



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Finance

Minutes of Proceedings

30 September 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

Apologies: Dr Steve Aiken MBE MLA

Eóin Tennyson MLA

Virtual: Gerry Carroll MLA

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Áine Murphy 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.

1. Apologies.

As above.

The Chairperson welcomed students from Northern Regional College, who were observing proceedings from the public gallery.

2. Declaration of Interests.

None.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider **agenda item 9: Chairperson's Business** before other scheduled agenda items.

9. Chairperson's Business

Informal meeting with Trade NI and Economy Committee

The Chairperson informed Members that an informal meeting with Trade NI and Economy Committee which was due to place over lunchtime today, had been cancelled due to bereavement.

9.1 Northern Ireland Fiscal Council (NIFC) – Public Sector Pay & Financial Sustainability in Northern Ireland

The Committee considered a copy of a presentation given by Dr Birnie at the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council's Annual Conference. Members also noted that an oral briefing on the NIFC's Sustainability Report 2026 had been requested for 18th November.

The Chairperson reflected on value of the NIFC's Annual Conference and on a presentation given by the Department of Finance Permanent Secretary at the Conference.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share Dr Birnie's presentation with other Statutory Committees and the Northern Ireland Assembly Audit Committee and to ask that the Department of Finance Permanent Secretary replicate his presentation at an informal meeting with other Statutory Committee Chairs and Clerks, if convenient, on 6th October 2026.

9.2 Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) – Save the Date – Annual Human Rights Statement

The Committee noted a "Save the Date" for the NIHRC's Annual Human Rights Statement on 10th December 2026.

9.3. Absence of an agreed Executive Budget

The Chairperson remarked on the absence of an agreed Executive Budget, 6 months into the financial year and the resulting difficult and challenging position.

3. Transformation Funding – Oral Briefing – Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (HOCS)

Members noted a Clerk's Memo and several background papers for the session, including a briefing paper provided by the Head of the Civil Service on the Public Sector Transformation Fund. Members also noted that a hard copy of the Annual Report on Public Sector Transformation Funding 2025/26 had been provided by HOCS.

The following officials joined the meeting, at 2:10pm;

Jayne Brady Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (HOCS)

Patrick Gallagher Head of the Delivery Unit, The Executive Office

Patrick Neeson Head of Supply, Department of Finance

The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session, and several issues were discussed including; progress on tranche 1 projects, drawdown of funding for

tranche 1 projects, the Primary Care Multi-Disciplinary Team Programme, spending profile for all transformation projects, governance matters and scrutiny of transformation projects.

Members also questioned HOCS on broader Executive matters and wider Civil Service Reform.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:22pm.

Áine Murphy left the meeting at 2:29pm.

Deirdre Hargey joined the meeting at 2:55pm.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 3:17pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to HOCS, seeking additional information on a number of issues discussed during the briefing.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance, and the officials left the meeting at 3:33pm.

The Committee adjourned at 3:35pm and reconvened at 3:43pm.

4. Department of Finance – Financial Position – Oral Briefing

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

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Department of Finance.

The following official joined the meeting, at 3:44pm;

Gavin Patrick	Director of Finance, Department of Finance
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The official briefed the Committee on the Department of Finance's draft 2026-27-2029-30 budget position and provided an update on the Contingency Planning Envelope 2026-27 position. The briefing was followed by a question-and-answer session, and several issues were discussed including; the absence of an agreed

Executive Budget, inescapable Capital Bids, Estate Disposals and level of vacancies.

Deirdre Hargey rejoined the meeting at 3:47pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek additional information from the Department of Finance on matters relating to property disposals and impact of vacancies.

The Chairperson thanked the official for their attendance, and the official left the meeting at 4:10pm.

5. Public Office (Accountability) Bill – Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) – Agreement of Addendum Report

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

The Committee considered an Addendum to its report on the Public Office (Accountability) 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 – Public Office (Accountability) Bill be published.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider **Agenda Item 6 Public Procurement Policy Assurance Statement** after agenda items requiring Hansard transcripts.

