation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (Penalty) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025

The Committee considered background information and supporting documentation regarding the required subordinate legislation to formally commence the role of Legal Services Oversight Commissioner. Members also considered correspondence from the Law Society, Bar Council and Justice Committee in relation to this legislation as well as a response from the Department of Finance to the Justice Committee regarding potential duplication of legal profession regulation.

The Committee noted that the rules were subject to draft affirmative resolution and had been scheduled for debate in plenary on Tuesday 24th June.

The Committee noted that a Department of Finance official would be attending the meeting today to answer questions Members may have in this regard.

The following official joined the meeting at 2:13pm:

David Hughes Director of Corporate Services

The official briefed Members on points raised by the Law Society, Bar Council and Justice Committee in recent correspondence. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

A number of issues were discussed including; detail of Levy considerations, governance arrangements, wider regulation, approval for budgets, review of effectiveness, cost cap and proportionate allocations to Barristers and Solicitors.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2:19pm.

Decision-making quorum was achieved.

Eoin Tennyson joined the meeting at 2:26pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a copy of correspondence from the Department of Finance to the Legal Professional Bodies regarding funding limits for the Legal Oversight Services Commissioner's Office.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest given his father's previous employment as a solicitor.

The Chairperson thanked the official for their attendance and the official left the meeting at 2:42pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy responses received from the professional bodies to the Justice Committee, given the cross-departmental interest.

The Committee considered Draft Statutory Rule The Legal Complaints and Regulation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (Levy) Regulations 2025, which would provide for the imposition of a levy on the Law Society of Northern Ireland and the Bar Council for the purpose of raising an amount corresponding to the expenditure of the Legal Services Oversight Commissioner.

Agreed: The Committee considered Draft Statutory Rule, The Legal Complaints and Regulation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 Regulations 2025 (Levy) Regulations 2025 and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

The Committee considered Draft Statutory Rule The Legal Complaints and Regulation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (Appeals) Regulations 2025 which will specify the circumstances in which appeals may be made to the High Court against determinations made by the Complaints Committee of either the Law Society or the Honourable Society of the Inn of Court of Northern Ireland (i.e. Bar Council).

Agreed: The Committee considered Draft Statutory Rule, The Legal Complaints and Regulation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (Appeals) Regulations 2025 and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

The Committee considered Draft Statutory Rule The Legal Complaints and Regulation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (Penalty) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 which would set the maximum amount the Legal Services Oversight Commissioner may require the Law Society or the Honourable Society of the Inn of Court i.e. Bar Council to pay as a penalty should the professional body either fail to submit a plan which the Commissioner considers adequate for the handling of complaints or fail to handle complaints in accordance with its plan.

Agreed: The Committee considered Draft Statutory Rule The Legal Complaints and Regulation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (Penalty) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to keep abreast of the financial implications of the Legal Services Oversight Commissioner's Office and to seek an update on the financial costs of the Legal Services Oversight Commissioner's office as it evolves.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1. Interparliamentary Forum (IPF) – 12th June

The Chairperson reflected on his attendance at the Interparliamentary Forum meeting which took place on 12th June in the House of Commons. Members noted a copy of the statement published following the meeting.

3.2. NI Fiscal Council Sustainability Report – Special Focus on Water

The Committee noted the publication of a Fiscal Council Sustainability Report with Special Focus on Water.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would explore with his Infrastructure colleague the potential for a joint meeting and that the Clerk would return to the Committee with proposals for consideration in due course.

3.3. Memorandum – Data (Use & Access) Bill

The Committee considered the latest position in relation to a Memorandum laid by the Department with respect to this Bill and an associated Motion for debate.

Members noted a Memorandum under Standing Order 42A (4) (b) and Motion laid for debate on 30th June 2025.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 10 June 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 11 June 2025.

5. Matters Arising

5.1. DALO Readout Extract – Meeting of 21st May 2025

The Committee noted an extract from the DALO Readout issued following the Committee meeting on 21st May 2025.

5.2. DALO Readout Response – Rates Bill – Incorrect URL

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding the publication of an incorrect URL on recent rates Bills

5.3. DALO Readout Response – NICS People Strategy

The Committee noted follow-up information relating to the Organisational Dashboard prepared by People and OD in collaboration with NICS HR.

5.4 DALO Readout Response – Subordinate Legislation relating to Legal Services Oversight Commissioner

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding the Levy and financial implications associated with the establishment of the Legal Services Oversight Commissioner.

5.5. DALO Readout Response – Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill

The Committee noted information provided by the Department of Finance regarding a query raised by Gerry Carroll during Question Time on 19th May.

5.6. DALO Readout Response – Prof. Holtham’s Assessment of Northern Ireland’s Level of Need

The Committee noted that Prof Holtham’s Assessment of Northern Ireland’s Level of Need had been published on 11th June 2025..

5.7. DALO Readout Response – NICS Office Estate Strategy

The Committee noted that the Department of Finance would provide regular progress reports on the NICS Office Estate Strategy.

5.8. Minister of Finance – Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill

The Committee considered an “in-confidence” copy of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill which had been provided by the Minister of Finance.

