



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

14 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

Brian Kingston MLA

Áine Murphy MLA

Eóin Tennyson MLA

Apologies: None

Virtual: Gerry Carroll MLA

Harry Harvey 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
Stephen Magee	Clerical Supervisor
Heather Graham	Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2:05pm in public session.

1. Apologies.

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests.

None.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider Chairperson's Business before other scheduled business.

10. Chairperson's Business

10.1. Finance Minister – Committee Event to mark Baby Loss Awareness Week

The Committee noted correspondence from the Finance Minister regarding his attendance at the Committee's Event to mark Baby Loss Awareness Week.

Members reflected on the event and the Baby Loss Certificates Scheme, paying tribute to all parties involved in the development of the Scheme.

Áine Murphy joined the meeting at 2:07pm.

10.2. House of Commons Library – Registration of Stillbirth and Baby Loss Certificates

The Committee considered a House of Commons Research paper examining the current legislative position in England & Wales for Stillbirth and Baby Loss Certificates.

10.3. Current Budget 2026/27

Members discussed the current Budget position and recent comments by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an urgent oral briefing from the Department of Finance on the current Budget 2026/27, in closed session, if appropriate.

Members agreed to ask the Department to provide briefing on a number of issues including the legality of offering a public sector pay settlement and the status of the 2027/28 Budget. Members also agreed to write to the Secretary of State for NI regarding his recent comments on the Budget 2026/27.

3. Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill – Committee Deliberations

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

Eóin Tennyson joined the meeting 2:20pm.

Members noted a Clerk's Memo and several background papers for the session. The Committee discussed the forthcoming oral briefing session with the General Registrar's Office, noting that a written briefing would be considered at next week's meeting. The Clerk discussed the need to revise the Bill timetable once again to ensure that scrutiny was completed in good time.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to proceed on the basis of a further revised timetable and schedule additional Committee meetings on 3rd and 10th November.

The Committee considered further evidence from NI Humanists.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:25pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish further evidence provided from NI Humanists.

Members noted that the next 3 agenda items would be taken together.

4. SL1 – The Land Registration, Statutory Charges, Ground Rents and Registry of Deeds (Electronic Communications) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

5. SL1 – The Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

6. SL1 – The Registration of Deeds (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee noted clerk's memos on each SL1. Members also noted receipt of the three proposed Statutory Rules,

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a call for views via survey, to publish the SL1s, the draft Statutory Rules, any relevant documents and to publish any responses after Committee consideration.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that a departmental oral briefing was not required at this time.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Committee staff would seek information from the Department of Finance, where necessary, on any matters raised during the SL1 stage, including in the call for views.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note receipt of the proposed statutory rules and to consider them at the meeting on 18th November 2026.

7. Cyber Security & Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill – Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) – Agreement of Addendum Report

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

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance confirming that a proposed EU Directive on Digitisation and Common Specifications would not impact the Legislative Consent Memorandum.

The Committee considered an Addendum to its report on the Cyber Security & Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill LCM.

The Committee considered the Title Page, Contents Page, Remit, Powers and Membership Section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Title page, Contents Page, Remit, Powers and Membership Section stand part of the Report

The Committee considered the Further Committee Consideration & Conclusion Sections as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Further Committee Consideration & Conclusion Sections stand part of the Report.

The Committee considered the Appendices Section; Appendix 1, 2 and 3 as drafted.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Addendum Report on the Legislative Consent Memorandum – Cyber Security & Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill be published.

The Committee noted that the debate on this LCM was scheduled for Monday 19th October therefore the Addendum would be circulated to all MLAs in advance.

8. Performance and Culture of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Inquiry – Committee Deliberations

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

The Committee considered correspondence from the Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Parliament outlining his comments on the Terms of Reference for the NICS Inquiry and enclosing a copy of the August 2026 Report: “Serving Scotland: Our 5 year plan”.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that this correspondence would be added to the evidence base for the Inquiry, in due course.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information on the differences between heads of the civil service and the civil service structures and functional responsibilities in Northern Ireland compared to neighbouring jurisdictions.

11. Public Procurement – Oral Briefing from the Department of Finance

The Committee noted a clerk's memo and departmental briefing paper provided in advance of the session.

The following officials joined the meeting, at 2:52pm;

Colin Woods Deputy Permanent Secretary CPD, Department of Finance; and

Donna Williams Divisional Director CPD, Department of Finance.

The officials briefed the Committee on progress addressing the Memorandum of Reply on Public Procurement and the Public Procurement Policy Statement and Assurance Process.

