



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

17 September 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Steve Aiken MLA

Phillip Brett MLA

Paul Frew MLA

Eoin Tennyson MLA

Apologies: None

Virtual: Gerry Carroll MLA

Jemma Dolan MLA

Deirdre Hargey MLA

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 2:05pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

Diane Forsythe declared an interest as a Member of both the NI Assembly's Audit Committee and Public Accounts Committee which related to some later agenda items.

3. Chairperson's Business

None.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 10 September 2025.

5. Matters Arising

5.1. Department of Finance – 2025-26 July (R4) Outturn and Forecast Outturn

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Department of Finance on the 2025-26 July Outturn and Forecast Outturn pending an oral briefing scheduled for 1st October 2025. Members indicated that they would be raising the issue of Financial Transactions Capital with officials at this briefing.

5.2. Department of Finance – NI Departmental Expenditure Webpages

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding the publication of a new webpage setting out NI Executive Spending over the period 2016-17 to 2024-25. Members reflected on greater transparency and openness that this webpage would bring to the wider public's awareness of government spending and fiscal matters.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:11pm.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2:12pm.

5.3. NI Assembly Audit Committee - Budgets 2026-2029/30 Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) and Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (NIAC)

Diane Forsythe and Jemma declared interests as Members of the NI Assembly Audit Committee.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Audit Committee to the Minister of Finance seeking views on the Budgets 2026-2029/30 for the NIAO, NIPSO and NIAC, pending a response from the Minister of Finance in due course.

5.4. Department of Finance – Cyber Security and Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding a delay to the Introduction of the Cyber Security and Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill and associated Legislative Consent.

5.5. Minister of Finance – Public Office (Accountability) Bill

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister regarding the Introduction of the Public Office (Accountability) Bill and potential Legislative Consent.

The Clerk updated the Committee on discussions with the Department of Finance regarding Legislative Consent Motions since the last Committee meeting before summer recess.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward both memoranda to other Statutory Committees.

5.6. Department of Finance – Schedule of Secondary Legislation

The Committee considered an indicative schedule of secondary legislation from the Department of Finance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that the Department inform the Committee of any changes or additions to the schedule.

5.7. Committee for the Economy – Public Procurement – SMEs, Microbusinesses and Social Enterprises

The Committee noted correspondence from the Economy Committee to the Department of Finance seeking an update on the publication of statistics showing the extent of public sector contracting to SMEs, microbusinesses and social enterprises and the location of the relevant businesses and further information on the impact of the changes made to the low value tendering process.

5.8 Protective Mothers NI - Correspondence

The Committee considered correspondence from Protective Mothers NI regarding family court and safeguarding systems, domestic abuse response and related matters. Members noted that other Departments were taking the lead in relation to the issues raised.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond to the correspondent indicating that the Committee does not have a policy locus in the issues referenced and that the Committee is not an appropriate authority for whistle blowing.

6. Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill – Bill Report Consideration

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

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 Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill be the 6th 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.

Members noted that an electronic Bill folder for the NI Fiscal Council Bill and Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill had been circulated in advance of today's meeting and these would be updated on a regular basis.

7. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Assembly Research & Information Services Oral Briefing (RaISe)

Agreed: Members agreed that the oral briefing should be reported by Hansard and that the research paper would be added to the Bill's evidence base, Committee webpages and Committee Report in due course.

The following official joined the meeting at 2:25pm:

Eileen Regan Senior Research Officer, RaISe

The official provided the Committee with a brief overview of the RaISe paper and its conclusions. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Steve Aiken declared an interest in relation to a relevant constituency matter linked to a Bill provision.

Diane Forsythe declared an interest as a Member of the NI Assembly's Audit Committee.

Phillip Brett joined the meeting at 3:16pm.

The Chairperson thanked the official for their attendance and the official left the meeting at 3:20pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send the research paper to the Statutory Committees with a direct locus in the Bill provisions, drawing appropriate scrutiny points to their attention.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send the relevant scrutiny points to the Department of Finance for a response.

8. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Bill Clerk Overview Briefing and Motion to extend Committee Stage

9. Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill – Bill Clerk Overview Briefing and Motion to extend Committee Stage

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session to receive advice on both Bills and consider its approach to Committee Stage for both.

The meeting moved into closed session at 3:21pm.

The following official joined the meeting at 3:21pm:

Stephen Orme Bill Clerk

Members received advice from the Bill Clerk on the provisions within both Bills, clarification and information was provided and considered as required.

The Committee considered its approach to Committee Stage for the Bills and an indicative combined timetable for the Committee Stage of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill and NI Fiscal Council Bill.

The Committee returned to public session at 3:53pm.

The Chairperson reflected on discussions and the need to give appropriate consideration to substantial issues in both Bills. The Chairperson then put the questions to extend the Committee Stage for both the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill and NI Fiscal Council Bill, indicating that the extension dates should be seen as deadlines as opposed to targets.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 27th March 2026, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill.

Agreed: The Committee for Finance agreed that in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 27th March 2026, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill..

The Committee considered a response from the Welsh Finance Committee to the Call for Evidence on the NI Fiscal Council Bill.

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

The Committee considered a response from the Infrastructure Committee to the Call for Evidence on the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the response to the evidence base for the Committee Stage of the Bill. Members also agreed to ask the Infrastructure Committee if it was content with Clause 17 within the Bill and with the use of the negative resolution procedure for this particular power.

Members noted that the Delegated Powers Memorandum for the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill was still outstanding and that it would be sent to the Examiner of Statutory Rules on receipt.

The Committee considered a response from the Ulster University Economic Policy Unit to the Call for Evidence on the NI Fiscal Council Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the response to the evidence base for the Committee Stage of the Bill. Members also agreed to ask the Department of Finance for a response to the issues raised in the response.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to explore the potential for a panel of policy experts to provide oral evidence to the Committee on the provisions of both the NI Fiscal Council Bill and Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill.

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

The Committee noted that a written briefing from the Department of Finance had been scheduled for today's meeting but there had been a delay with the consultation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule the written briefing to the 1st October 2025.

11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered correspondence from Gerry Carroll regarding the Windsor Framework and Fujitsu. Members also considered previous updates on this matter provided by the Department of Finance.

Steve Aiken left the meeting at 3:58pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider a draft letter to the Minister of Finance at next week's meeting which is reflective of Members' discussion.

12. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a revised Forward Work Programme. Members noted that the written briefing on Land Registration Project would be scheduled for 1st October, that a Department of Finance written briefing on its Budget position would be scheduled for 24th September and cover future year budget exercise and that the oral briefing on Outturn and Forecast Outturn was confirmed for 1st October.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to make the necessary preparations for a Strategic Planning session to explore potential themes for its next Inquiry into Civil Service Reform.

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

13. Any Other Business

The Chairperson reflected on the departure of both Paul Frew and Phillip Brett from the Committee, paying tribute to both their contributions over the last 18 months.

Paul Frew and Phillip Brett thanked the Members of the Committee and Committee team.

Diane Forsythe drew Members' attention to the current Permanent Secretary recruitment exercise, indicating that this could be added to the Committee's Civil Service Reform work.

14. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 24 September 2025 at 2.00pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:15pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

24 September 2025