



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Finance

## Minutes of Proceedings

9 April 2025

**Meeting Location:** Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

- Present:** Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)  
Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Steve Aiken MLA  
Phillip Brett MLA  
Jemma Dolan MLA  
Paul Frew MLA  
Eoin Tennyson MLA
- Online:** Gerry Carroll MLA  
Deirdre Hargey MLA
- Apologies:** None
- 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 1.08pm in public session.

### **1. Apologies**

As above.

### **2. Declaration of Interests**

The Chairperson, Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as a former bank employee. All Members present declared an interest as either bank or building society account holders.

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

The Chairperson, Matthew O'Toole expressed his thanks to the deputy Chairperson; Diane Forsythe, during his recent paternity leave. The Chairperson also thanked the Committee team for support in this regard.

#### **3.1-3.3 & 3.7 Final Budget 2025-26**

The Committee considered a number of items related to the Final Budget 2025-26, including an urgent written statement made by the Minister of Finance on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2025, a Department of Finance press release on agreement of a final budget, notification and copy of Ministerial Statement on the Final Budget 2025-26 which was made in the Assembly on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2025.

Eoin Tennyson joined the meeting at 1.12pm.

The Chairperson noted and welcomed the oversubscription of Financial Transactions Capital Funding as outlined in the Ministerial Statement.

### **3.4 Belfast Live – NI “cash heaviest” part of the UK**

The Committee considered a news article which relates to the Banking and Financial Services Landscape Inquiry which highlights Northern Ireland’s reliance on cash withdrawals.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add this article to the Inquiry’s evidence base.

### **3.5 RTE News – Dáil passes Bill to ensure no decline in cash access**

The Committee considered a news article which relates to the Banking and Financial Services Landscape Inquiry which highlights legislation in the Republic of Ireland obliging banks to provide ATM facilities and improve access to cash.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add this article to the Inquiry’s evidence base. Members also agreed to obtain a copy of the Committee Report on the Finance (Provision of Access to Cash Infrastructure) Bill 2024.

### **3.6 Northern Ireland Youth Assembly Newsletter – March 2025**

The Committee noted the March Newsletter from the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly.

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meetings of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2025.

## **5. NI Banking & Financial Services Landscape Inquiry – Joint Oral Briefing from Progressive Building Society and Building Societies Association**

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

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 1.16pm:

Michael Boyd            CEO, Progressive Building Society; and

Robin Fieth                      CEO, Building Societies Association (also attending as a representative of Nationwide).

The Committee considered written submissions from both the Building Societies Association and Progressive Building Society.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add these submissions to the Inquiry's evidence base.

The witnesses briefed the Committee on Building Societies in general and on the Progressive Building Society. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

A number of issues were discussed including: the Building Society model, current investment within the Progressive Building Society branch network, urban and rural balance and regulatory arrangements for Building Societies.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance and engagement with the Committee. The witnesses left the meeting at 1.55pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to obtain a copy of the Audit Reform and Corporate Governance Bill.

Phillip Brett left the meeting at 1.56pm.

The Committee suspended at 1.56pm and resumed at 2.05pm.

**6. NI Banking & Financial Services Landscape Inquiry – Joint Oral Briefing from Barclays, Ulster Bank, Santander, Bank of Ireland, Danske Bank, Allied Irish Bank and UK Finance**

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

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2.06pm:

Daniel Wallace                      Deputy Customer Care, Barclays Bank;

Mark Crimmins	Regional Managing Director, Ulster Bank;
Brian Mulligan	Customer Interactions Regional Manager, Santander;
George Higginson	Managing Director, Bank of Ireland;
Richard Caldwell	Executive Director, Danske Bank;
Brian Gillan	NI Head of Retail, Allied Irish Bank;
Eric Leenders	Managing Director, Retail Finance, UK Finance; and
Paul Leonard	Non-Executive Director, Northern Ireland Committee, UK Finance.

The Committee considered a written submission from UK Finance and a copy of a UK Finance Report “Plan for Growth”.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add the submission and report to the Inquiry’s evidence base.

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the macro and regulatory environment with particular reference to banks operating in Northern Ireland. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Erin Leenders declared an interest as the Vice Chair of Building Society.

Eoin Tennyson left the meeting at 2.34pm.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2.48pm.

A number of issues were discussed including: the changing banking environment banks, business and personal banking challenges, ongoing work to address issues identified by the Committee in its Inquiry, profitability of banks and current issues impact on global markets.

The witnesses agreed to revert to the Committee on some issues discussed.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 3.32pm.

Paul Frew left the meeting at 3.55pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance and engagement with the Committee. The witnesses left the meeting at 3.58pm.

The Committee suspended at 3.59pm and resumed at 4.05pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek follow-up information from the witnesses on a number of issues, including initiatives to improve charities' access to banking facilities, factual information on ethical considerations, risk in respect of SME banking, and dividend policies.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek written comments from NI Chambers of Commerce on the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to engage with both the Youth Assembly and Young Enterprise NI with particular emphasis on surveying.

## **7. Matters Arising**

### **7.1 Minister of Finance – Levelling Up and Local Fund Successors**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding the design and delivery of successors to the Levelling Up/Local Growth Funding.

### **7.2 Department of Finance – Delegated Powers: Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill**

The Committee considered a Delegated Powers Memorandum for the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the Memorandum to the Examiner of Statutory Rules for a view. Members also agreed to seek a view on the Bill from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and Equality Commission. Finally, the Committee agreed to request a briefing from the Bill Clerk at the meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2025 and to schedule an oral briefing with Department of Finance officials on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

Members noted that an oral briefing from NI Assembly Research and Library Services on the Bill had been arranged for the meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2025.

