



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

1 October 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)
Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Jemma Dolan MLA (until 4:00pm)
Deirdre Hargey MLA
Harry Harvey MLA
Brian Kingston MLA
Eoin Tennyson MLA

Apologies: None

Virtual: Steve Aiken MLA
Gerry Carroll MLA
Jemma Dolan MLA (from 4:16pm)

In Attendance: Peter Hall Committee Clerk

Fiona Rooney Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk

Clairita Frazer Assistant Assembly Clerk

Tom Armstrong Assistant Assembly Clerk

Stephen Magee Clerical Supervisor

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:08pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

None.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Queens University Belfast (QUB) Discussion on AI and the Future of Work

The Committee noted that the Chairperson and deputy Chairperson had been invited to a discussion in QUB on Wednesday 22 October regarding AI and the Future of Work.

3.2 Baby Loss Awareness Week

The Committee discussed events to take place during Baby Loss Awareness Week, including a Sands Ribbon Display Ceremony hosted by Jemma Dolan on Thursday 9th October and a Committee Event on Tuesday 14th October 2025.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 24 September 2025.

The Committee moved to agenda item 6.

6. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Committee Deliberations

Agreed: Members agreed to move into closed session to receive procedural advice on the Bill.

The Committee moved into closed session at 2:11pm.

The following official joined the meeting at 2:11pm:

Stephen Orme, Bill Clerk.

The Committee discussed the Delegated Powers within the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill and a response from the Assembly's Audit Committee concerning Clause 20 of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill.

Members also discussed a submission from the OECD to the Committee's Call for Evidence on the NI Fiscal Council Bill and the requirement for an oral briefing on the Delegated Powers within the NI Fiscal Council Bill.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2:12pm.

Eoin Tennyson joined the meeting at 2:17pm.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:20pm.

Diane Forsthye and Jemma Dolan declared interests as current Members of the Assembly Audit Committee.

The Chairperson thanked the official for their attendance and the official left the meeting at 2:31pm.

The Committee returned to open session at 2:31pm.

The Committee considered a response from the Economy Committee regarding provisions in the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill relevant to its remit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the Economy Committee's response to the evidence base for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission legal advice in relation to Clause 20 of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send the Audit Committee's correspondence regarding Clause 20 of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill to the Department of Finance for comment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that an oral briefing from the Examiner of Statutory Rules on Delegated Powers within the NI Fiscal Council Bill was not required at this time.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a closed session on the NI Fiscal Council Bill at next week's meeting.

5. Matters Arising

5.1. DALO Readout Extract 10 September 2025

The Committee noted an extract from the DALO Readout following the meeting on 10 September 2025.

5.2. DALO Readout Response – Dilapidation Bill

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance concerning Land and Property Services' locus relating to the Dilapidation Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for details of any modelling conducted on anticipated financial impact of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a NIL return to the Committee for Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Affairs' Call for Evidence on the Dilapidation Bill.

5.3. DALO Readout Response – Departmental Reserve Claims

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the making of Reserve Claims by Departments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for further information in relation to potential Reserve Claims associated with the Redress Service for those affected by Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries, and Workhouses.

5.4. DALO Readout Response – A5 High Court Judgement and October Monitoring Round

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding implications of the A5 High Court Judgement and timing of the October Monitoring Round.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to update; other Statutory Committees regarding to the October Monitoring Round and, the Committee for Infrastructure regarding the A5 High Court Judgement.

5.5. DALO Readout Response – Chief Scientific and Technology Officer

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding the allocation of time for the Chief Scientific and Technology Officer's work for the Public Sector Transformation Board.

5.6. DALO Readout Response – Presentation of Bids and Allocation for Monitoring Rounds

The Committee noted an assurance from the Department of Finance regarding the presentation of bids and allocations within Monitoring Round Statements.

5.7. DALO Readout Response – City & Growth Deals

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the alternative gondola project in Newry, Mourne and Down District.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to seek clarity over timescales and expectations for an alternative project.

5.8. DALO Readout Response – Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance on comments received by the NI Children's Commissioner relating to provisions within the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy the Department's response to the NI Children's Commissioner and to copy both the original comment and response to the Executive Office Committee and Economy Committee.

5.9. DALO Readout Response – Civil Service Advertising Policy

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding implications of the change in the Civil Service Advertising Policy.

