



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Finance

**Minutes of Proceedings**

**29 April 2026**

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

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

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Jemma Dolan MLA

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Eoin Tennyson MLA

**Apologies:** Steve Aiken MLA

**Virtual:** Gerry Carroll 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.**

None.

**3. Chairperson's Business.**

**3.1. Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill – Consideration Stage**

The Chairperson informed the Committee that he had tabled a number of amendments for the Consideration Stage for the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill.

**4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2026.

**5. Matters Arising**

**5.1. DALO Extract – 25 March 2026**

The Committee noted the DALO Extract issued following the Committee meeting on 25 March 2026.

## **5.2. DALO Readout Response – 25 March 2026 – Transformation Funding**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance on Transformation Funding awards. Members noted that the Department had not responded to the Committee's query about how much of the funding had actually been drawn down.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to again request that the Department of Finance provide it with the drawdown of Transformation funding to date and expected profile of spend.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:09pm.

## **5.3. DALO Readout Response – 25 March 2026 – Renewables Obligation Scheme**

The Committee noted an update from the Department of Finance regarding the comparable NI Renewables Obligation Scheme.

## **5.4. DALO Readout Response – 25 March 2026 – Follow-up to Oral Briefing on NICS People Strategy**

The Committee considered follow-up information provided by the Department of Finance on the NICS People Strategy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for further information and clarity on the resource constraints which have ended the publication of the quarterly sickness absence publications. Members also agreed to ask that the Committee is copied into all NICS Board Dashboards from this point forward. The Committee also agreed to add the information provided to the evidence base for the NICS Inquiry.

## **5.5. DALO Extract – 15 April 2026**

The Committee noted the DALO Extract issued following the Committee meeting on 15 April 2026.

### **5.6. DALO Readout Response – 15 April 2026 – Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc.) Bill**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc.) Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to submit a NIL return to the Committee for Justice.

### **5.7. Committee for Communities – Children’s Services Cooperations Act Updated Guidance**

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Minister of Finance requesting a copy of updated guidance on the Children’s Cooperation Act.

### **5.8. Committee for Justice – Jade’s Law – Policy Work Update**

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Committee for Justice to the Department of Finance requesting information on policy development work undertaken in this area.

### **5.13. Minister of Finance – Jade’s Law – Parental Responsibility**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding Jade’s Law and policy development work to be undertaken by the Department of Finance.

Members welcomed the developments outlined in the Ministerial correspondence and indicated that an oral briefing would be useful in the coming months.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the Minister’s correspondence to the Justice Committee. Members also agreed to write to the Minister of Finance welcoming developments.

**5.9. His Majesty's Treasury (HMT) response to Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) – Energy Bill Support**

The Committee considered copy correspondence from HMT to the NIAC regarding support for energy bills in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy HMT's response to the Department of Finance for awareness and potential onwards circulation to the Executive.

**5.10. House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee (HOLNISC) – Duty Relief for small parcels etc.**

The Committee noted a reply from the HOLNISC regarding its work in relation to Duty Relief for small parcels and other related matters.

**5.11. House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee (HOLNISC) – Simplified Tariff treatment for the distance sales of goods and elimination of the customs duty relief threshold.**

The Committee noted copy correspondence from HOLNISC to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury regarding simplified Tariff treatment.

**5.12. Department of Finance – Fermanagh House Property Disposal**

The Committee considered an update from the Department of Finance on the recent property disposal of Fermanagh House.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for information on how the NICS Estate Strategy aligns with the Strategic Asset Management Unit/LPS systems and for confirmation that there is integration between the two workstreams.

**6. SL1 The Baby Loss Certificate Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee considered a clerk's memo (scrutiny paper) on the Baby Loss Certificate Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and related papers. Members noted



**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that Hansard would provide a transcript of the oral evidence sessions during today's meeting.

## **7. Banking & Financial Services Inquiry – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance**

The Committee considered papers provided to assist with the session, including a briefing paper from the Department of Finance and copy of the Committee's Report on the Banking & Financial Services Landscape.