7. Marriage & Civil Partnership Bill – Committee Deliberations

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

The Committee considered an extract from the UK Government’s consultation “Tying the Knot: Reforming weddings law in England and Wales”

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

Members noted a comparative table outlining the differences between a Limited Company and a Charity.

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

The Committee noted that there were no papers to consider under this agenda item.

Members discussed a number of issues considered as part of the earlier oral briefing with HOCS on Transformation Funding and Civil Service Reform which had direct relevance to the themes identified in the Committee Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite HOCS to provide a further briefing on the Inquiry in due course.

6. Public Procurement Policy Assurance Statement – Committee Consideration

The Committee considered correspondence and papers from the Department of Finance regarding the Public Procurement Policy Assurance Statement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this matter at a scheduled oral briefing with Departmental officials on 14th October 2026.

10. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 23rd September 2026.

11. Matters Arising

11.1. Minister of Finance – Budget Briefing

The Committee noted correspondence from the Finance Minister on the current budgetary situation and request for briefing.

11.2. Department of Finance – DALO Readout Response – 9th September – Annual Reports and Accounts

Members considered a response from the Department of Finance regarding the current position in relation to Annual Report and Accounts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to inform the Economy Committee about the delay in respect of the Department for the Economy Annual Report and Accounts.

11.3. Department of Finance - DALO Readout Responses – 9 September – Motor Insurance Claims and Premiums and Claims Management Regulation

The Committee considered a combined response from the Department of Finance regarding Motor Insurance Claims, Premiums and Claims Management Regulation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to update the British Insurance Brokers' Association on the current position in relation to Claims Management Regulation and to copy the information in relation to insurance premiums to the Infrastructure, Justice and Economy Committees. Members also agreed to ask both the Association of British Insurers and Department of Finance for further information in respect of Regulation.

11.4. Department of Finance - DALO Readout Responses – 9 September – Tariff Treatment: Elimination of customs duty relief

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance in relation to the cost of the elimination of customs duty relief.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy the information to both the Northern Ireland Assembly's Economy Committee and House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee.

11.5. Department of Finance - DALO Readout Responses – 9 September – Data Sharing Strategy

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance in relation to ownership of a Data Sharing Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to copy this information to the Communities Committee.

11.6. Committee of Procedures – Standing Order 42A Legislative Consent Motions

The Committee noted correspondence from the Procedures Committee in relation to amendments to Standing Orders concerning Legislative Consent Memorandums.

11.7. Scottish Finance and Public Administration Committee

The Committee considered correspondence from the Convenor of the Scottish Finance and Public Administration Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson would attend an online meeting with the Convenor of the Scottish Finance and Public Administration Committee and Chair of the Senedd Finance Committee to discuss future engagement.

11.8. Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (WFDSC)

The Committee considered correspondence from the WFDSC regarding the EU proposed Directive on digitalisation and common specifications.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a view from the Department of Finance on the relevance of this Directive to the Cyber Security & Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill, Legislative Consent Memorandum.

11.9. Economy Committee – Regional Balance Bill

The Committee considered correspondence from the Economy Committee to the Department of Finance regarding the Regional Balance Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a reminder to the Department of Finance about a response to inform the Call for Evidence on this Bill.

11.10. Department for the Economy – Universities and City & Growth Deals

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department for the Economy regarding the impact of City & Growth Deal funding on the University sector.

12. Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee agreed to carry forward items of **correspondence** to next week's meeting.

13. Draft Forward Work Programme

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

The Committee noted earlier agreement in respect of an informal meeting with the Department of Finance Permanent Secretary on 6th October.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to start next week's meeting at the earlier time of 1pm.

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

14. Any Other Business

None.

15. Date and Time of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 7th October 2026 at 1pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

Brian Kingston and Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 4:32pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:32pm.

Matthew O'Toole

Chairperson, Committee for Finance

7th October 2026