



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

23 September 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

Apologies: None

Virtual: 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
Marion Johnson	Clerical Supervisor
Heather Graham	Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 1:08pm in public session.

1. Apologies.

As above.

Members noted that the Committee could proceed to take oral evidence but did not have a decision-making quorum.

2. Declaration of Interests.

None.

3. Marriage and Civil Partnership – Oral Briefing – Northern Ireland (NI) Humanists

Members noted that 3 panels of stakeholders would be giving evidence on the Bill today, both in person and remotely. Members also noted a Clerk's Memo providing background to all 3 sessions as well as a copy of the Bill and Explanatory Memorandum for the Bill. Finally, Members noted a copy of the written submission from NI Humanists to the Committee's Call for Evidence on the Bill.

The following witnesses joined the meeting, at 1:11pm;

Boyd Sleator	Co-ordinator, NI Humanists
Stefanie Onipko	NI Celebrant Network Services Coordinator

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session, and several issues were discussed including; the lawful basis for humanist ceremonies, the Dublin model, the Scottish Government's Family Law Consultation and training for humanists' celebrants.

Diane Forsythe joined the meeting at 1:13pm

Steve Aiken joined the meeting at 1:28pm.

Áine Murphy joined the meeting at 1:33pm.

Steve Aiken declared an interest as his daughter was married by a Humanist Celebrant in Scotland and as he had been briefed separately by NI Humanists.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Hansard would report all 3 sessions on the Bill at today's meeting.

The Committee considered a Hansard transcript of its Deliberations during its meeting on 9th September and a transcript from last week's meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add both Hansard transcripts to the Committee Report on the Bill in due course.

The Committee considered a DALO readout response regarding No Fault Divorce.

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

The witnesses undertook to provide further information on regulation.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance, and the witnesses left the meeting at 1:58pm.

4. Marriage and Civil Partnership – Oral Briefing – Humanists Together

The Committee again noted a Clerk's Memo providing background to all 3 sessions and a copy of the Bill and Explanatory Memorandum for the Bill

Members noted a copy of the written submission from Humanists Together to the Committee's Call for Evidence on the Bill.

The following witnesses joined the meeting via Zoom, at 1:59pm;

Michael Conlon Chief Executive, Humanists Together

Chloe Cairns Wedding Celebrant, Humanists Together

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session, and several issues were discussed including; the Dublin model, qualifying requirements for celebrants and potential risks for smaller organisations.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:18pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance, and the witnesses left the meeting at 2:29pm.

5. Marriage and Civil Partnership – Oral Briefing – Give Couples A Choice

The Committee again noted a Clerk's Memo providing background to all 3 sessions. Members also noted a copy of the Bill and Explanatory Memorandum for the Bill as well as a copy of the written submission from Give Couples A Choice to the Committee's Call for Evidence on the Bill.

The following witness joined the meeting via Zoom, at 2:29pm;

Sophie Easton Campaign Lead, Give Couples A Choice
Movement

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session, and several issues were discussed including; local representation for Independent Celebrants, the UK Government's current consultation, safeguards and regulation of Independent Celebrants.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2:30pm.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as he was married by a Registrar in a civil marriage ceremony.

Steve Aiken left the meeting at 2:45pm

Áine Murphy left the meeting at 2:48pm.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 2:50pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witness for their attendance, and the witness left the meeting at 2:52pm.

Áine Murphy rejoined the meeting at 2:54pm.

The Chairperson indicated that he wished the Committee to consider an item under **Chairperson's Business** before further agenda items.

10. Chairperson's Business

10.3 Northern Ireland Fiscal Council – Annual Conference 2026

The Committee considered further details for the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council's Annual Conference to take place on Friday 25th September. Members also considered the Council's Sustainability Report 2026 – Special Focus on Public Sector Pay. The Chairperson informed Members that the agenda for the Conference had changed and the Finance Minister was no longer able to attend, however, the Chairperson and the deputy Chairperson had been invited to speak at the Conference.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and deputy Chairperson would speak at the Conference.

Deirdre Hargey rejoined the meeting at 2:57pm.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 2:57pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to both the Minister of Finance and Secretary of State for NI in relation to the Council's Sustainability Report and that an oral briefing on the Report would be sought from the Council, before the end of the year. Members also agreed to add the Report to the evidence base for the Committee's Inquiry on Performance and Culture in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to Chairperson's Business later in the meeting.

The Committee adjourned at 3:00pm and reconvened at 3:12pm.

Steve Aiken rejoined the meeting at 3:12pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider agenda item 8 – **End of Session Report 2025/26** next.

8. Committee for Finance – End of Session Report 2025/26

The Committee considered its draft End of Session Report for 2025-26.

The Chairperson and deputy Chairperson reflected on the work of the Committee and thanked Committee staff for their efforts throughout the year.

