Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

4 November 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:	Matthew O'Toole MLA (Chairperson)	
	Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)	
	Deirdre Hargey MLA	
	Harry Harvey MLA	
	Brian Kingston MLA	
	Áine Murphy MLA	
Apologies:	None	
Virtual:	Dr Steve Aiken MBE MLA	
	Gerry Carroll 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
Marion Johnson	Clerical Supervisor
Heather Graham	Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:00pm in public session.

1. Apologies.

As above.

The Chairperson indicated that he would be leaving the meeting early and expressed his thanks to the deputy Chair for assuming the Chair in his absence.

2. Declaration of Interests.

None.

3. Performance and Culture of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) – Oral Briefing from Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the session would be reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted a clerk's memo to assist during the session and a briefing paper submitted by NIPSO in advance of the session. Members also considered a Hansard Transcript of Committee deliberations at the meeting on 14th October.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this transcript to the Inquiry's Evidence base.

Members considered correspondence from the Assembly & Executive Review Committee (AERC).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the AERC Hansard transcript to the evidence base for the Inquiry. Members also agreed to forward a Hansard Transcript of an oral briefing on the Review of Arm's Length Bodies on 20th May to AERC and to request an update on the current status of the Review from the Department of Finance.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:03pm.

The following witnesses joined the meeting, at 2:03pm;

Margaret Kelly	Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
Sean Martin	Deputy Ombudsman

The witnesses briefed the Committee on complaints received by NIPSO, categories these fall into and what they might reveal about NICS-provided services.

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session, and several issues were discussed including; challenges faced by public services & servants, complaint themes, comparisons with neighbouring jurisdictions, whistleblowing and accessibility of complaints processes.

Eóin Tennyson joined the meeting at 2:14pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance, and the witnesses left the meeting at 2:51pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 2:51pm.

Members discussed an item of Committee correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee returned to open session at 2:57pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance a number of questions related to changes to HR Recruitment practices.

4. Legal Services Oversight Commissioner – Oral Briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper provided in advance of the session. Members also noted the background to the session.

The following officials joined the meeting, at 2:59pm;

Jonathan McNaught	Corporate Services Division, Department of Finance
Dr Deborah Magill	Legal Services Oversight Commissioner
Marian Cree	past Legal Services Oversight Commissioner

The officials briefed the Committee on the evolution of the Legal Services Oversight Commissioner since the commencement of provisions within the Legal Complaints and Regulation Act.

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session, and several issues were discussed including; statutory oversight, complaints handling and future workstreams.

The Chairperson; Matthew O'Toole left the meeting and the deputy Chairperson; Diane Forsthye assumed the Chair at 3:09pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 3:31pm.

5. Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill – Committee Deliberations

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the open sessions of this agenda item should be reported by Hansard.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 3:31pm.

The Committee noted a clerk's memo to assist during the session, along with a written briefing from General Registrar Office (GRO) and copy of the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill and the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum. Members also noted an updated briefing paper from the General Registrar and copy of the Guidance for Officiants on Marriage Procedures in Northern Ireland.

The Committee considered suggested amendments to the Explanatory & Financial Memorandum, a written submission from Coalition for Marriage and Hansard Transcripts of Committee Deliberations on 14th and 21st October.

Members also considered correspondence from an Independent Celebrant.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the Hansard Transcripts to the evidence base for the Committee Stage of the Bill. Members also agreed to add the written submission from Coalition for Marriage to the evidence base for Committee Stage of the Bill.

Deirdre Hargey returned to the meeting at 3:33pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 3:33pm.

The Bill Clerk and Senior Assistant Clerk assisted with deliberations on a way forward.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 3:52pm.

The Committee returned to open session at 4:07pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to propose changes previously discussed to the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum of the Bill to the Department of Finance and to proceed with informal and formal Clause by Clause consideration of the Bill at the Committee meeting on 10th November. Members also agreed to seek permission from the Independent Celebrant to add their submission to the evidence base for Committee Stage of the Bill.

Brian Kingston left the meeting at 4:08pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the next 3 items together.

6. SL1 The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2027

7. SL1 The Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2027

8. SL1 The Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2027

The Committee considered 3 clerk's memos (scrutiny papers) on the Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2027, the Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2027, the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2027 and related papers. Members noted the purpose of the proposed statutory rules and that no responses had been received to the Committee's Citizen Space Survey on the proposed rules.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the policy merits of the proposals and that the Department make the rules.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish its decisions and inform the Department of Finance accordingly.

9. SL1 The Government Resources and Accounts (Northern Ireland) Act 2001 (Estimates and Accounts) (Designation of Bodies) (Amendment) Order 2026

The Committee considered correspondence from the Finance Minister requesting that this proposed statutory rule is considered in a shortened timeframe. Members noted the purpose of the proposed rule and considered a clerk's memo, SL1 letter from the Department, draft Statutory Rule and Explanatory Memorandum.

Brian Kingston returned to the meeting at 4:11pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was not necessary to proceed with a Call for Views on this occasion.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the merits of the proposal and that the Department make the rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish its decision and inform the Department of Finance accordingly.

10. Chairperson's Business

10.1. Minister of Finance – Chancellor's Autumn Statement – Impact on Executive Funding

The Committee considered correspondence from the Finance Minister providing a summary of the Chancellor's Autumn Budget 2026.

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

Members expressed thanks to the Finance Minister for providing this update.

10.2. House of Commons Library – Briefing on Autumn Budget 2026

The Committee noted a House of Commons Research briefing on the Autumn Budget 2026.

