



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Committee for Finance

### Minutes of Proceedings

9 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

Deirdre Hargey MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

Brian Kingston MLA

Áine Murphy MLA

Eóin Tennyson MLA

**Apologies:** None

**Virtual:** Gerry Carroll 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 2:05pm in public session.

The Chairperson welcomed Áine Murphy to the Committee, who has replaced Jemma Dolan, with effect from 7<sup>th</sup> September. The Chairperson also passed on the Committee's congratulations to Jemma who welcomed a baby girl; Síomha Fearon on 4<sup>th</sup> September.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to send Jemma a congratulatory card on behalf of the Committee.

The Chairperson also wished Heather Graham from the Committee team a very Happy Birthday.

**1. Apologies.**

As above.

**2. Declaration of Interests.**

Steve Aiken declared an interest related to discussion about the Executive Budget, given his involvement in recent engagement with the Secretary of State for NI on same.

Eoin Tennyson declared an interest in relation to an item under correspondence from a constituent.

### **3. Chairperson's Business.**

#### **3.1 Minister of Finance – Plenary Attendance**

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Minister of Finance to the Speaker indicating that he would not be in attendance for Plenary proceedings on 14<sup>th</sup> September after 4pm.

#### **3.2 Department of Finance – Written Ministerial Statement – Local Growth Fund**

The Committee noted the notification of and copy of a Written Ministerial Statement made on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2026 relating to the Local Growth Fund.

#### **3.3 Minister for Infrastructure – Urgent Written Ministerial Statement (WMS): Forensic Audit Governance Systems in NI Water**

The Committee noted a copy of the WMS made by the Infrastructure Minister on 4<sup>th</sup> September regarding a Forensic Audit of the Governance Systems in NI Water. Members further noted that this will be conducted by Internal Audit which sits within the Department of Finance and has briefed the Committee previously.

#### **3.4 Department of Finance – Section 59/Section 7 Authorisation Letters**

The Committee considered 2 items of correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding authorisations to Departmental Accounting Officers increasing total resources and cash which can be utilised by Departments.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward this update to other Statutory Committees and the Assembly Audit Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Finance seeking his agreement to hold himself ready to brief the Committee as soon as there is progress on the Budget.

### **3.5 Department of Finance – Informal meeting with Permanent Secretary**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding an informal meeting with the Chairperson and deputy Chairperson.

### **3.9 Department of Finance – Informal meeting with Permanent Secretary**

The Committee considered a note of the informal meeting with the Permanent Secretary and the Chairperson updated Members on the discussions at this informal meeting, indicating that an invitation would be issued to the Committee to visit the Headquarters of the NICS Occupational Health Service.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Committee Team would scope a potential visit to the Headquarters of the NICS Occupational Health Service.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2:20pm.

### **3.6 And 3.10 Northern Ireland Fiscal Council – Annual Conference 2026**

The Committee noted details of the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Annual Conference, taking place on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> September 2026, including formal invitation and agenda. Some Members indicated that they would attend the conference.

### **3.7 Committee Invitation – Belfast Late-Night Bus Service Pilot**

The Committee noted an invitation to an event in the Long Gallery on 16<sup>th</sup> September to showcase the successes of Belfast's Late-Night Bus Service pilot to date.

### **3.8 Centre for Cross Border Cooperation's Research Priorities Seminar**

The Committee noted an invitation to attend a seminar outlining Cooperation Irelands' key research priorities.

### **3.11 Informal meeting with Oireachtas Joint Committee**

The Chairperson discussed the informal meeting and visit to the Oireachtas Joint Committee, noting that this was cancelled due to anticipated low attendance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to explore alternative means of engagement on mutual areas of interest, when the forward work programme permits.

## **4. Draft Minutes of Proceedings.**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting of the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2026.

## **5. Matters Arising**

### **5.1. Minister of Finance – Consultation on Non-Domestic Rating Policy**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Finance relating to the consultation on non-domestic rating measures.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing on the outcome of the consultation and forthcoming annual Rating Policy Statutory Rules on 7<sup>th</sup> October.

### **5.2. Minister of Finance – Cyber Security and Resilience Bill – Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM)**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Finance regarding the LCM related to the Cyber Security and Resilience Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing on this LCM at the meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> September. The Committee also agreed to schedule an oral briefing on the Public Office (Accountability) Bill at the meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> September.

### **5.3. Minister of Finance – Copy correspondence to the Executive Office Committee**

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Minister of Finance to the Executive Office Committee regarding bids submitted to access to records and the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.

### **5.4. Minister for Infrastructure – Lagan Pedestrian Cycle Bridge**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister for Infrastructure relating to the Lagan Cycle Bridge.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance of what the implications of the delay to this project will be in terms of reprofiling this year's Capital Budget and what contingency plans are in place. Members also agreed to copy this correspondence to the Infrastructure Committee.