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 Key Activities, Outputs and Achievements Section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Key Activities, Outputs and Achievements Section stand part of the Report.

The Committee considered the Appendices section; Appendix 1 and 2 as drafted.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee for Finance End of Session Report 2025-26 be the 13th Report of the Committee for Finance.

6. Cyber Security & Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill – Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) – Oral Briefing from Department of Finance officials

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

The Committee noted that this session was scheduled as an update briefing in advance of the anticipated Plenary debate on the LCM. Members also noted correspondence from the Finance Minister along with a copy of the Committee Report on the LCM.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3:17pm;

Paul Grocott	Deputy Secretary, Digital & Security Shared Services
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Hugh Tohill	Director, Digital Security & Engagement
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The officials briefed the Committee on the latest position with respect to the LCM.

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session, and several issues were discussed including; Artificial Intelligence, the LCM timeline and compliance with the Windsor Framework.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 3:28pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to incorporate today's briefing into an addendum report on the LCM.

Members also considered the Hansard transcripts from last week's briefing on the Public Office (Accountability) Bill – Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to incorporate this transcript into the addendum report on the LCM.

7. Department of Finance – Oral Briefing – Outturn and Forecast Outturn Data

The Committee noted background papers for the session; including previous briefing papers on the June and July data. Members considered the most recent data for August (Round 5).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to circulate the Round 5 data to other Statutory Committees and the Assembly Audit Committee as usual.

Members also considered a DALO readout response regarding departmental pressures.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3:29pm;

Maryann Smith	Director of Central Expenditure Division (CED), Department of Finance
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Emer Rice	Head of In-Year Monitoring, CED, Department of Finance
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The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session, and several issues were discussed including; current budget position, departmental engagement, current resource pressures and variances across departments.

Áine Murphy left the meeting at 3:37pm.

Officials undertook to provide further information to the Committee as indicated during the session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 4:00pm.

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

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

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding the procurement of a replacement contract for the supply of agency workers to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information on several related matters, including information on control processes in place for the contract. Members also agreed to copy the correspondence to the Communities Committee for awareness.

The Committee considered a Hansard transcript from its Deliberations at the meeting on 9th September and another transcript from last week's Deliberations on the Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add these to the evidence base for the Inquiry, in due course.

10. Chairperson's Business (continued).

10.1 Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS) Series 9 Programme

The Committee noted correspondence from Assembly Research outlining the forthcoming KESS Programme.

10.2 Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure, Public Services Reform and Digitisation and Taoiseach

The Committee considered correspondence from the above Joint Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee Clerk would continue to explore potential engagement with the Joint Committee.

11. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 16th September 2026.

12. Matters Arising

12.1. Department of Finance – Baby Loss Certificate Scheme

The Committee considered an update from the Department on the current position of the Baby Loss Certificate Scheme.

Members discussed the success of the Scheme and reflected on the Committee's role.

12.2. Baby Loss Awareness Week

Members discussed the upcoming Baby Loss Awareness Week and related events, noting details of a ribbon event being organised by Jemma Dolan MLA on 12th October.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to circulate details of the ribbon event to all MLAs.

Members also discussed a further Committee event on 14th October.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to host a Committee event on 14th October, to reflect on and mark the success of the Baby Loss Certificate Scheme.

12.3. DALO Readout Response – 9 September – Public Procurement Policy

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance with further details of the Public Procurement Policy Assurance Statement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this matter further at next week's meeting, in advance of a Departmental briefing on 14th October.

12.4. Infrastructure Committee – Association of British Insurers (ABI)

The Committee noted correspondence from the Infrastructure Committee regarding the ABI briefing on motor insurance premiums, noting that Committee's decision in this regard.

12.5. House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee

The Committee noted confirmation from the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee that it would add the Committee for the Economy to its distribution lists as appropriate.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as he had given evidence to the Scrutiny Committee on a related matter, last week.

13. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered correspondence from the Executive Office Committee regarding the prevalence and impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Finance for response.

- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly & Executive Review Committee (AERC) regarding its Review into the Development of a formal process and guidance on the handling of Westminster Statutory Instruments which include a role for the Assembly.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest as a Member of the AERC.

- iii. The Committee noted the 73rd Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.
- iv. The Committee considered correspondence on behalf of Wastewater Infrastructure Group.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee Clerk would liaise with the Clerk of both the Economy and Infrastructure Committees, to ascertain a suitable course of action.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the individual, noting the agreed approach.

14. Draft Forward Work Programme

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

The Committee noted that the informal meeting with the Economy Committee and Trade NI would take place next week at 12:30pm in the Private Dining Room. Members also noted the provisional date of 27 January 2027, for a visit and external meeting in Occupational Health Service.

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 meeting will be held on Wednesday 30th September 2026 at 2pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:31pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

30th September 2026