### **7.3 Draft Budget 2025-26 – Response from the Executive Office Committee**

The Committee noted a response from the Executive Office Committee on the draft Budget 2025-26 which had already been published as part of the Committee's compilation report on scrutiny of the draft Budget 2025-26.

### **7.4 Public Accounts Committee Report on Major Capital Projects – Follow-Up**

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

The Committee considered a copy of the Public Accounts Committee Report on Major Capital Projects – Follow-up. Members noted that PAC retains primacy on this matter at the current time.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask if the Minister of Finance will highlight the Public Accounts Committee's new recommendations to his Ministerial colleagues, considering the pressures on capital budgets and, in many cases, the absence for baseline budget funding for high priority capital projects.

### **7.5 DALO Readout from Committee meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

The Committee noted the DALO readout extract issued following the Committee meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

### **7.6 DALO Readout Response – Legal Services Oversight Commissioner**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the timescale for required subordinate legislation to enact all the powers for a Legal Services Oversight Commissioner.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing on this subordinate legislation towards the end of June 2025.

The Chairperson reflected on his view that this matter would be more appropriately dealt with by the Justice Committee.

### **7.7 DALO Readout Response – C&AG Disclaiming of Department for the Economy Accounts for 2023-24**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding an audit opinion for the Department for the Economy Accounts for 2023-24.

Members noted an assurance from the Department of Finance that there is no risk of an actual overspend or control totals being breached and is an issue related to the consolidation and reconciliation process rather than a substantive issue with breaching the budget or Estimate control totals. This did not impact on the Net Cash Requirement control total or the related Supply debtor within the financial statements

The Committee also noted previous agreement for informal engagement with departmental Finance Directors and that a suitable date for would be arranged.

### **7.8 DALO Readout Response – Funding for NI Water**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding comments made by the Minister of Finance in relation to funding for NI Water.

Members noted that the Department does not recognise the level of underspend promoted by the Construction Employer's Federation and its belief that the level of underspend is overstated.

### **7.9 DALO Readout Response – Land and Property Services Rate Collection Targets**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding comparison of Land and Property Service target setting for Rate Collection with GB local authorities.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to raise this issue at the next substantial oral briefing with Land and Property Service officials.



### **7.10 DALO Readout Response – Public Sector Transformation Board Terms of Reference**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance enclosed a copy of the Terms of Reference for the Public Sector Transformation Board.

### **7.11 DALO Readout Response – NICS Estate Strategy**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance proposing a date for an update briefing on the first review of the NICS Office Estate Strategy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an update briefing towards the end of May 2025.

### **7.12 Department of Finance – Signing of Land Registration Contract**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding the Land Registration Procurement contract.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to receive an oral briefing from Department of Finance officials to consider the correspondence further.

The following officials joined the meeting at 4.24pm;

Sharon Smyth	Chief Executive, Construction & Procurement Delivery;
Christine Farrell	Director of Land Registry; and
Mike Beare	Director of Digital, Contracts and Accommodation Services.

The Committee noted apologies from Sharon Gallagher, Chief Executive of Land & Property Services.

Diane Forsythe declared an interest given previous related work in the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

The officials briefed the Committee on background and context for the Land Registration Contract including due diligence carried out by the Department of Finance and engagement with the Crown Services and Cabinet Office in this regard. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The officials left the meeting at 4.34pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider information on the financial impact of legal settlements, in closed session if appropriate.

#### **8. SR 2025/62 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Registration of Deaths and Still-Births) (Extension) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025**

The Committee considered a statutory rule laid by the Department of Finance which will extend the expiry date of the temporary provisions in the Coronavirus Act 2020 in relation to death and still-birth registration until 24<sup>th</sup> September 2025.

Members noted that the Statutory Rule is subject to confirmatory resolution and will come into operation after it is debated and approved in the Assembly.

Members noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules has not drawn this rule to the attention of the Assembly.

**Agreed:** The Committee considered SR 2025/62 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Registration of Deaths and Still-Births) (Extension) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

#### **9. SR 2025/70 The Recognition of Professional Qualification and Implementation of International Recognition Agreements (Amendment) (Extension to Switzerland etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025**

The Committee noted that SR 2025/70 The Recognition of Professional Qualification and Implementation of International Recognition Agreements (Amendment) (Extension to Switzerland etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 had come into operation after it was debated in the Assembly on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

## 10. Correspondence

i. The Committee considered correspondence from Lord Carlile of Berriew, Chair of the Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland regarding the Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee discussions about the application of EU law on type-approval of motor vehicles to Northern Ireland under the Windsor Framework.

Steve Aiken declared an interest as a Member of the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the correspondence to the Committee for Infrastructure and Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee.

ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Executive Office Committee regarding Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Finance for a direct response.

iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office Committee regarding the NI Investment Fund.

Paul Frew returned to the meeting at 4.40pm.

iv. The Committee noted a Hansard Transcript from the Department of Finance oral briefing on Budget 2025-26.

## 11. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Programme, as drafted.

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be after the Easter recess period, on 30<sup>th</sup> April and that arrangements would be put in place for Committee engagement at the Balmoral Show on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

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

## **12. Any Other Business**

Steve Aiken indicated that he may be attending Committee meetings remotely for a short period after Easter recess.

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

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2025 at 2.00pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.42pm.

**Matthew O'Toole**

**Chairperson, Committee for Finance**

**30 April 2025**