



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

19 November 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)
Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Deirdre Hargey MLA
Harry Harvey MLA
Brian Kingston MLA

Apologies: None

Virtual: Steve Aiken MLA
Gerry Carroll MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA
Eoin Tennyson MLA

In Attendance: Peter Hall Committee Clerk

Fiona Rooney Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk

Clairita Frazer Assistant Assembly Clerk

Tom Armstrong Assistant Assembly Clerk

Marion Johnson Clerical Supervisor

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:02pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

Diane Forsythe declared an interest as the Assembly Private Secretary for the Education Minister.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as a former UK Civil Servant.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1. Minister of Finance – Notice of Intention to make an Oral Statement & Ministerial Oral Statement on Strategic Roadmap on Rating Policy

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Finance giving Notice of Intention to make an Oral Statement to the Assembly on Tuesday 18th November 2025 to provide an update on the Strategic Roadmap for Rating Policy. Members also considered the statement itself.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Department of Finance on the Executive's timeline for changes to Rating Policy as outlined in the Statement.

Gerry Carroll and Eoin Tennyson joined the meeting at 2:06pm.

4. Department of Finance Permanent Secretary – Oral Briefing on issues relating to the Education Minister’s visit to a school in Israel.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard would provide a transcript of the briefing session.

Members noted a number of relevant background papers including correspondence from the Permanent Secretary outlining the parameters of his briefing and Department of Finance Internal Audit Reports.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2:10pm:

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| Neil Gibson | Department of Finance, Permanent Secretary; and |
| Catherine Shannon | Deputy Secretary, NICS HR; |
| Aisling Quinn | Director HR Policy; and |
| David Hughes | Director of Corporate Services. |

The officials provided the Committee with oral evidence on issues relating to the Code of Ethics, Internal Audit Reports and the new approach to recruitment of Administrative Officers.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including responsibility for adherence to the NICS Code of Ethics, Departmental Designated Officers responsible for oversight of the NICS Code of Ethics, Internal Audit Reports on Inefficiency Compensation Payments and on IT matters.

The Chairperson thanked the Permanent Secretary and officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 2:55pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek additional information from the Department of Finance on a number of issues including on Designated Officers in Departments and on violations of International Law and its applicability to the NICS Code of Ethics.

6. Draft Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 12 November 2025.

5. NI Fiscal Council Bill – Oral Briefing from the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard would provide a transcript of the oral evidence session.

Members noted a number of relevant background papers including the Department of Finance's response to the OECD submission to the Call for Evidence on the Bill and a copy of the OECD Review of the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council.

The following witnesses joined the meeting via Zoom at 2:56pm:

Seamus Coffey Chairperson; and

Niall Conroy Acting Chief Economist and Head of Secretariat

The witnesses provided the Committee with oral evidence on the Advisory Council and relevance to this Committee's deliberations on the NI Fiscal Council Bill.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including budget, economic forecasting powers, the comply or explain principle within the Advisory Council and autonomy over staffing matters.

Eoin Tennyson left the meeting at 3:40pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance, and the witnesses left the meeting at 3:43pm.

7. Matters Arising

7.1 Marshalled list of amendments for the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill

The Committee noted the updated Marshalled list of amendments for the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill. Members also noted that Final Stage of the Bill was scheduled for 2nd December 2025.

7.2 Notice of Amendments for the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill

The Committee noted the Notice of Amendments for the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill.

7.3 DALO Readout Extract – Meeting of 5th November 2025.

The Committee noted an extract from the DALO Readout issued following the meeting on 8th October 2025.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 3:45pm.

7.4 DALO Readout Response – Presbyterian Mutual Society

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding Financial Conduct Authority registration and compliance with financial services legislation.

7.5 Committee for Communities – Cross-Departmental briefing on Retrofitting and Future- Proofing Homes

The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Department of Finance requesting that officials attend a cross-departmental briefing on retrofitting and future-proofing homes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request the Hansard Transcript of the evidence session from the Communities Committee.

7.6 Committee for Communities – The Bytes Project

The Committee considered a response from the Committee for Communities confirming that it has not received any correspondence relating to the Bytes Project Initiative: Tech Secure Project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider scheduling a joint informal briefing with the Communities Committee to consider the Bytes Project Initiative further.

7.7 Committee for Communities – Reform of Building Regulations

The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Department of Finance regarding the reform of building regulations and associated matters.

7.8 Secretary of State NI – Local Growth Fund

The Committee considered a response from the RT Honourable Hilary Benn, SoS NI to the Committee Chair regarding the Local Growth Fund.