### **5.5. Department of Finance – Breaches of 2026-27 Vote on Account**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance relating to some Departments breaching their 2026-27 Vote on Account. Members reflected on the potential for reputation risk to Departments.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for further information on the new accounting treatment.

### **5.6. Department of Finance – Research Project – SMEs and Public Sector Procurement**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance regarding research examining the relationship between the public procurement environment and microbusinesses, SMEs and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the correspondence to the Economy Committee for its information.

#### **5.7. DALO Readout Response – 15 April 2026 – Call for Evidence – General Teaching Bill**

The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding remit within the General Teaching Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to submit a NIL return to this Call for Evidence.

#### **5.8. DALO Readout Response – 22 April 2026 – City & Growth Deals**

The Committee noted an update from the Department regarding City & Growth Deals.

#### **5.9. DALO Readout Response – 1 July 2026 – City & Growth Deals**

The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding developments relating to City & Growth Deals.

#### **5.10. City & Growth Deals – Quarterly Progress Report**

The Committee noted the July 2026 Quarterly Progress Report for City & Growth Deals.

#### **5.11. DALO Readout Response – 3 June 2026 – Ministerial Oral Briefing Follow-up**

The Committee considered follow-up information from the Department following the Ministerial Oral Briefing.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Committee Clerk would indicate to the Head of the Civil Service specific requirements for the forthcoming oral briefing on Transformation Funding.

#### **5.12. DALO Readout Response – 17 June 2026 – Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill**

The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding policy remit within this Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the response to the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs as a response to the Call for Evidence on the Bill. Members also agreed to write to all Committee Clerks highlighting the need to scrutinise costings of Private Members Bill.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 2:54pm.

#### **5.13. DALO Readout Response – 17 June 2026 – Annual Reports and Accounts**

The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding Departmental readiness to publish Annual Reports and Accounts.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Department of Finance on the current position on compliance with the statutory deadline of the publication of Annual Reports and Accounts.

#### **5.14. Department of Finance – Pre-publication copy – Summary Report on Consultation on Land Registration Fees Order**

The Committee noted a summary consultation report on the Land Registration Fees Order.

#### **5.15. Department of Finance – Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)**

Diane Forsythe declared an interest given her previous work with SEUPB.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding the Annual Report and Accounts for SEUPB.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to express its dissatisfaction with the continuing situation and ask the Department of Finance for further specifics on the continuing delay. Members also agreed to explore the potential for an external visit and/or oral briefing with SEUPB.

#### **5.16. Department of Finance – Association of British Insurers (ABI)**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding ABI briefing on motor insurance premiums and claims.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the correspondence to the Infrastructure, Justice and Economy Committees. Members also agreed to ask the Department of Finance about what actions have been taken in relation to issues raised.

#### **5.17. British Insurance Brokers' Association**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Chief Executive of the British Insurance Brokers' Association regarding regulation of Claims Management Companies.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for clarification on the policy locus on the issues raised.

#### **5.18. Department of Finance – Copy correspondence to the Justice Committee**

The Committee noted copy correspondence from the Department to the Justice Committee regarding the introduction of lump sum orders in financial remedy proceedings.

Deirdre Hargey rejoined the meeting at 3:04pm.

### **5.19. Public Accounts Committee (PAC) – Major IT Projects in Northern Ireland**

The Committee considered a copy of the PAC Report on Major Projects in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask HOCS to address matters relating to the Interg8 project during the forthcoming oral briefing.

### **5.20. Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) – Northern Ireland City & Growth Deals**

The Committee noted a copy of the NIAO Report on City & Growth Deals.

### **5.21. Chief Secretary to the Treasury – NI Executive Budget**

The Committee noted a response from Emma Reynolds MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury regarding the NI Fiscal Council's Sustainability Report.

### **5.22. And 5.23 Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) – Evidence sessions 15<sup>th</sup> July**

The Committee considered transcripts of evidence sessions from the NIAC on 15<sup>th</sup> July, which were attended by the deputy Chair. The deputy Chair reflected on the evidence sessions.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to correspond to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, the Secretary of State for NI and to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury about issues pertinent to the evidence sessions.

### **5.24. House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee – Copy correspondence – Tariff Treatment**

Steve Aiken declared an interest as a Member of the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee considered copy correspondence from the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee regarding tariff treatment and elimination of customs duty relief.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for its assessment of any potential cost to the Northern Ireland Block due to these changes. Members also agreed to copy the correspondence to the Economy Committee.

## **5.25. Fermanagh & Omagh District Council – Rural Affairs Research**

Áine Murphy declared an interest during her time as a Member of the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, the Council had presented oral evidence of a similar nature.

The Committee considered correspondence from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council regarding its research on rural affairs.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Committee Clerk would engage further on this matter and return to the Committee with further information.

## **6. Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill – Committee Deliberations**

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

The Committee noted that the scheduled oral evidence with the Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner for Children and Young People would not be going ahead today.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for clarification on legislative provision for Non-Fault Divorce.