10.3. 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.

10.4. Correspondence from the NI Fiscal Council

The Committee noted correspondence from the NI Fiscal Council, thanking the Chairperson for recent attendance at its Annual Conference.

10.5. AQW 55152/22-27 – Impact of fuel price increases on the NICS Office Estate in 2026/27

The Committee considered an Assembly question in relation to the impact of fuel price increases.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for a quantum of expected costs for the current financial year, including for a sensitivity analysis.

10.6. Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission – Annual Human Rights Statement 2026

The Committee noted an invitation for the Committee Clerk to attend the launch of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission Annual Human Rights Statement launch.

10.7. Minister of Finance – Notice of Intention to make an Oral Statement to the Assembly

The Committee noted the Minister of Finance's intention to make an Oral Statement to the Assembly on Tuesday 10th November on the launch of a Family Law Reform Consultation.

10.8. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill

The Committee noted that the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill has received Royal Assent.

11. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.

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

12. Matters Arising

12.1. Minister of Finance – Correspondence to the Executive Office Committee

Members noted copy correspondence from the Minister of Finance to the Executive Office Committee regarding a policy paper from the Dromore Group.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 4:19pm.

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

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

12.3. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 7th October – Budget Discussions

The Committee noted a update from the Department of Finance regarding current budget discussions.

12.4. Secretary of State for NI – NI Executive Budget

The Committee noted a reply from the Secretary of State regarding budget related matters.

12.5. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 7th October – Transformation Funding

The Committee noted an update from the Department of Finance regarding funding for additional transformation projects.

12.6. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 7th October – Reserve Claims

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding budgetary contributions to the Truth Recovery Redress Scheme.

12.7. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 14th October– Public Procurement Oral Briefing Follow-up

The Committee noted follow-up information from the Department of Finance relating to Public Procurement.

12.8. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 14th October – Association of British Insurers (ABI) Evidence and the Financial Services and Markets Bill

The Committee considered an update from the Department of Finance in relation to the Regulation of Claims Management Companies and the Financial Services and Markets Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this matter when the ABI had reverted to the Clerk.

Deirdre Hargey returned to the meeting at 4:27pm.

12.9. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 21st October - Special EU Programme Board (SEUPB) Annual Report and Accounts 2024

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the SEUPB Annual Report and Accounts for 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if the financial irregularity would be reflected in the Consolidated Departmental accounts.

12.10. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 21st October – Rating Policy Oral Briefing Follow-Up

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance with information on current reviews of Net Annual Value (NAVs).

12.11. Department of Finance – Consultation on NISRA Sickness Absence Official Statistics.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance relating to a consultation on the frequency of NICS Sickness Absence Statistics.

12.12. Department of Finance – Budget Briefings to Statutory Committees

The Committee noted a response from the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Finance regarding budget briefings to Statutory Committees.

12.13. – 12.19 Correspondence from other Statutory Committees regarding budget briefings

The Committee noted responses from the following Statutory Committees; Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Communities, Economy, Executive Office, Infrastructure and Justice, regarding the extent of budget briefings from their respective Departments.

12.20. House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee – EU Regulation establishing the Union Customs Code and EU Customs Authority.

The Committee noted correspondence from the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee regarding the above EU Regulation.

12.21. House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee – EU Regulation suspending the Common Customs Tariff Duties

The Committee noted correspondence from the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee regarding the above EU Regulation.

13. Correspondence

i. The Committee considered a Call for Evidence from the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on the Fisheries, Aquaculture and Water Environment Bill.

Áine Murphy declared an interest as a Member of the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee.

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

ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Economy Committee to the Department of Finance regarding the economic implications of the Waste Water Infrastructure constraints.

Brian Kingston left the meeting at 4:34pm.

iii. The Committee considered a Call for Evidence from the Economy Committee on the Credit Unions (Amendment) Bill.

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

iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Economy Committee on a Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) associated with the Commercial Payments Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request an urgent briefing from the Department of Finance on how the provisions of the LCM is relevant to the remint of the Department. This would be sent directly to the Economy Committee on receipt.

v. The Committee noted the Food Standards Agency – Annual Report and Accounts 2025/26

vi. The Committee noted the Land and Property Services Trust Statement – Rate Levy Accruals and Accounts 2025/26.

Members may raise the C&AG comments within the Statement, with Land and Property Services Officials at the next oral briefing.

vii. The Committee noted a Hansard transcript from its session to agree the Addendum Report on the Cyber Security and Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill.

viii. The Committee considered correspondence from Visual Arts Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the correspondence with other Statutory Committees and with the Department of Finance.

ix. The Committee noted copy correspondence from an individual to the Finance Minister.

x. The Committee considered copy correspondence from an individual to the Executive Office, Department for the Economy, Public Accounts Committee and Committee for the Economy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would liaise with colleagues regarding the approach being taken to this correspondence.

xi. The Committee noted results from a youth-led research project conducted through NI Youth Forum.

14. Draft Forward Work Programme

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

The Committee noted the business scheduled for 2 meetings on Tuesday 10th and on Wednesday 11th November 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to postpone 2 scheduled Departmental briefings to later in the session given the business to be considered on 11th November.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that meeting packs for the meetings next week, may issue later than usual to allow for the finalisation of papers for the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill.

Members requested a calendar invite for the Tree Planting event on 19th November.

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

15. Any Other Business

None.

16. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meetings will be held on Tuesday 10th November 2026 at 12:30pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings and on Wednesday 11th November 2026 at 2pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

11th November 2026