



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Finance

**Minutes of Proceedings**

**27 May 2026**

**Meeting Location:** Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:** Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Dr Steve Aiken MBE MLA

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

**Apologies:** Gerry Carroll MLA

**Virtual:** Jemma Dolan 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

Stephen Magee Clerical Supervisor

Heather Graham Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:10pm in public session.

**1. Apologies.**

As above.

**2. Declaration of Interests.**

None.

**3. Update on the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Office Estate Strategy – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance**

The Committee considered papers provided to assist with the session, including the latest progress report from the Department of Finance, the NICS Office Estate Strategy, the May 2025 Progress Report and related DALO Readout Responses.

The following officials joined the meeting at 2:12pm;

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Desi McDonnell  | Director of Properties Division;  |
| Tracy Flannigan | Director of Valuation and Commissioner of Valuation and Appeals, Land & Property Service (LPS); |
| Niall Hobbs     | Deputy Director of Properties Division, Head of Office Estates; and                             |
| Neil McCall     | District Valuer LPS.  |

The officials briefed the Committee on the latest assessment of the NICS Office Estate Strategy and related issues.

Eoin Tennyson joined the meeting at 2:20pm.

Diane Forsythe joined the meeting at 2:33pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including; achievement of Key Performance Indicators, Dundonald House, Connect Hubs, Land and Property Valuations, legislative limitations in terms of divesting property and impact of homeworking.

Steve Aiken declared an interest during discussions about a constituency related matter.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 3:28pm to discuss issues relating to Dundonald House.

The Committee returned to public session at 3:35pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 3:35pm.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 3:35pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request ongoing updates from the Department of Finance in relation to the future of Dundonald House.

#### **4. SL1 – The Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee considered a clerk's memo (scrutiny paper) on the Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 and related papers. Members noted the purpose of the proposed statutory rule which allows the Department of Finance to collect information from specified NI bodies and share it with the Treasury to support the preparation of the UK-wide Whole of Government Accounts. Members also noted that no responses had been received to the Committee's Citizen Space Survey on the proposed rule.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the merits of the proposal and that the Department make the rule.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to publish its decision and inform the Department of Finance accordingly.

**5. SR 2026/90 The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee considered a statutory rule laid by the Department of Finance. Members noted that SR 2026/90 The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 will amend the Valuation, Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 and will replace or revise the names of gas transportation companies listed in the Schedule of the 2010 Regulations. Members noted that the rule was subject to negative resolution procedure and that it would come into operation on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2026.

Members also noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had not yet reported on the Rule.

**Agreed:** The Committee for Finance has considered SR2026/90 The Valuation (Telecommunications, Natural Gas and Water) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and, subject to the Examiner's report, has no objection to the Rule.

Deirdre Hargey returned to the meeting at 3:35pm.

**6. Outturn and Forecast Outturn – Written Briefing**

The Committee considered a briefing paper on March restated (R13) Outturn and Forecast Outturn data provided by the Department of Finance in advance of today's session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the written briefing to other Statutory Committees and the NI Assembly Audit Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request further detail on the easements relating to Transformation funding, on the Department of Finance specific easements and on Capital easements referenced in the briefing paper.

## **7. Performance and Culture of the Northern Ireland Civil Service – Committee Deliberations**

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

The Committee considered a Belfast Telegraph article on last week's oral briefing with the Head of the Civil Service and results of the 2025, 2023 and 2021 NICS People Survey. Members also noted correspondence from the Economy Committee regarding the AI Strategy for the public sector in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add the NICS People Surveys to the evidence base for the Performance and Culture of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Inquiry.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Clerk would bring back proposals detailing former NICS employees who held senior roles and could potentially offer relevant input to the Inquiry.

## **8. Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill – Committee Deliberations**

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

The Committee considered correspondence from Northern Ireland Humanists.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Finance for comment on the points raised and to schedule an oral briefing with Northern Ireland Humanists in due course.