Diane Forsthye declared an interest as the Chair of the Assembly All-Party Group (APG) on the Voluntary and Community Sector and Brian Kingston declared an interest as a Member of the same APG.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State, welcoming his acknowledgement of concerns with the Local Growth Fund. Members also agreed to include a recent NICVA/Pivotal report on the Voluntary and Community Sector with this correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a written briefing from the Department of Finance on developments and work to expedite the development of the Local Growth Fund including a readout of the meeting between the Finance Minister and SoS of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government which took place on

22nd October, with a view to potentially holding an oral briefing session early next year.

Jemma Dolan left the meeting at 3:54pm.

7.9. Belfast Region - City Deal Executive Board – Mourne Mountain Gondola Project.

The Committee noted a response from the Belfast City Deal Executive Board regarding a specific timeframe for Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to submit an alternative proposal to the Mourne Mountains Gondola Project.

7.10 Chairpersons Liaison Group – Amendment to Civil Service Advertising Policy

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as a Member of the Chairpersons' Liaison Group.

The Committee noted a response from the Chairpersons' Liaison Group indicating that it had noted correspondence from the Minister of Finance confirming that the mandatory requirement to advertise all external recruitment opportunities in the three daily newspapers has been removed.

8. NI Fiscal Council Bill – Oral Briefing from NI Fiscal Council

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard would provide a transcript of the oral evidence session.

Members noted a number of relevant background papers including correspondence from the NI Fiscal Council on the Bill and the Department of Finance's response to the Fiscal Council's views on the Bill.

The following witnesses joined the meeting via Zoom at 3:57pm:

Sir Robert Chote

Chairperson, NI Fiscal Council; and

Jonathan McAdams Chief of Staff , NI Fiscal Council.

The witnesses provided the Committee with oral evidence on the Council's views on the NI Fiscal Council Bill.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as a former Treasury employee whilst Sir Robert Chote was Chairman of the Office of Budget Responsibility.

Jemma Dolan rejoined the meeting at 4:09pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including budgetary independence, additional functions conferred and appointments.

The Chairperson left the meeting at 4.25pm, with the Deputy Chairperson taking the Chair.

The Chairperson rejoined the meeting at 4.29pm and resumed the Chair.

Members also asked witnesses about the forthcoming multi-year budget process.

The witnesses confirmed that they were content with the explanation provided by the Department of Finance in relation to Clause 4 of the Bill.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance, and the witnesses left the meeting at 4:50pm.

9. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Committee Deliberations and Consideration of Legal Advice

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 4:51pm to consider legal advice on limitations on the scope of the Bill.

The Committee considered and discussed the legal advice provided.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 5:04pm.

The Committee moved into open session at 5:11pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to relevant Statutory Committees regarding the scope of the Bill and potential for future amendments to the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if it intends to bring forward any amendments to the Bill.

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance on queries raised by Members following the meeting on 24th September, which would be revisited during future deliberations on the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share this information with relevant Statutory Committees.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Executive Office Committee regarding Child Rights Screening related to the Bill provisions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the NI Children's Commissioner for information.

The Committee noted a Hansard Transcript of the RalSe briefing and Committee deliberations on the Bill which took place at last week's meeting.

Agreed: During discussions, Members also agreed to invite the Nevin Institute and Pivotal to share their views on the **NI Fiscal Council Bill** during a forthcoming oral evidence session with the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre.

Deirdre Hargey rejoined the meeting at 5:15pm.

Steve Aiken left the meeting at 5:15pm.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a Consumer Council report examining the relationship between transport and food accessibility for rural consumers;
 - ii. The Committee noted a Hansard transcript of a Department of Finance oral briefing on the LCM: Public Office (Accountability) Bill on 5 November 2025;
 - iii. The Committee noted a Hansard transcript of an OECD oral briefing on the NI Fiscal Council Bill on 5 November 2025;
 - iv. The Committee noted a Hansard transcript of a Department of Finance oral briefing on the Divorce Bill consultation;
 - v. The Committee noted the 50th Report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules;
- and

- vi. The Committee noted a press release from the Association of British Insurers on UK Insurance Premiums.

11. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme and noted future items to be scheduled including consideration of Rating Policy SL1s on 3rd December, consideration of a SL1 on Government Resources and Accounts on 26th November and the rescheduling of an oral briefing on the implementation of the Legal Complaints and Regulation Bill to the end of the financial year.

Members also noted that a list of items for the Minister's Oral Briefing on 10th December 2025 would be forwarded to the Department of Finance in advance.

Agreed: Given the anticipated Bill related workload in the New Year, the Committee agreed to start Committee meetings at the earlier time of 1pm with effect from 21st January 2026 for a period of approximately 2 months.

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

12. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for an urgent readout of the impact of the Budget Announcement made on 26th November, at the earliest possible opportunity and before any oral statement to the Assembly.

13. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 26 November 2025 at 2.00pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:21pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

26 November 2025