



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

11 March 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Steve Aiken MLA

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Apologies: Eoin Tennyson MLA

Virtual: Gerry Carroll MLA

Jemma Dolan 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 2:05pm in public session.

1. Apologies.

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests.

None.

3. Chairperson's Business.

3.1. Joint response from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury & Secretary of State for NI – Reserve Claim

3.12. Final Stage - Budget Bill 2026

The Committee considered a joint response from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to its correspondence regarding the NI Executive 2025-26 Reserve Claim. Members also considered an extract from the Hansard transcript of the Final Stage of the Budget Bill, 10th March 2026, which referenced the “open book exercise”.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to again request a copy of the Terms of Reference for the “open book exercise” as per previous agreement reached on 25th February 2026.

3.2. Minister of Finance – Oral Statement – Chancellor’s Spring Forecast

The Committee noted a copy of the Minister’s Statement on the Chancellor’s Spring Forecast.

3.13. AQW 39557/22-27 Response to Phillip Brett regarding Treasury Funding for the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligations (NIRO)

Members considered a response to an Assembly Question regarding £81m Resource AME set aside for 2026-27 to 2028-29.

Diane Forsthye declared an interest as a Member of the Economy Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request clarity from the Department of Finance on the status of this additional funding and related issues.

3.3. Department of Finance - Chancellor’s Spring Forecast- Impact on Executive Funding

The Committee considered a briefing note from the Department of Finance with a summary of the Chancellor’s announcement, setting out the Executive’s control totals for Resource and Capital.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this information to other Statutory Committees and the NI Assembly Audit Committee.

3.4. House of Commons Library – 2026 Spring Forecast: A Summary

The Committee noted a research briefing on the 2026 Spring Forecast produced by the House of Commons Library.

3.5. House of Commons – Hansard from Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

The Committee noted a Hansard transcript of oral evidence from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, on 4th March 2026.

3.6. Response to the Committee for the Executive Office – Windsor Framework and wider EU issues.

The Committee considered a draft response to the Committee for the Executive Office regarding work the Finance Committee has carried out in relation to the Windsor Framework and wider EU issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Executive Office Committee.

3.7. Committee for the Economy – Economic Impact of Business Rates

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for the Economy regarding the economic impact of business rates and proposal for a joint evidence session on this issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that a focused evidence session could potentially take place at a later date and that the Clerk would write to the Clerk of the Economy Committee to begin to explore arrangements.

Jemma Dolan joined the meeting at 2:24pm.

3.8. Response from the Northern Ireland Office – Local Growth Fund

The Committee noted a response from the Northern Ireland Office regarding the Local Growth Fund indicating that the Committee's correspondence had been transferred to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

3.9. Bank of Ireland – Request to brief Committee

The Committee considered a request from the Bank of Ireland to brief the Committee on fraud and security trends.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as a relative works for a bank in a similar area.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send details of the request to the Department of Finance to seek detail on what related workstreams it was progressing. Members would then consider next steps, based on this response.

3.10. Association of British Insurers (ABI) – Graduated Drivers Licence

Following previous discussions on the matter, the Committee noted that ABI have indicated that they are in discussions with the Minister of Infrastructure and that the ABI have been invited to give evidence to the Infrastructure Committee later this month.

3.11. Joint Informal meeting with the Communities Committee – Bytes TechSure Pilot

The Chairperson reflected on the joint informal meeting with the Bytes TechSure Pilot which took place on Tuesday 10th March 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerks of both Committee would liaise on ways in which Members can take forward issues raised at the meeting.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 4th March 2026.

5. Matters Arising

5.1. DALO extract - Meeting on 28th January 2026

The Committee noted a DALO extract from the Committee meeting on 28th January 2026.

5.2. & 5.3 DALO Readout Responses – Victoria Hall Disposal

The Committee noted a response from Department of Finance regarding the recent disposal of Victoria Hall including detail on the rationale for the price differential and an apology for the gap in the provision of Property Sales Information to the Committee.

5.4. DALO Readout Response – Sale of Clarence Court

The Committee considered a response from Department of Finance providing detail on the recent sale of Clarence Court. Members expressed concerns with the apparent disparity between initial valuations and subsequent sale amounts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek information from the Department of Finance on current property sales and those expected to be completed in the coming months.

5.5. Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) – Cyber Security and Resilience Bill

The Committee noted agreement from the Department of Finance to provide the Committee with updates on progress in relation to this Bill and associated LCM.

5.6. DALO extract - Meeting on 18th February 2026

The Committee noted a DALO extract from the Committee meeting on 18 February 2026.