## **9. Chairperson's Business.**

### **9.1. Minister of Finance – Plenary Attendance 1 June 2026**

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Minister of Finance to the Speaker regarding Plenary Attendance on 1 June 2026.

### **9.2. Written Ministerial Statement – First Minister and deputy First Minister**

The Committee noted a Written Ministerial Statement made by the Executive Office on 20 May 2026 concerning Module 3 and 4 of the Covid-19 Public Inquiry.

### **9.3. Minister of Finance – Oral Statement – Transformation Fund: Tranche 2**

The Committee considered an oral statement made by the Minister of Finance regarding Tranche 2 of the Transformation Fund.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance asking for clarification on funding provided for the Department for Communities' Pathway to Work and Wellbeing proposal; copying the correspondence to the Economy and Communities Committees.

### **9.4. Scottish Parliament – Appointment of Presiding Officer**

The Chairperson highlighted the recent appointment of Kenneth Gibson as Presiding Officer in the Scottish Parliament.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Mr Gibson congratulating him on his appointment.

## **10. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 20<sup>th</sup> May 2026.

## **11. Matters Arising**

### **11.1. DALO Extract – 6<sup>th</sup> May 2026**

The Committee noted the DALO Extract issued following the Committee meeting on 6 May 2026.

### **11.2. DALO Readout Response – 6<sup>th</sup> May 2026 – Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Committee for the Economy to inform its Call for Evidence on the Bill.

### **11.3. DALO Readout Response – 6<sup>th</sup> May 2026 – Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Committee for the Economy to inform its Call for Evidence on the Bill.

### **11.4. Department of Finance – National Population Projections for Northern Ireland**

The Committee considered detail provided by the Department of Finance on Northern Ireland Population Projections and associated statistical bulletin.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the information provided with other Statutory Committees.

The Committee considered the next 4 items collectively.

**11.5. Assembly Audit Committee – Budget for Northern Ireland Audit Office 2026-27**

**11.6. Assembly Written Question – June Monitoring Process in 2026**

**11.7. And 11.8. Correspondence from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) – Absence of an agreed Northern Ireland Executive Budget**

The Committee considered a number of items relating to the absence of an agreed Northern Ireland Executive Budget for 2026-27 including; correspondence from the Assembly Audit Committee, an Assembly Written Question and correspondence from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) to the First and deputy First Minister and to the Secretary of State.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the NIAC correspondence to the Executive Office Committee. The Committee also noted that the Department of Finance correspondence enclosed with the Assembly Audit Committee correspondence had been shared with Statutory Committees.

**11.9. House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee (HOLNISC) – US Administration imposition of global reciprocal tariffs**

The Committee noted correspondence from the HOLNISC to the Minister of State for Trade (Department for Business and Trade) regarding global reciprocal tariffs.

**11.10. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Notice of Amendments tabled for Further Consideration Stage.**

The Committee noted amendments tabled for Further Consideration Stage of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill which took place on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2026.

## **12. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from the Communities Committee to the Minister of Finance regarding funding for the Northern Ireland Place-Name Project.
- ii. The Committee noted a reply from an individual regarding MLA Pay Determination.
- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from that individual.
- iv. The Committee noted the 66<sup>th</sup> Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

## **13. Draft Forward Work Programme**

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a joint informal briefing with the Economy Committee on Trade NI's document: "Advancing Northern Ireland's Economic Future". Members also agreed that the Forward Work Programme should be amended accordingly and published on the Committee webpages.

Members noted arrangements for next week's oral briefing with the Minister of Finance.

## **14. Any Other Business**

Members discussed the forthcoming launch of the Baby Loss Certificate Scheme.

**15. Date and Time of next meeting**

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2026 at 2pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:22pm.

**Matthew O'Toole**

**Chairperson, Committee for Finance**

**3<sup>rd</sup> June 2026**