



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

24 September 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Jemma Dolan MLA

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Apologies: None

Virtual: Steve Aiken MLA

Gerry Carroll 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 2:05pm in public session.

The Chairperson welcomed two new Members joining the Committee; Harry Harvey MLA and Brian Kingston MLA.

The Chairperson also welcomed a new member of the Committee Team; Marion Johnson.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

None.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson reflected on the successful launch of the Committee's Report on its Banking and Financial Services Landscape Inquiry, which took place on Tuesday 23rd September. After thanking colleagues and Committee team, the Chairperson indicated that there would be a significant amount of follow-up for the Committee in the coming months.

Eoin Tennyson joined the meeting at 2:07pm.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 17 September 2025.

5. Matters Arising

5.1. Department of Finance – 2025-26 August (R5) Outturn and Forecast Outturn

The Committee considered a briefing paper from the Department of Finance on the 2025-26 August Outturn and Forecast Outturn, pending an oral briefing scheduled for 1st October 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to circulate the Outturn and Forecast Outturn data for June, July and August to other Statutory Committees and the Assembly Audit Committee.

5.2. Communities Committee – UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The Committee considered correspondence from the Communities Committee to the Minister of Finance regarding the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Brian Kingston declared an interest having raised this issue whilst a Member of the Communities Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a briefing from the Department of Finance on this matter at an opportune time.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:12pm.

5.3. Communities Committee – Invest to Save Initiative

The Committee noted correspondence from the Communities Committee to the Minister of Finance regarding Invest to Save in relation to Fraud and Error.

5.4. Minister of Health – Written Ministerial Statement – Duty of Candour Bill for Northern Ireland

5.5. Health Committee – Public Office (Accountability) Bill

The Committee considered a Written Ministerial Statement from the Minister of Health regarding a Duty of Candour Bill for Northern Ireland and correspondence from the Health Committee to the Minister of Finance seeking clarification on

potential consideration of a Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) in respect of the Public Office (Accountability) Bill.

The Clerk updated the Committee on how these developments could link with a potential LCM led by the Department of Finance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to maintain a watching brief on developments and return to this matter when officials can brief Members further.

5.6. Minister of Finance – Draft Correspondence regarding Horizon and Fujitsu

The Committee considered a draft letter to the Minister of Finance regarding Horizon and Fujitsu.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue the correspondence as amended.

5.7 Northern Ireland Civil Service Presentation - Fiscal and Budget Context

The Committee noted a copy of a presentation delivered by the Department of Finance Permanent Secretary on the Executive's challenging Fiscal position.

6. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Department of Finance Oral Briefing

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

Members noted that the Delegated Powers Memorandum on the Bill had now been received from the Department of Finance and sent to the Examiner of Statutory Rules for advice. Members also noted a Hansard transcript of the RalSe briefing on the Bill.

The Committee considered a response from the Fiscal Council to the Bill which would be added to the evidence base for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send the response to the Department of Finance for a formal response to the issues highlighted.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2:30pm:

Patrick Neeson, Director of Supply Division, Public Spending Directorate (PSD), Department of Finance;

Ian Fleming, Principal Economist, PSD, Department of Finance; and

Sarah Gibson, Supply Division, PSD, Department of Finance.

The officials provided the Committee with a briefing on the provisions of the Bill. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were discussed including the timeline for inclusion of each of the Bill provisions, the use of negative resolution in the Bill's Delegated Powers and departmental powers to charge fees.

Steve Aiken left the meeting at 3:00pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance and the officials left the meeting at 3:19pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for further information on a number of issues discussed including potential nullification of previous powers and clarity over occasions when the 2% limit to advances from the Consolidated Fund has been reached.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Assembly Audit Committee regarding its consideration of Clause 20 of the Bill.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this correspondence in greater detail at next week's meeting before agreeing a way forward.

7. Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill – Department of Finance Oral Briefing

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

Members noted a briefing paper provided by the Department of Finance in advance of the meeting today.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Audit Committee which would be added to the evidence base for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission legal advice on the scope for the Assembly Audit Committee to have a role in relation to the Fiscal Council to inform the Committee's position in this regard. Members also agreed to send the correspondence from the Audit Committee to the Department of Finance for a formal response to the issues raised.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Fiscal Council on the Bill provisions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Fiscal Council's comments to the Department of Finance for a formal response to the issues raised.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to extend the Call for Evidence for the Bill for a further week.

The Committee noted that the Executive Office Committee had submitted a NIL return to the Call for Evidence for the Bill.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3:36pm:

Wendy Lecky, Director, Strategic Policy and Reform, Department of Finance;

Julie King, Deputy Principal, Fiscal Council Bill and Sponsorship Team, Department of Finance; and

Sarah Wilson, Deputy Director, Fiscal Council Bill and Sponsorship team, Department of Finance.

The officials provided the Committee with a briefing on the provisions of the Bill. The briefing was followed by a question and answer session. A number of issues were

discussed including economic forecasting, budgetary oversight and OECD principles for Independent Fiscal Institutions.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance and the officials left the meeting at 4:13pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider OECD guidance and Managing Public Money in NI during further consideration of the Bill.

8. Department of Finance Budget Position – Written Briefing from the Department of Finance

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department of Finance on the Department of Finance 2026/30 Forecast Budget Costs, Savings, Resource Bids, Capital Bids and Equality Impacts.

Eoin Tennyson left the meeting at 4:19pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that officials attend Committee next week to answer questions related to a number of issues including; savings, inter-departmental charges, digitisation savings, vacancies and pay increases.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 4:24pm.

9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted Hansard Transcripts on the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill – Clause by Clause Scrutiny and Consideration of Bill Report.
- ii. The Committee noted the 44th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold its Strategic Planning Session at 12noon on Wednesday 22 October 2025 in the Private Dining Room, Parliament Buildings.

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

11. Any Other Business

None.

12. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 1 October 2025 at 2.00pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:29pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

1 October 2025