Members noted that both the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill and Fiscal Council Bill are anticipated to be introduced to the Assembly on 23rd June with 2nd Stages already scheduled for 1st July.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share a copy of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill with RaISe. The Committee also agreed to write to Statutory

Committees and the Assembly Audit Committee alerting them to the provisions in the Bill.

5.9. Department of Finance – Report to the Assembly on Scheme Yield Contributions

The Committee noted that the Department of Finance had formally laid its report on the Consultation on adjustments to NICS Employee Contributions to meet the required scheme yield.

5.10. Santander – Follow-up Information – Banking and Financial Services Landscape Inquiry

The Committee considered follow-up information provided by Santander following its oral evidence session with the Committee on 9th April.

Phillip Brett left the meeting at 3:04pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further detail from Santander on SME lending.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Banking and Financial Services Inquiry survey should be closed.

9. Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill – Consideration of Responses

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

Phillip Brett rejoined the meeting at 3:11pm.

The Committee considered a number of written submissions which had been received to the Call for Evidence on the Bill.

The Committee also considered an analysis of the Citizen Space responses to the Call for Evidence for the Bill.

Members also considered a copy of the Department of Finance consultation on proposals for a new Baby Loss Certificate Scheme to assist in determining the detail around that scheme, a response from the Department of Finance regarding a query

raised by Gerry Carroll concerning a potential inequality faced by unmarried same sex couples living in NI but undertaking IVF treatment in the Republic of Ireland and a response from the Minister of Finance regarding liaison between Departmental officials and the Forget Me Not Group. Members also noted a Hansard transcript from the evidence session with the Forget Me Not Group which would be added to the Committee's report on the Bill. .

Agreed: The Committee agreed to adopt the issues raised by those who have provided written submissions on the Bill and forward them to the Department of Finance for consideration and response.

10. Department of Finance Service Delivery Brochure – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance on targets and delivery metrics set for Resourcing (inc. Resourcing, Employee Relations and Occupational Health and Wellbeing)

The Committee noted background information and a briefing paper provided by the Department of Finance in advance of the session.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3:16pm:

Catherine Shannon Deputy Secretary, NICS Human Resources, Department of Finance (DoF);

Debbie Sherlock Director of People Services, NICS HR, DoF; and

Beverly Beggs Director of HR Transformation, Service Management and Strategic Engagement, NICS HR, DoF.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Resourcing aspects outlined in the Service Delivery Brochure. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 3:22pm.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 3:33pm

A number of issues were discussed including; restructuring of business areas within the Department, meaningful metrics and specific targets, sickness absence, the new Agency Worker Framework in the NICS and vacancy timescales.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance and the officials left the meeting at 3:35pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider Correspondence and Forward Work Programme before the final evidence session.

12. Correspondence

i. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure to the Department of Finance regarding compensation paid for the A6, A8 and A31 road upgrades.

ii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding post-19 support for adults with complex Severe Learning Difficulties.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Economy Committee as the issue sits more appropriately within that Committee's remit and to advise the individual accordingly.

iii. The Committee noted a Hansard transcript of the oral evidence session with the Department of Finance in relation to the Data (Use and Access) Bill Legislative Consent Memorandum.

13. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that an oral briefing on the Domestic Rating Review would take place at next week's meeting, that the oral briefing on Service Delivery Brochure had moved to 2nd July, that an informal meeting with NICS Finance Directors would take place on 2nd July and that the first meeting after summer recess would take place on 10th September.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that officials address the Procurement Strategy during the oral briefing session on 2nd July.

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

11. Outcome of Comprehensive Spending Review – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance

The Committee considered the Ministerial Statement on the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review which was made on 16th June 2025.

Members also considered notification from the Minister of Finance of his intention to make a statement, a readout from the Department of Finance on the Chancellor's Spending Review, an update from the Department of Finance on its June Monitoring position, a copy of Prof. Holtham's Review of NI's Level of Need and an update on NI Interim Fiscal Framework Implementation.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3:38pm:

Joanne McBurney	Deputy Secretary, Public Spending Directorate;
Emma-Jayne Hunter	Grade 7 Budget Team, CED; and
Tony Simpson	Deputy Secretary of Strategic Policy & Reform.

The officials briefed the Committee on the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review and on the latest position in relation to Prof Holtham's Assessment of Relative Need in NI. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

A number of issues were discussed including; UK Treasury's position in relation to Prof Holtham's Review, Fiscal Devolution proposals, Casement Park, June Monitoring, multi-year budget preparation, NI Housing Executive borrowing powers and revenue raising.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance and the officials left the meeting at 4:25pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a copy of correspondence from the Minister of Finance to the Minister for Communities regarding Casement Park and the Department of Finance's assessment of chart 5.5 within the Chancellor's Spending Review 2025 Report which illustrates the real terms increase in total DEL between 2023-34 and 2028-29 and average annual real growth rate. Members also agreed to request more information in respect of the Growth Mission Fund also referenced in the Chancellor's Spending Review 2025 report.

14. Any Other Business

None.

15. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 25th June 2025 at 2.00pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:26pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

25th June 2025