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session, and several issues were discussed including; Recommendations from the Public Accounts Committee Report on Public Procurement, SMEs, prompt payment, ethical procurement, costs of public procurement and social value.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek additional information on geographical sanctions and the timeline for consultation with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in respect of ethical procurement.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 3:25pm.

11. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 7th October 2026.

12. Matters Arising

12.1. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 9th September – Special European Union Programme Board (SEUPB) Annual Report and Accounts

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as he recently met with representatives of SEUPB in a party political context.

Members considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the delay in publication of the 2024 SEUPB Annual Report and Accounts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to liaise with both the Public Accounts Committee and NI Assembly Audit Committee in relation to resourcing within the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 3:26pm.

12.2. Department of Finance - DALO Readout Responses – 16th September – Follow-up information Business Plan Oral Briefing

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance with follow-up information on People Strategy and Civil Service Renewal.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the information on Civil Service Renewal to the evidence base for the NICS Inquiry.

12.3. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 16th September – Follow-up information on Departmental 5 year plans

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance with information on departmental 5 year plans.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy the response to other Statutory Committees for awareness. Members also agreed to ask the Department of Finance if the first iterations of the 5 year plans would be published as anticipated.

12.4. Department of Finance – NI Fiscal Council – Update on Recruitment

The Committee considered an update on the recruitment of a deputy Chair to the NI Fiscal Council.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to pass on its congratulations to Alan Barrett on his appointment as deputy Chair to the Council.

12.5. The Executive Office – Written Statement on Response to UK Covid-19 Inquiry Module 4

The Committee considered a Written Statement on the Executive's Response to Module 4 Report from the Covid-19 Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to explore how the Covid-19 Inquiry findings may be relevant to the Committee's NICS Inquiry.

12.6. Communities Committee – Housing (Amendment) Bill

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Communities Committee to the Department of Finance regarding homelessness, budget and planned work in the Department of Finance.

12.7. Education Committee – Budget Briefing

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

The Committee considered correspondence from the Education Committee regarding the non-attendance of the Education Permanent Secretary at a scheduled briefing on the budget.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance Permanent Secretary regarding Statutory Committees' scrutiny of Budget matters and also to write to all Statutory Committees seeking information on what briefing has been received in relation to budget matters. A response will issue to the Committee for Education indicating these actions.

12.8. Committee for the Economy – Hospitality Rates Review

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Economy Committee to Land & Property Services regarding a reported rates review in the hospitality sector.

12.9. The Dromore Group – Copy correspondence to the Finance Minister

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

12.10. Minister of Finance – Response to NI Fiscal Council’s Special Report on Public Sector Pay

The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Finance in relation to the NI Fiscal Council’s Special Report on Public Sector Pay, noting that an oral briefing on the Council’s Report had been scheduled for 11th November.

12.11. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Responses – 23rd September – Prevalence and Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in Northern Ireland.

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance on this report. Members noted that an oral briefing on PEACE PLUS had been requested.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy this response to the Executive Office Committee.

12.12. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 23rd September – Outturn and Forecast Outturn briefing

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance in relation to a recent briefing on Outturn and Forecast Outturn Briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy the information provided to the Committee for Infrastructure and Committee for Education for awareness; informing them about the Finance Committee’s agreement in respect of this issue. Members also agreed to ask the Department of Finance for confirmation of its challenge function in these cases.

12.13. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 30th September – Claims Management Companies Regulation

Steve Aiken declared an interest given a recent meeting with the Financial Conduct Authority to discuss this issue.

The Committee considered a Department of Finance response regarding Regulation of Claims Management Companies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for a copy of the evidence produced by the Association of British Insurers and for information on its engagement with UK Government in connection with associated legislation.

13. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered correspondence from the Infrastructure Committee seeking input to its Committee Stage for the Tree Protection Bill.
- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Infrastructure Committee seeking input to its Committee Stage of the Harbours Bill
- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Infrastructure Committee seeking input to its Committee Stage of the Display of Flags and Emblems Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek comment from the Department of Finance on the policy locus for each Bill, including comment on financial implications – this would inform a response to the Infrastructure Committee.

- iv. The Committee noted the 75th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

Harry Harvey left the meeting at 4:07pm.

14. Draft Forward Work Programme

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

The Committee noted agreement reached in relation to additional meetings to scrutinise the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill.

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

15. Any Other Business

None.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 4:10pm.

16. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 21st October 2026 at 2pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:11pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

21st October 2026