Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

21 October 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:	Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)	
	Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)	
	Dr Steve Aiken MBE MLA	
	Harry Harvey MLA	
	Brian Kingston MLA	
	Áine Murphy MLA	
	Eóin Tennyson MLA	
Apologies:	None	
Virtual:	Gerry Carroll MLA	
	Deirdre Hargey MLA	
In Attendance:	Peter Hall	Committee Clerk
	Fiona Rooney	Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk

Tom Armstrong	Assistant Assembly Clerk
Clairita Frazer	Assistant Assembly Clerk
Marion Johnson	Clerical Supervisor
Heather Graham	Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 1:05pm in public session.

1. Apologies.

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests.

None.

3. Performance and Culture of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) – Oral Briefing from David Sterling – Former HOCS

The Committee noted a clerk's memo to assist during the session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 1:06pm.

The following witness joined the meeting, at 1:06pm;

David Sterling	Former Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (HOCS).

The witness briefed the Committee on issues pertinent to the Terms of Reference of the Committee's Inquiry.

Diane Forsythe joined the meeting at 1:11pm.

Harry Harvey joined the meeting at 1:23pm.

Áine Murphy joined the meeting at 1:48pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witness for their attendance, and the witness left the meeting at 2:04pm.

Agreed: The Committee returned to open session at 2:06pm.

Agreed: The Committee undertook to re-engage with former senior civil servants and Heads of the Civil Service.

4. Budget Update – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance

The Committee noted a clerk's memo and supporting papers. Members noted that the Health and Economy Committees had received briefings on budget. The Chairperson also reminded Members that this Committee had received an oral briefing on the Department of Finance's own budget position at the meeting on 30th September.

The following officials joined the meeting, at 2:07pm;

Neil Gibson	Permanent Secretary, Department of Finance; and
Deborah Brown	Deputy Secretary, Public Spending Group, Department of Finance.

The officials briefed the Committee on all departments' current operating environment and budgetary picture.

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session, and several issues were discussed including; pay settlements, the 2027/28 budget, current negotiations, fiscal framework and revenue raising.

Steve Aiken declared an interest given his party's future meeting with the Secretary of State for NI and also in relation to a previous meeting with the NIO Junior Minister; Sarah Owen.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2:27pm.

Eóin Tennyson left the meeting at 2:36pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 2:42pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek additional information from the Department of Finance on potential Barnett Consequentials from the forthcoming UK Chancellor's Budget.

Members resolved to keep abreast of budget developments and to request a briefing from the Minister of Finance in the event of significant developments or material changes to the current situation.

5. Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill – Written Briefing – General Registrar Office (GRO)

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard would report the session.

The Committee noted a clerk's memo and supporting papers for the session. Members considered a revised timetable for the Committee Stage of the Bill, a written briefing paper from GRO and a copy of the GRO Application for temporary approval as an officiant at Belief Marriages in Northern Ireland.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 2:47pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the GRO briefing paper and application form to the evidence base for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 2:49pm.

Eóin Tennyson rejoined the meeting at 2:56pm.

Members discussed the written briefing from GRO.

Harry Harvey and Áine Murphy left the meeting at 3:04pm.

Agreed: The Committee returned to open session at 3:05pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider potential amendments to the Explanatory & Financial Memorandum of the Bill, at the meeting on 3rd November. Members also agreed to the revised timetable for the Committee Stage of the Bill, noting that further information would be requested from the Department to assist the Committee.

The Committee considered a Hansard transcript from the Department of Finance oral briefing which took place on 7th October.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this transcript to the Committee Report in due course.

6. Outturn and Forecast Outturn Data (Round 6) – Written Briefing

The Committee considered a written briefing paper from the Department of Finance on September (R6) Outturn and Forecast Outturn data.

Harry Harvey and Áine Murphy rejoined the meeting at 3:07pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the papers to other Statutory Committees and Assembly Audit Committee as usual.

Members discussed the potential for retrospective changes to the Outturn and Forecast Outturn data.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek additional information and clarity from the Department of Finance.

7. Chairperson's Business

7.1. Northern Ireland Fiscal Council – Correspondence regarding the NI Fiscal Council Annual Conference

The Committee noted correspondence from the Fiscal Council regarding the deputy Chair's attendance at the NI Fiscal Council's Annual Conference.

7.2. Interparliamentary Forum (IPF) 4 December 2026

The Committee considered an invitation to the Chairperson to attend the 9th meeting of the Interparliamentary Forum (IPF) to be held on Friday 4th December at the Senedd, Cardiff Bay.

The Chairperson indicated that attendance, or otherwise would be confirmed in due course.

7.3. Minister of Finance – Written Statement – Local Growth Fund 2027/28 and 2028/29 Funding Arrangements

The Committee noted a Written Statement from the Finance Minister concerning the Local Growth Fund 2027/28 and 2028/29 Funding Arrangements.

8. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 14th October 2026.

9. Matters Arising

9.1. Department of Finance – Correspondence to the Communities Committee regarding the Anti-Poverty Strategy

Members noted copy correspondence from the Department of Finance to the Communities Committee regarding planned actions and financial bids related to the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

9.2. Department of Finance – Correspondence to the Communities Committee regarding the Housing (Amendment) Bill

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance to the Communities Committee regarding Homelessness related costs, budget and planned activity.

9.3. Justice Committee – Protective Mothers NI

The Committee noted correspondence from the Justice Committee to the Department of Finance regarding issues raised by Protective Mothers NI.

9.4. Head of the Civil Service (HOCS) – Follow up to Oral Briefing – 30th September – Public Sector Transformation Board

The Committee considered follow-up information provided by HOCS regarding Public Sector Transformation.

Some Members expressed disappointment that all the additional information requested from HOCS had not been received.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask HOCS again for the specific information on spending profiles.

Áine Murphy left the meeting at 3:24pm

9.5. The Dromore Group – Copy correspondence to the Minister of Finance

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Dromore Group to the Minister of Finance.

9.6. Financial Services and Markets Bill

The Committee considered a copy of Baroness Hoey's withdrawn amendment to the Financial Services and Markets Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Association of British Insurers to request a copy of its evidence presented to the Finance Minister on the impact of Claims Management Companies Regulation.

9.7. Department of Finance – Special EU Programme Board Annual Report and Accounts 2024

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the SEUPB Annual Report and Accounts for 2024. Members also noted a copy of the 2024 Annual Report and Accounts which had been laid in the Business Office.

Some Members expressed their disappointment with the qualified opinion on regularity included in the C&AG's report within the Accounts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information on the regularity in relation to expenditure, as identified by the C&AG.

9.8. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 1st July & 30th September – Regional Balance Bill

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the provisions within the Regional Balance Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the comments to the Economy Committee for inclusion in its Committee Stage Deliberations.

9.9. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 7th October – Rating Policy Oral Briefing Follow-Up

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance with information on current reviews of NAVs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance how the number of current reviews compares with previous years.

9.10. Correspondence from an individual – Shared Property Management

The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the reform of Shared Property Management.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to raise issues with Departmental officials at a forthcoming oral briefing session and inform the correspondent accordingly.

10. Correspondence

i. The Committee noted a Hansard transcript from the oral briefing with the Director of Rating Policy which took place on 7th October.

ii. The Committee noted the 76th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules

11. Draft Forward Work Programme

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

The Committee noted that the meeting packs for the meetings on 3rd and 4th November would be issued on Monday 2nd November.

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

12. Any Other Business

None.

13. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Tuesday 3rd November 2026 at 1pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:41pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

4th November 2026