5.7. DALO Readout response – SEUPB Accounts

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the certification of the SEUPB 2024 Accounts. Members expressed their concern about the delay in certification.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a date for completion of the certification of Accounts.

5.8. DALO Readout response – Match Funding

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance providing information and data on match funding previously provided by the Executive for the European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund.

5.9. DALO Readout Response – City and Growth Deals

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance providing a further update on the Mid South West Governance Arrangements and the Mourne Mountains Gateway Alternative Proposal.

5.12. & 5.13 Department of Finance – City and Growth Deals Cost Increases

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance outlining how cost increases and shortfalls affecting some City and Growth Deal projects are being managed and mitigated.

5.10. Department of Finance – Future Public Procurement (Economic Security) Bill

The Committee noted a written briefing from the Department of Finance on a future Public Procurement (Economic Security) Bill, including an assessment of the implications of reform proposals; in particular three reforms which would be beneficial to public bodies and suppliers here.

5.11. Department of Finance - Dormant Assets Northern Ireland Funding

The Committee noted an update from the Department of Finance on Dormant Assets Funding, the Strategic Action Plan for Dormant Assets and the Annual Report and Accounts for 2024-25.

5.14. & 5.15 DALO Readout Response – Land and Property Services (LPS) briefing on 28th January

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance following the oral evidence session with LPS on 28th January 2026.

5.16. Department of Finance – Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) Tracker

The Committee noted the latest LCM tracker from the Department of Finance.

6. SL1 The Valuation (Telecommunications Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee noted that the Department of Finance proposes to make a statutory rule: The Valuation (Telecommunications Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 which will update existing Regulations by replacing or revising the names of gas transportation companies listed in the Schedule of Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010. Members noted that the Department of Finance had submitted a SL1 letter, a draft Statutory Rule and draft Explanatory and Financial Memorandum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a call for views for the SL1, and to publish the SL1, the draft Statutory Rule and any relevant documents from the Department of Finance on the Committee website.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Committee staff would seek information from the Department of Finance, where necessary, on any matters raised during the SL1 stage, including in the call for views.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish any responses received to the Committee call for views on the SL1, after they have been considered by the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note receipt of the proposed statutory rule and to consider it at the meeting on 15th April 2026.

Members were content that an oral briefing from officials was not necessary at this stage.

7. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Consideration of Committee Report

The Committee considered a number of papers provided to assist with their deliberations on the Report, including a Clerk's Memo, a Clause by Clause table for the Bill, a Hansard transcript of oral evidence session with the Department of Finance on 25th February, a copy of the Bill and the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum for the Bill .

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard should report on the session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Department of Finance on the status of and process for amendments to the Bill.

There were no amendments proposed by Members.

Title Page, Contents Page, Powers, Membership and List of Abbreviations and Acronyms.

The Committee considered the Title page, Contents Page, Powers, Membership and List of Abbreviations and Acronyms as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Title page, Contents Page, Powers, Membership and List of Abbreviations and Acronyms stand part of the Report

Executive Summary.

The Committee considered the Executive Summary as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Executive Summary stand part of the Report.

Introduction.

The Committee considered the Introduction as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Introduction stand part of the Report.

Committee Approach.

The Committee considered the Committee Approach section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee Approach section stand part of the Report.

Consideration of the Bill.

The Committee considered the Consideration of the Bill section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Consideration of the Bill section stand part of the Report.

Clause by Clause Consideration.

The Committee considered the Clause by Clause Consideration section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clause by Clause Consideration section stand part of the Report.

Clause by Clause Scrutiny of the Bill.

The Committee considered the Clause by Clause Scrutiny of the Bill section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clause by Clause Scrutiny of the Bill section stand part of the Report.

Appendices.

The Committee considered the Appendices section as drafted. Members noted that these would be updated with today's Minutes of Proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Appendices section stand part of the Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Report on the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill be the 9th Report of the Committee for Finance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the report would be laid in the Assembly Business Office and published on the Committee webpages in due course.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy the Bill report to the Minister of Finance in advance of the Consideration Stage of the Bill.

8. Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill– Informal and Formal Clause by Clause Consideration & Initial Consideration of Committee Report

The Committee considered a number of papers provided to assist with their deliberations on the Bill, including a Clerk's Memo, an alternative amendment regarding the economic impact of public finance decisions, a response from the Department of Finance regarding the Committee's deliberations on the Bill, Clause by Clause table, the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill and the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum for the Bill. Members also noted a draft copy of the Committee Report on the Bill, correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding amendments to the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum (EFM) of the Bill, an amended version of the EFM and Notice of Amendments to the Bill.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 3:07pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session to undertake the informal Clause by Clause deliberations on the Bill.

