



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

6 May 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Eoin Tennyson MLA

Apologies: Deirdre Hargey MLA

Virtual: Dr Steve Aiken MBE MLA

Gerry Carroll MLA

Jemma Dolan 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 2:03pm in public session.

There were no Declaration of Interests.

1. Apologies.

As above.

2. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 29th April 2026.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:05pm.

3. Chairperson's Business.

3.1. Department of Finance – Guidance to Departments in the absence of a Budget 2026-27

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding the provision of Resource and Capital DEL contingency planning envelopes to help inform Departmental Accounting Officers' decision making in the absence of an agreed Executive Budget.

Some Members voiced their disappointment that the Committee had not been furnished with the full detail of the planning envelopes and with a copy of the Dear Accounting Officer guidance. Some Members also expressed disappointment that the contents of the correspondence was discussed in the public arena and not shared with the Committee in advance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Finance to reflect Members' deliberations and to request the detail discussed.

3.2. Updated Guidance for Committees

The Committee noted updated guidance for Committees, specifically; for Witnesses appearing before Assembly Committee and on the Role of Committee Chairpersons.

3.3. Balmoral Show

The Committee noted information provided by the Committee Clerk, in advance of the visit to the Balmoral Show next week.

3.4. Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill – Consideration Stage Amendments

The Committee noted amendments that were selected for the Consideration Stage for the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill, which took place on Tuesday 5th May 2026.

3.5. Belfast Telegraph Article – Senior Civil Servant

The Chairperson referred to an article published in the Belfast Telegraph concerning the costs of a senior civil servant being borne by the Department of Finance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance for further detail and to request a briefing on this matter, in closed session, if appropriate.

4. Matters Arising

4.1. Department of Finance – Jade's Law

4.5. DALO Readout Response – 22nd April 2026 - Jade's Law

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance to the Justice Committee regarding the Minister of Finance's intention to progress legislative reform in respect of legal and safeguarding arrangements for children in cases of domestic abuse and homicide. Members also noted that the Minister of Finance had previously provided the Committee with an update on this matter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for further detail on this issue, requesting clarification on timescale, consultation, drafting and approximate date for Introduction, as well as an assessment of how this complex GB legislation would be transferred to Northern Ireland.

Eoin Tennyson joined the meeting at 2:20pm.

Brian Kingston declared an interest as a Member of the Justice Committee

4.2. DALO Extract – 15 April 2026

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

4.3. DALO Readout Response – 15 April 2026 – Charge UK/EV Charging Points

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance on rate support measures for EV Charging Points.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Charge UK indicating that the Committee for Infrastructure has the policy locus for this matter, copying that Committee into the correspondence. Members also agreed to forward the original correspondence from Charge UK to the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee and Infrastructure Committee.

Steve Aiken declared an interest as a Member of the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee.

4.4. DALO Readout Response – 15 April 2026 – High Fuel Support

The Committee considered an update from the Department of Finance regarding Ministerial engagement with His Majesty's Treasury on support for high fuel costs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for detail of what plans are being made by both it and the Executive to obtain additional financial support for high energy costs as the current crisis continues.

4.6. DALO Readout Response – 15 April 2026 – Temporary Promotions and Agency Staff

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance on data available from HR Connect on the number of temporary promotions and agency staff in the NICS. Some Members voiced their disappointment about a gap in data availability regarding vacancies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this response to the evidence base for the Performance and Culture of the NICS Inquiry.

4.7. DALO Readout Response – 15 April – Vote on Account

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance on the drawdown of the Vote on Account and a departmental analysis of relative funding per head and level of need funding across the devolved administrations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a monthly update from the Department of Finance on the timeline for cashflow forecast/spend profiles; specifically indicating if the pattern shown in the response was expected at this time of year.

4.8. Department of Finance – Copy correspondence to Executive Colleagues – Energy Bill Support

Members noted that the Minister of Finance had copied correspondence from His Majesty's Treasury on Energy Bill Support to Executive Colleagues, as requested by the Committee.

5. Performance and Culture of the NICS Inquiry – Oral Briefing from the Centre for Public Administration (CPA) Ulster University

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

The Committee considered papers provided to assist with the session, including a presentation from CPA provided in advance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this presentation to the evidence base for the Inquiry.