5.10. DALO Readout Response – Hybrid Working Policy

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the NICS Hybrid Working Policy. Some Members voiced their concerns about the lack of central monitoring within the Hybrid Working Policy and absence of a complete data set. This issue would be considered as part of the future Committee Inquiry.

5.11. DALO Readout Response – Casement Park Funding

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding funding for Casement Park.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this issue further in due course.

5.12. DALO Readout Response – Assembly & Executive Review Committee – Cross Cutting Strategies

The Committee considered a draft response to the Assembly & Executive Review Committee regarding that Committee's Review on Cross Cutting Executive Strategies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue the response as drafted.

5.13. NI Fiscal Council Bill

The Committee considered an extract from Managing Public Money in NI, the OECD Principles for Independent Fiscal Institutions and a submission from OECD to the Call for Evidence on the NI Fiscal Council Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add these documents to the evidence base for the Committee Stage of the Bill and to forward the OECD submission to the Department of Finance for comment on the issues raised. Members also noted that the submission would be discussed in greater detail, in closed session, at next week's meeting.

Deirdre Hargey and Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 3:12pm.

7. SR 2025/150 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Registration of Deaths and Still-Births) (Extension) (No.2) 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 24th March 2026.

Members noted that the Statutory Rule is subject to confirmatory resolution and will be debated and approved in the Assembly.

Members noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules has indicated that the Rule does not require to be drawn to the special attention of the Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2025/150 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Registration of Deaths and Still-Births) (Extension) (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

8. Budget 2026-29/30 (Resource 26-27 to 28-29 & Capital 26-27 to 29-30) Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance

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

Members noted a briefing paper provided by the Department of Finance which had previously been considered by the Committee. The Committee also noted correspondence from the Audit Committee to the Department of Finance regarding budget figures for the Northern Ireland Audit Office, Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman and Northern Ireland Assembly Commission.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3:13pm:

Gavin Patrick, Director of Finance, Department of Finance;

Seanin Ferguson, Financial Management Branch, Department of Finance;

Jeff McGuinness, Head of Budget Sustainability, Department of Finance; and

Aidan McMahon, Director, Fiscal Policy Division, Department of Finance.

The officials provided the Committee with a briefing on the Budget 26-29/30 Information Gathering Exercise and queries raised during consideration of the issue at last week's meeting. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including timing of the multi-year budget, income generating vacancies, Fiscal Framework, Revenue Raising and Office Estate Assessment.

Harry Harvey left the meeting at 3:32pm and rejoined the meeting at 3:58pm.

Gerry Carroll rejoined the meeting at 3:33pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 3:59pm.

9. Outturn and Forecast Outturn Data – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance

Members noted Outturn and Forecast Outturn data for June, July and August which had been provided by the Department of Finance.

The following officials joined the meeting at 4:00pm:

Maryann Smith, Director of Central Expenditure Division, Department of Finance; and

Emer Rice, Head of In year Monitoring, Department of Finance.

The officials provided the Committee with a briefing on the most up to date position regarding Outturn and Forecast Outturn Data for all Departments. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including current overcommitment levels, pay pressures and potential Barnett Consequentials.

Deirdre Hargey rejoined the meeting at 4:04pm.

Jemma Dolan left the meeting at 4:07pm and rejoined remotely at 4:16pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 4:24pm.

10. Land Registration Legislation Project Consultation – Written Briefing from the Department of Finance

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department of Finance on the launch of the Land Registration Legislation Project consultation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Department of Finance in due course and to request detail on projected savings of the Land Registration Implementation Project, which will be responsible for delivering the new digital solution for Land Registry and if there will be any procurement anticipated as a result of this Project.

11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the Public Income and Expenditure Account for the year ending 31 March 2025;
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding the Department of Finance's Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of its Equality Scheme and Section 75 duties; and
- iii. The Committee noted the 45th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

Members discussed aspects of the Department of Finance's Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of its Equality Scheme and Section 75 duties.

12. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

The Committee Clerk updated Members on the current position with the Public Office (Accountability) Bill – LCM.

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

13. Any Other Business

Members discussed an anticipated response from the First Minister and deputy First Minister and Minister of Finance regarding appraisal and performance review arrangements for the Head of the Civil Service.

Steve Aiken declared an interest in respect of recently tabled Assembly Questions.

14. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 8 October 2025 at 2.00pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:40pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

8 October 2025