The Committee noted the Keeling Schedule for the Marriage (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

**7. SR The Public Service Pensions (Valuations and Employer Cost Cap) (Amendment) Directions (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Committee noted that the Department of Finance had made the Public Service Pensions (Valuations and Employer Cost Cap) (Amendment) Directions (NI) 2026, which are not subject to any Assembly procedure.

**8. Outturn and Forecast Outturn – Written Briefing – June and July data**

The Committee noted a DALO readout response relating to the Ministerial Statement on 2025-26 Provisional Outturn and 2026-27 available funding.

The Committee considered a DALO readout response relating to the Executive Office Financial Transactions Capital underspend.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy this information to the Executive Office Committee and Economy Committee.

The Committee noted a Hansard transcript of an oral evidence session with the Department of Finance on the Outturn and Forecast Outturn which took place on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2026.

The Committee considered a written briefing paper from the Department of Finance on June (R3) Outturn and Forecast Outturn data and a written briefing paper from the Department of Finance on July (R4) Outturn and Forecast Outturn data.

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to indicate to officials that specific issues in relation to identified pressures should be addressed in a forthcoming oral briefing.

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

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

**Agreed:** The Committee moved into closed session at 3:44pm to consider an update on scheduled oral evidence sessions for the Inquiry.

Deirdre Hargey left the meeting at 3:46pm.

The Committee returned to public session at 4:00pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an oral briefing with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman on 4<sup>th</sup> November.

The Committee noted a written Assembly Question from the Finance Minister to the deputy Chairperson regarding staff vacancies in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS).

The Committee noted correspondence from the Secretary General in the Department of the Taoiseach in Dublin regarding the role of the Secretary General.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Permanent Secretary to the Welsh Government.

## **10. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted the following Annual Reports and Accounts;
  - i. Department of Finance 2025-26 Annual Report and Accounts;
  - ii. Department of Finance Superannuation and Other Allowances Pension Schemes;
  - iii. NIPSO 2025-26 Annual Report and Accounts
  - iv. National Lottery Community Fund Annual Report and Accounts 2025-26
  - v. UK Statistics Authority Annual Report and Accounts 2025/26
  - vi. Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) Annual Report and Accounts 2025/26 (including notification of the FCA Annual Public meeting)
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance alerting Members to 2 new appointments to the Board of the Utility Regulator.

iii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Finance relating to the publication of the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Public Procurement Policy Assurance Statement 2025/26.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to circulate the Departmental information to other Statutory Committees. Members also agreed that officials should be prepared to answer queries in relation to the Public Accounts Committee's Report on Public Procurement and wider procurement policy changes at a forthcoming evidence session.

iv. The Committee considered copy correspondence from the Department of Finance to the Communities Committee relating to the Debt Respite (Breathing Space) Scheme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the correspondence to the Communities Committee given policy relevance.

v. The Committee considered copy correspondence from the Communities Committee to the Finance Minister and response from the Finance Minister regarding the absence of a Data Sharing Strategy in Northern Ireland.

Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 4:15pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance for clarification over the ownership of a Data Sharing Strategy if one was in existence.

vi. The Committee considered the Committee for Communities' Call for Evidence on the Charities (Amendment) Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if there is any policy locus for the provisions of the Bill, to inform a response to the Committee for Communities.

vii. The Committee considered the Committee for Communities' Call for Evidence on the Housing (Amendment) Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if there is any policy locus for the provisions of the Bill, to inform a response to the Committee for Communities.

viii. The Committee considered the Committee for Communities' Call for Evidence on the Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if there is any policy locus for the provisions of the Bill, to inform a response to the Committee for Communities.

ix. The Committee considered the Committee for the Economy's Call for Evidence on the Renewable Electricity Generation Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if there is any policy locus for the provisions of the Bill, to inform a response to the Committee for the Economy.

x. The Committee considered the Committee for Justice's Call for Evidence on the Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Finance if there is any policy locus for the provisions of the Bill, to inform a response to the Committee for Justice.

Áine Murphy left the meeting at 4:18pm.

xi. The Committee noted the June, July and August 2026 Updates from the Youth Assembly.

xii. The Committee noted the 71<sup>st</sup> Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

xiii. The Committee noted a press release from the Construction Employer's Federation.

xiv. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the correspondent for a written briefing in the first instance.

xv. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual.

xvi. The Committee noted correspondence from that individual.

xvii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the high price of heating oil.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to inform the individual that their issues are best addressed through the Department for the Economy.

xviii. The Committee noted correspondence regarding the Pica Awareness Day on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2026.

xix. The Committee noted the latest Pivotal Tracker Report.

## **11. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme and a number of upcoming briefings.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Economy Committee regarding an informal meeting with Trade NI, noting that this had been rescheduled to 30<sup>th</sup> September.

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

## **12. Any Other Business**

Steve Aiken recorded his apologies for next week's meeting.

## **13. Date and Time of next meeting**

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2026 at 2pm in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:21pm.

**Matthew O'Toole**

**Chairperson, Committee for Finance**

**16<sup>th</sup> September 2026**