Members also considered follow-up information provided by the Northern Ireland Audit Office following its briefing to the Committee last week and a report from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI): Assessing Economic Trends in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:45pm;

Professor Paul Carmichael Director, Centre for Public Administration;
and

Professor Colin Knox Emeritus Centre Member.

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the alignment of the NICS People Strategy and Programme for Government and the capacity and capability of the NICS.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including; Programme for Government objectives, the Wellbeing Framework, Accountability chains and the Review of Arm's Length Bodies.

Gerry Carroll declared an interest as a past pupil of Professor Carmichael.

During the briefing, some Members voiced their support for Ulster University staff, at this current time.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance, and the witnesses left the meeting at 3:50pm.

Members discussed follow-up information provided by the Northern Ireland Audit Office following its briefing to the Committee last week.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this information to the evidence base for the Performance and Culture of the NICS Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the ESRI paper to the evidence base for the Performance and Culture of the NICS Inquiry.

6. Performance and Culture of the NICS Inquiry – Oral Briefing from Pivotal

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

The Committee considered papers provided to assist with the session, including a written briefing from Pivotal provided in advance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this briefing to the evidence base for the Inquiry.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:51pm;

Ann Watt Director, Pivotal; and

Tom Burns Researcher, Pivotal

The witnesses briefed the Committee on themes and analysis from its research report “Policy Delivery in Northern Ireland” with relevance to the Committee’s Inquiry.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and a number of issues were discussed including; leadership, recruitment and skills, culture, structures and data and targets.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 4:03pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance, and the witnesses left the meeting at 4:33pm.

7. Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill – Overview Oral Briefing from the Bill Clerk

The Committee considered a number of papers provided to assist with the session, including a Clerk's Memo, copy of the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill and Explanatory and Financial Memorandum.

The Bill Clerk joined the meeting at 4:34pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session to receive procedural advice on the Bill at 4:34pm.

Brian Kingston left the meeting at 4:35pm.

The Chairperson thanked the Bill Clerk and the Bill Clerk left the meeting at 4:51pm.

The Committee returned to open session at 4:52pm.

The Committee considered revised questions for the Balmoral Show questionnaire on the Bill. Members also considered NIL responses to the Committee's Call for Evidence on the Bill, from the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and Justice Committees. Finally, the Committee considered a Hansard Transcript of the oral briefing from Departmental officials on 22nd April 2026.

Agreed: Members agreed that they were content with the questions for the Balmoral Show questionnaire. Members also agreed to add the NIL responses to the Committee Report on the Bill in due course. Finally, the Committee agreed to add the Hansard Transcript of the oral briefing from Departmental officials to the evidence base of the Committee Stage of the Bill.

Members considered an up to date list of authorised religious bodies whose officiants have conducted marriages in recent years along with a number of belief bodies authorised under temporary arrangements – this had been requested following the oral briefing with Departmental officials on 22nd April 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to extend the Call for Evidence to recognised bodies with a governance structure and sizable following and to specific bodies highlighted by Members.

8. Correspondence

i. The Committee considered a Call for Evidence from the Economy Committee on the Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if there is any relevant policy locus for the Department in the Bill's provisions.

ii. The Committee considered a Call for Evidence from the Economy Committee for the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if there is any relevant policy locus for the Department in the Bill's provisions.

iii. The Committee considered a Call for Evidence from the Education Committee on the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if there is any relevant policy locus for the Department in the Bill's provisions.

iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance to the Education Committee regarding the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to both the Minister of Finance and Assembly Speaker in relation to consideration of costings for Private Members Bill.

v. The Committee considered a Call for Evidence from the Education Committee on the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if there is any relevant policy locus for the Department in the Bill's provisions.

vi. The Committee noted the Brussels Report January – March 2026.

vii. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules 64th Report to the Assembly.

viii. The Committee considered a Hansard Transcript of the Departmental Briefing on the Integr8 Programme on 22nd April 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this transcript to the evidence base for the Performance and Culture of the NICS Inquiry.

ix. The Committee noted the April Monthly Update from the Youth Assembly.

9. Draft Forward Work Programme

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

Members noted that the Motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill was scheduled for 11th May, that there was no formal meeting next week due to the Committee's visit to the Balmoral Show and that the meeting on 20th May would begin at the earlier time of 1pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to amend the Forward Work Programme accordingly and to publish the Forward Work Programme on the Committee webpages.

10. Any Other Business

None.

11. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 20th May 2026 at 1pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:01pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

20th May 2026