Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

1 July 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Dr Steve Aiken MBE MLA

Jemma Dolan MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Eoin Tennyson MLA

Apologies: Deirdre Hargey MLA

Virtual: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Harry Harvey MLA

Gerry Carroll MLA

In Attendance: Peter Hall Committee Clerk

Fiona Rooney Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk

Tom Armstrong Assistant Assembly Clerk

Stephen Magee Clerical Supervisor

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:12pm in public session.

The deputy Chairperson, Diane Forsythe assumed the Chair.

1. Apologies.

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests.

Diane Forsythe declared an interest as her father is currently the Chairperson of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

3. Chairperson's Business.

3.1 Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) – Invite – Evidence session on NI Executive Finances and Budgetary situation

Steve Aiken declared an interest as he will be attending talks on the Budgetary situation on Thursday.

The Committee considered an invitation from NIAC, for the Chairperson and deputy Chairperson to be question-asking "guests" during an evidence session on 15th July, in Westminster on the NI Executive Finances and the ongoing budgetary situation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the deputy Chair can attend.

3.2 Oireachtas Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure, Public Services Reform and Digitalisation and Taoiseach

The Committee considered an invitation for the Committee to attend an informal meeting with the Oireachtas Joint Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Clerk to continue preparations for the informal meeting.

3.3 Minister of Finance – Oral Ministerial Statement – 29th June

The Committee noted the Minister of Finance's Oral Statement made on 29th June 2026 relating to various Rating matters.

3.4 Minister of Finance – Oral Ministerial Statement – 29th June

The Committee noted the Minister of Finance's Oral Statement made on 29th June 2026 relating to the 25th meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in Special EU Programmes sectoral format which took place on 10th June 2026.

The Committee discussed the lateness of briefing papers and outstanding DALO Readout responses. In noting the agreed protocols and agreements for the provision of papers and responses to the Committee, Members reflected on the need for improvement in the new session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Clerk to write to the DALO and arrange a meeting with the Permanent Secretary to discuss further.

3.5 Kenneth Gibson MSP Presiding Officer

The Committee noted a response from Kenneth Gibson MSP following our letter of congratulations on his election as Presiding Officer.

3.6 Introduction of a Commercial Payments Bill and Consequential Amendments to the Construction Contracts (NI) Order 1997

The Committee considered a memo from the Department on the Introduction of a Commercial Payments Bill and Consequential Amendments to the Construction Contracts (NI) Order 1997.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Public Accounts Committee and the Northern Ireland Audit Office to ask on the progress of recommendations from the Capital Projects Report.

3.7 Invitation to Sea Across Society Launch Event

The Committee noted an invitation to attend the Sea Across Society launch event on Tuesday 3rd November.

3.8 Consultation on Non-Domestic Rating Policy

The Committee noted a letter from the Minister of Finance and the consultation document on Non-Domestic Rating Policy.

3.9 Freedom of Information and Correspondence during summer recess

Agreed: The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Chairperson and deputy Chairperson to submit views on the releasing or withholding of information in any non-routine or contentious Freedom of Information requested received by the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that, should the need arise, urgent correspondence could be disposed of via email over the summer recess period and reflected in the Minutes of Proceedings for the next scheduled meeting of the Committee.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 24th June 2026.

5. Matters Arising

5.1. Minister of Finance – Northern Ireland Place – Name Project

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Minister of Finance to the Communities Committee regarding the transfer of the NI Place Names Project to the Department for Communities.

5.2. Department of Finance – Public Office (Accountability) Bill – Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM)

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding the timeframe for the LCM related to the Public Office (Accountability) Bill.

5.3. Department of Finance – Oral Briefing on Shared Property

The Committee noted that an oral briefing on Shared Property would be scheduled later in the new Assembly session.

5.4. Department of Finance – Update on the timeline for cashflow forecast/spend profiles

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance confirming that a monthly report will be provided showing updated cashflow forecast/spend profiles, remaining VoA, and VoA drawdown pattern compared to previous years.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to email these reports to Members over the recess period.

5.5. Department for the Economy – Support for Energy Costs

The Committee noted a response from the Department for the Economy regarding the business case for the comparable Renewables Obligation.

5.6. House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee - Follow-up Inquiry on Strengthening Northern Ireland’s voice in the context of the Windsor Framework

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

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee regarding its follow-up Inquiry on Strengthening Northern Ireland’s voice in the context of the Windsor Framework.

5.7. House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee - Emission Type Approval Procedures for Light Passenger and Commercial Vehicles

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee to the Secretary of State regarding the implementation of mandatory dual vehicle type approvals.

5.8. Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) – Swift Bricks

The Committee considered a response from the RSPB regarding legislative change to make the use of Swift Bricks mandatory.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to advise the RSPB that the Department of Finance would be best placed to advise on its query.

5.9. Department of Finance – Business Plan 2026-27

The Committee considered the Department of Finance Business Plan 2026-27

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing on this matter in the Autumn

5.10. Public Accounts Committee Review of the Primacy of NIAO Reports

Jemma Dolan declared an interest as a Member of the Public Accounts Committee

The Committee noted a memo from the Public Accounts Committee on its decision to retain ‘Primacy’ on the NIAO report into A Strategic Review of the Planning Appeals Commission and to release the NIAO report into Flood Risk Management in Northern Ireland

5.11. DALO Extract – Meeting 18 March 2026

The Committee noted the DALO Extract issued following the Committee meeting on 18 March 2026.

