



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Finance

**Minutes of Proceedings**

**3 June 2026**

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

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

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Dr Steve Aiken MBE MLA

Gerry Carroll MLA

Jemma Dolan MLA

Deirdre Hargey MLA

**Apologies:** Eoin Tennyson MLA

**Virtual:** Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston 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 2:10pm in public session.

The Chairperson welcomed Pdraig McNally, a work experience student from All Saints College, who was observing today's meeting.

**1. Apologies.**

As above.

**2. Declaration of Interests.**

None.

**3. Minister of Finance – Oral Briefing – Pre-brief**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move into closed session to discuss procedural arrangements for the Ministerial briefing.

The Committee moved into closed session at 2:12pm.

Members discussed the approach to questioning during the Ministerial Oral Briefing.

The Committee returned to public session at 2:25pm.

The Committee considered relevant background papers provided to assist with the session, including a Clerk's Memo, copies of previous Ministerial Statements relating to Transformation Funding, correspondence from the Department of Finance's Permanent Secretary to Departmental Accounting Officers regarding the absence of an agreed budget for 2026/27, an Assembly Written Question on legal cases and judicial reviews, a DALO Readout Response on contingency budget planning and the HM Treasury Open Book Review of Northern Ireland Executive Budget.

#### **4. Minister of Finance – Oral Briefing**

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

The Minister of Finance and the Department of Finance Permanent Secretary: Neil Gibson, joined the meeting at 2:25pm.

The Minister briefed the Committee on a number of issues pertaining to recent departmental matters.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including; the absence of an agreed Executive Budget, Level of Need, Revenue Raising, Public Sector pay, Transformation Funding, Artificial Intelligence and Rating Policy.

Steve Aiken declared an interest as the owner of an electric car.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and Permanent Secretary for their attendance, and both left the meeting at 4:06pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request some follow-up information on issues discussed including details of a HOCS led exercise on efficiencies and the departmental response to the HM Treasury Open Book Exercise.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the HM Treasury Open Book Review of Northern Ireland Executive Budget with other Statutory Committees.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 4:06pm.

Steve Aiken left the meeting at 4:06pm.

The Committee adjourned at 4:06pm.

The Committee reconvened in public session at 4:11pm.

Deirdre Hargey returned to the meeting at 4:11pm.

The Chairperson reflected on the oral briefing with the Minister of Finance and on agreements reached.

**Agreed:** The Committee to consider agenda item 6 next to ensure decision-making quorum.

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 4:12pm to consider procedural advice on future evidence sessions for the Inquiry.

The Committee considered proposals for further witnesses who could potentially offer relevant input to the Inquiry.

The Committee returned to public session at 4:26pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that Hansard would provide a transcript of the Committee's deliberations on the Inquiry.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite a sample of recent previous HOCS and senior civil servants (and equivalent from other jurisdictions) to provide oral evidence to the Inquiry.

The Committee considered a Hansard transcript of the oral evidence session with the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service which took place on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2026 and a Hansard transcript of Committee deliberations on the Inquiry which took place on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2026..

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

## **5. Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill – Oral Briefing from Assembly Research and Library Service (RaLSe)**

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

The Committee considered a RaLSe briefing paper on the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill and a RaLSe briefing paper on Review of Costs: Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill.

The Committee considered 2 Hansard transcripts of Committee Deliberations on the Bill which took place on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> May 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Hansard transcripts would be added to the Committee report on the Bill in due course.

The Committee considered a response to its Call for Evidence on the Bill from the Communities Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add this response to the Committee Report on the Bill in due course.

The following Assembly officials joined the meeting at 4:29pm;

Thomas Lough      Researcher, NI Assembly Research and Library Services  
(RaISe); and

Ross Connolly      Researcher, RaISe

The officials briefed Members on both Research papers.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including; issues raised by stakeholders, recognition of under 18 marriages and the Scottish model.

The officials undertook to return to Committee with follow-up information on queries raised during the briefing.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider agenda items 8 & 11 to ensure decision-making quorum.

## **8.      Draft Minutes of Proceedings.**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 27<sup>th</sup> May 2026.

## **11.     Draft Forward Work Programme**

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

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

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 5:01pm.

**Returning to agenda item 5:**

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 5:03pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to submit scrutiny points within both research papers to the Department of Finance for response.

**7. Chairperson's Business.**

**7.1. Minister of Finance – Invitation to mark the launch of the Baby Loss Certificate Scheme**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Finance inviting Members to an event on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> June at 7pm, to mark the launch of the Baby Loss Certificate Scheme.

**7.2. The Executive Office – Written Statement – Publication of the Programme for Government Annual Report**

The Committee noted a Written Statement from the Executive Office regarding the publication of the Programme for Government Annual Report and a copy of the Annual Report.

**12. Any Other Business**

None.

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

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2026 at 2pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:05pm.

**Matthew O'Toole**

**Chairperson, Committee for Finance**

**10<sup>th</sup> June 2026**