Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

11 November 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	
	Áine Murphy MLA	
Apologies:	None	
Virtual:	Dr Steve Aiken MBE MLA	
	Gerry Carroll MLA	
	Deirdre Hargey MLA	
	Eóin Tennyson MLA	
In Attendance:	Peter Hall	Committee Clerk
	Fiona Rooney	Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk

Tom Armstrong	Assistant Assembly Clerk
Clairita Frazer	Assistant Assembly Clerk
Stephen Magee	Clerical Supervisor
Heather Graham	Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:03pm in public session.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that this would be the last meeting for Tom Armstrong, Assistant Clerk, who is moving to the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairperson thanked Tom for all his work and wished him all the best in his new post.

Members noted that Sean McCann, would be joining the Committee as the new Assistant Clerk.

1. Apologies.

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests.

None.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2:06pm.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.5. Ministerial Oral Briefing

The Chairperson and other Members discussed the need for oral briefing from the Finance Minister and additional matters related to the current Budgetary situation.

Steve Aiken declared an interest given his recent involvement in talks with the Secretary of State for NI.

Diane Forsthye declared an interest as the Assembly Private Secretary to the Education Minister.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request an oral briefing on the budget from the Finance Minister. The Committee also agreed to ask the Department of Finance for clarity over the timeline for legislative passage of the Budget Bill and contingency planning.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask other Statutory Committees to seek a snapshot of key budgetary pressures from their respective departments as well as a readout of risks identified in different planning scenarios.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State for NI again requesting that he briefs the Committee if Westminster should pass a Budget for Northern Ireland.

3.1. Competition and Markets Authority

The Committee noted an invitation to an event from the Competitions and Markets Authority on Consumer Protection.

3.2. Irish Centre for European Law (ICEL)

The Committee noted an invitation to the ICEL Public Procurement Law Annual Conference 2026.

3.3. Minister of Finance – Oral Statement – Family Law Reform Consultation

The Committee considered an oral statement from the Finance Minister on the Family Law Reform Consultation. Members also discussed the related item 5.8 in Matters Arising.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance to confirm a date for the oral briefing on this workstream.

3.4. Draft Press Release – Tree Planting Ceremony

The Committee noted the agreed press release for the Tree Planting Ceremony to take place on Thursday 19th November.

4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 3rd November 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 4th November 2026.

5. Matters Arising

5.1. Minister of Finance – Update: Local Growth Fund

Members considered an update from the Minister of Finance regarding developments with the Local Growth Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this update, pending an oral briefing in the New Year. Members also agreed to ask the Department of Finance if there was any impediment to draw down of this fund.

5.2. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 14th October – Tree Protection Bill

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the Committee for Infrastructure's Call for Evidence on the Tree Protection Bill

Agreed: The Committee agreed to submit a NIL return to this Call for Evidence.

5.3. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 14th October – Outturn and Forecast Outturn

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding the different methodologies used by Department and the Department of Finance's challenge function.

5.4. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 14th October – Departmental 5-year plans

The Committee considered an update from the Department of Finance regarding publication of 5year Departmental plans.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask other Statutory Committees to request an update on the status of their respective Department's 5year plans. Members also agreed to ask the Department of Finance for a copy of its 5year Departmental plan.

5.5. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 7th October – National Lottery Community Fund

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the National Lottery Community Fund Annual Report 2025-26.

Gerry Carroll declared an interest given a recent meeting with the National Lottery Community Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if it intended to make changes to the funding criteria. Members also agreed to schedule an update briefing on Dormant Accounts in the New Year.

5.6. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 7th October– A5 Court Case

The Committee considered information from the Department of Finance relating to projects progressing as a result of the A5 ruling.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for further clarity on several issues related to the impact of the delay due to the A5 ruling.

5.7. Department of Finance – Copy Correspondence to the Economy Committee – Commercial Payments Bill - LCM

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance to the Economy Committee regarding the LCM associated with the Commercial Payments Bill.