5.12. DALO Readout Response – 18 March 2026 – Department of Education Advance

The Committee noted a response from the Department the recent advance made to the Department of Education from the NI Consolidated Fund

5.13. DALO Extract – Meeting 20 May 2026

The Committee noted the DALO Extract issued following the Committee meeting on 20 May 2026.

5.14. DALO Readout Response – 20 May 2026 – Enhancing Financial Services Bill

The Committee noted a response from the Department on the Department’s input to the Enhancing Financial Services Bill.

5.15. Update on Census User Needs Consultation and Next Steps

The Committee considered a memo from the Department on the public consultation on the Census User Needs and next steps

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing on this matter in the Autumn

5.16. Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG)

The Committee noted a letter from the Minister of Finance to the Committee for the Executive Office details of any bids submitted by Departments since the launch of the EVAWG Strategic Framework.

6. Department of Finance – Oral Briefing – Outturn and Forecast Outturn including wider Budgetary matters

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

The Committee considered relevant papers for this session, including a Clerk's Memo and departmental briefing paper.

The Committee noted an Assembly Question answered by the Finance Minister on 24th June indicating that there have been no Ministerial Directions issued to Permanent Secretaries to exceed the 45% authorised by the Vote on Account 2026-27.

The Committee also noted copy correspondence from the Department of Finance Permanent Secretary to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee regarding the current budgetary situation and the Permanent Secretary's role.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.39pm;

Patrick Neeson	Director, Supply Division, Department of Finance
Maryann Smith	Director, Central Expenditure Division, Department of Finance

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2.46pm.

Matthew O'Toole joined the meeting at 2.47pm.

The officials briefed the Committee on outturn and forecast outturn data for the coming financial year.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including; the talks scheduled for Hillsborough on Thursday, the impact of the current budgetary situation on departments and Westminster Estimates.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 3.12pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for further details on the Executive Office Financial Transactions Capital underspend.

7. Performance and Culture of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) – Committee Deliberations

Harry Harvey joined the meeting at 3.12pm.

Agreed: The Committee moved into closed session at 3.13pm to consider correspondence related to oral evidence sessions for the Inquiry.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 3.23pm.

The Committee returned to public session at 3.27pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Clerk to write back to a witness who has refused the Committee's invitation to appear with a renewed offer.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Hansard from the session with ICTU to be added to the evidence base.

8. Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill – Committee Deliberations

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

The Committee considered a Clerk's memo outlining the responses received to the Committee's Call for Evidence on the Bill. Members reflected on the contents of the responses.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the issues raised in the evidence base for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance which indicated that Departmental officials would attend Committee on 7th October 2026 to address issues raised during the Committee Stage of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this oral evidence session to the Forward Work Programme.

9. Department of Finance - Oral Briefing – City & Growth Deals

The Committee considered relevant papers for this session, including a Clerk's Memo, briefing paper and the latest quarterly update progress report.

The following official joined the meeting at 3.37pm;

Jillian Gilmore Director of Strategic Funding Division

The official briefed the Committee on the current status of City & Growth Deals and the next update for the Committee will be submitted shortly.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including; the current status of the Newry, Mourne and Down project, the impact of the current budgetary situation and the Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge.

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 3.56pm.

The Chairperson thanked the official for their attendance, and the official left the meeting at 4.09pm.

The Committee was suspended at 4.11pm

The Committee resumed at 4.12pm.

Jemma Dolan left the meeting at 4.12pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a further session on Strategic Funding in the Autumn.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for an urgent update on the Newry, Mourne and Down project and to request that the Department keep the Committee up to date on the impact of a new Prime Minister on all projects.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Infrastructure to ask why the Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge project had to be paused due to the A5 judgment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for the Economy to ask about the current status of university capital funding.

10. Correspondence

i. The Committee noted the Department of Finance Special Advisers Report 2025-26.

ii. The Committee considered the Committee for the Economy’s Call for Evidence on the Regional Balance Bill.

    Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if there is any policy locus for the provisions of the Bill, to inform a response to the Committee for the Economy.

iii. The Committee noted the 70th Report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

iv. The Committee noted the Ulster University Strategic Policy Unit Report – “Unlocking NI’s potential: A Framework for Economic Transformation”

v. The Committee considered the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs’ Call for Evidence on the Hunting with Dogs Bill.

    Agreed: The Committee to ask the Department of Finance if there is any policy locus for the provisions of the Bill, to inform a response to the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

vi. The Committee considered correspondence from a group of students from St Mary’s College regarding Investment in STEM Teacher Training.

    Steve Aiken declared an interest as part of the APG on STEM.

    Agreed: The Committee agreed to inform the Committee does not pursue individual cases not linked to the strategic priorities of the Committee.

vii. The Committee noted the Hansard for last week's deliberations on the Committee Report into the LCM of the Cyber Security and Resilience Bill and that Committee has already agreed that this is to be added to the report.

viii. The Committee noted NISRA's 205-26 Annual Report and Accounts

11. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme and a number of upcoming briefings.

Members noted that the Forward Work Programme for the new session would be considered at the first meeting in September.

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

12. Any Other Business

The Chairperson passed on the Committee's thanks to the Committee Staff on their work during this session.

13. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 9th September 2026 at 2pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.20pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

9th September 2026