The following Department of Finance officials joined the meeting at 3:15pm;

Wendy Lecky          Director, Strategic Policy Division

Julianne Kieran      Principal Economist, Strategic Policy Division

Dylan McDonnell    Deputy Principal Economist, Strategic Policy Division.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Department's work towards implementing relevant recommendations within the Committee's Inquiry Report.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including; the Department's ongoing engagement with relevant bodies, claims management regulation, mutual bank development and online/challenger banks.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek further information and clarification on a number of issues discussed during the briefing. Members also agreed to write to the UK Treasury about related matters, copying in the NI Affairs Committee and Treasury Select Committee.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 3:43pm.

**8. Leading and Resourcing in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) – Pre-Brief for Oral Briefing from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)**

**9. Leading and Resourcing in the NICS – Oral Briefing from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)**

The Committee considered a number of papers provided to assist with the session, including a Clerk’s Memo, a Briefing Paper from the NIAO, and a copy of the NIAO’s Report Leading and Resourcing in the NICS.

Members considered correspondence from the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) regarding the Committee’s NICS Inquiry and request for oral evidence. Members also considered a process evaluation report on the AO pilot recruitment competition.

The following NIAO officials joined the meeting at 3:44pm;

Dorinnia Carville	Comptroller & Auditor General, NIAO
Suzanne Jones	Director, NIAO
Laura Murphy	Audit Manager, NIAO

Members noted that elements of the oral briefing may need to take place in closed session.

The NIAO officials briefed the Committee on the background to the Leading and Resourcing the NICS Report.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including; NICS sickness absence, data analysis, senior Civil Service turnover and succession planning.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 4:24pm.

The Committee returned to open session at 4:43pm.

NIAO officials undertook to provide a number of additional items as discussed during the briefing.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 4:44pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a dedicated session for NIPSA.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for its response and proposed way forward addressing the recommendations within the Evaluation Report on the AO Pilot and to add the report to the evidence base of the NICS Inquiry

## **10. Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill – Consideration of Committee Stage Approach**

The Committee considered a Clerk's memo on the approach for Committee Stage of the Bill which included an indicative timetable for Committee Stage.

The Bill Clerk joined the meeting at 4:51pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 4:51pm to receive procedural advice on the Committee Stage approach for the Bill.

Members discussed the timetable and approach proposed.

The Committee moved into open session at 5:08pm to formalise agreements for Committee Stage approach.

The Chairperson reflected on discussions and the need to give appropriate consideration to the Bill. The Chairperson then put the question to extend the Committee Stage for the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill, indicating that the extension date should be seen as a deadline as opposed to a target.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 13<sup>th</sup> November 2026, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill.

The Committee considered a proposed list of targeted stakeholders, template letter to stakeholders, draft Call for Evidence/Citizen Space questions and draft signposting ad for Committee Stage of the Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek written evidence from targeted stakeholders; including additional stakeholders as discussed.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that a Call for Evidence/Citizen Space Survey would run from 1<sup>st</sup> May for 6 weeks. Members also agreed to amend questions for the Balmoral Show engagement as discussed.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that signposting ads would be published week commencing 11<sup>th</sup> May 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request a Keeling Schedule from the Department of Finance.

The Chairperson thanked the Bill Clerk and the Bill Clerk left the meeting at 5:10pm.

## **11. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted the first report of the Independent Autism Reviewer.
- ii. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules 63<sup>rd</sup> Report to the Assembly.

## **12. Draft Forward Work Programme**

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

Members noted that the Committee's Motion on the 2026-29/30 Budget was scheduled for Monday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to begin the meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> May, at the earlier time of 1pm. Members also agreed that the Forward Work Programme should be amended accordingly and published on the Committee webpages.

## **13. Any Other Business**

None.

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

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2026 at 2pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:12pm.

**Matthew O'Toole**

**Chairperson, Committee for Finance**

**6<sup>th</sup> May 2026**