5.8. Committee for Justice – Jade's Law

The Committee noted correspondence from the Justice Committee regarding Jade's Law given earlier discussion about the issue.

5.9. Economy Committee – Copy Correspondence to the Department of Finance – Regional Balance Bill

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Economy Committee to the Department of Finance regarding an evidence session for the Committee Stage of the Regional Balance Bill.

5.10. Copy Correspondence to the Secretary of State for NI

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Dromore Group to the Secretary of State for NI regarding Budget Forecasting and Accountability.

6. Marriage & Civil Partnership Bill – Agreement of Committee Report

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard should report on the session.

There were no amendments proposed by Members.

Áine Murphy joined the meeting at 2:52pm.

Title Page, Contents Page, Powers, Membership and List of Abbreviations and Acronyms.

The Committee considered the Title page, Contents Page, Powers, Membership and List of Abbreviations and Acronyms as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Title page, Contents Page, Powers, Membership and List of Abbreviations and Acronyms stand part of the Report

Executive Summary.

The Committee considered the Executive Summary as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Executive Summary stand part of the Report.

Introduction.

The Committee considered the Introduction as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Introduction stand part of the Report.

Committee Approach.

The Committee considered the Committee Approach section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee Approach section stand part of the Report.

Consideration of the Bill.

The Committee considered the Consideration of the Bill section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Consideration of the Bill section stand part of the Report.

Clause by Clause Consideration.

The Committee considered the Clause by Clause Consideration section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clause by Clause Consideration section stand part of the Report.

Clause by Clause Scrutiny of the Bill.

The Committee considered the Clause by Clause Scrutiny of the Bill section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clause by Clause Scrutiny of the Bill section stand part of the Report.

Appendices.

The Committee considered the Appendices section as drafted. Members noted that these would be updated with today's Minutes of Proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Appendices section stand part of the Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Report on the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill be the 13th Report of the Committee for Finance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the report would be laid in the Assembly Business Office and published on the Committee webpages in due course.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy the Bill report to the Minister of Finance in advance of the Consideration Stage of the Bill and to send a copy of the report to all those who contributed to the evidence base for Committee Stage.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairperson thanked all Staff who contributed to the Committee Stage of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to other scheduled business before the Oral Briefing with the NI Fiscal Council.

9. Correspondence

i. The Committee considered a Call for Evidence from the Executive Office Committee on the Age Discrimination (Goods, Facilities and Services) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for comments on the Bill, along with any financial implications.

ii. The Committee noted the October update from the Youth Assembly.

iii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a legislative ban on marriages and civil partnerships between 1st, 2nd and 3rd cousins.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme and several upcoming briefings.

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

Members noted that there were no papers to consider under Agenda Item: **8. Performance and Culture of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS)**

The Committee suspended at 2:56pm and re-opened in public session at 3:03pm

7. NI Fiscal Council – Oral Briefing – Sustainability Report 2026

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard should report on the session.

The Committee noted a clerk's memo to assist during the session. Members also noted several supporting reports including the NI Fiscal Council Sustainability Report: June 2026, NI Fiscal Council Sustainability Report September 2026: Special Focus – Public Sector Pay, and NI Fiscal Council Report: Retention and use of income: November 2026.

The following witnesses joined the meeting, at 3:05pm, via Zoom;

Sir Robert Chote	Chair, NI Fiscal Council
Dr Esmond Birnie	Member, NI Fiscal Council
Maureen O'Reilly	Member, NI Fiscal Council
Jonathan McAdams	Chief of Staff, NI Fiscal Council

The witnesses briefed the Committee on issues related to the Council's Report: Special Focus – Public Sector Pay.

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session, and several issues were discussed including; the size of NI's Public Sector, delivery of services by the NI Public Sector, Fiscal Framework, Barnett Consequentials, Revenue Raising, cost of living in NI and the UK Treasury's Open Book Exercise.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 4:07pm.

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

11. Any Other Business

None.

12. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 18th November 2026 at 2pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:13pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

18th November 2026