The Committee moved into closed session at 3:08pm.

Deirdre Hargey rejoined the meeting at 3:23pm.

Members discussed the proposed amendment regarding the impact of public finance decisions on the wider NI economy.

Members discussed the individual Clauses of the Bill, reflecting on evidence and comments on each. Members also discussed the Department's proposed amendments to the EFM.

The Committee moved into open session at 4:07pm to undertake its formal Cause by Clause consideration of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clause-by-Clause Consideration should be reported by Hansard.

The Committee commenced its formal Clause-by-Clause consideration of the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill.

Clause 1- Northern Ireland Fiscal Council

The Committee considered Clause 1 as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 1 as drafted.

Clause 2 – Main Functions

The Committee considered Clause 2 as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 2 as drafted.

Clause 3 – Budget Assessment Reports

The Committee considered Clause 3 as drafted.

The Chairperson reflected that the Committee had indicated that it was not content to support an amendment regarding the impact of public finance decisions on the wider NI economy. However, individual Members are free to pursue amendments as they wish. The Chair wished to put on record that he supports the principle of the Council being able to assess the impact on the wider NI economy of decisions regarding public finances.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 3 as drafted.

Clause 4 – Fiscal Sustainability Reports

The Committee considered Clause 4 as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 4 as drafted.

Clause 5 – Power to Confer Additional Functions

The Committee considered Clause 5 as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 5 as drafted.

Clause 6 - How the Council is to perform its functions

The Committee considered Clause 6 as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 6 as drafted.

Clause 7 - Consequential amendments

The Committee considered Clause 7 as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 7 as drafted.

Clause 8 - Meaning of certain expressions

The Committee considered Clause 8 as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 8 as drafted.

Clause 9 - Commencement and Short Title

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 9 as drafted

Schedules

Members discussed some points which would be reflected in the Committee Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Schedules as drafted.

Explanatory and Financial Memorandum

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum, subject to amendments as detailed by the Department of Finance in correspondence to the Committee received 9th March 2026.

Long Title

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Long Title of the Bill.

The Committee gave initial consideration to its draft Report on the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill and noted that the Clause by Clause section would be amended following today's deliberations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule final consideration of the Committee's report on the Bill for next week's meeting.

9. Census 2031 – Written Briefing from Department of Finance

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department of Finance on Census 2031.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider scheduling an oral briefing on this matter at a suitable time, after Legislative and Inquiry work had been completed.

10. Budget 2026-2029/30 – Consideration of evidence from other Statutory Committees

The Committee noted a number of responses from the following Statutory Committees: Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Education, Infrastructure, Justice and from the NI Assembly Audit Committee on their respective scrutiny of the draft Budget 2026-2029/30.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing on Budget-related matters for the meeting on 15th April 2026.

11. Inquiry into Performance and Culture of the Northern Ireland Civil Service

The Committee noted a email received from an individual which would be added to the evidence base for the Inquiry and Committee report in due course. Members noted a response from the Department of Finance which indicated that an oral briefing on the NICS People Strategy would take place on 25th March 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for the rationale for generalist Deputy Principal recruitment in light of previous Public Accounts Committee's recommendations on the need for specialist posts within the NICS. This would also be followed up during the oral briefing on the NICS People Strategy on 25th March 2026.

12. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the NIPSO Report for 2024-25 which was laid in the Assembly Business Office on 2nd March 2026.
- ii. The Committee noted a Hansard transcript of a recent oral evidence session with the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council on the draft Budget 2026-2029/30.
- iii. The Committee noted the February update from the Youth Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would explore the potential for an oral briefing from the Youth Assembly on the Marriage Bill at an appropriate time.

- iv. The Committee noted a Health and Safety Executive NI consultation document on Proposals for the H&S (Miscellaneous Repeals, Revocations and Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

13. Draft Forward Work Programme

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

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

14. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to explore the potential for a joint letter from the Interparliamentary Finance Committee Forum to the MHCLG on concerns around the funding spilt of the Local Growth Fund.

Members also welcomed forthcoming consideration of delegated legislation flowing the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Act. The Clerk undertook to circulate information about a Baby Loss Event to take place in Parliament Buildings on 14th March 2026.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 4:26pm.

15. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 18th March 2026 at 2pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the tabled pack for the meeting on 18th March 2026 would be issued on the morning of the meeting due to the Public Holiday on 17th March 2026.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:27pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

18th March 2026