



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for the Economy

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2025**

**Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings**

**Present:** Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Ms Diana Armstrong MLA

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

**Apologies:** Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

**In Attendance:** Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Stuart Gilmour (Clerical Officer)

Michael Scholes (Research Officer) – item 9 only

Rachel Keyes (Research Officer) – item 9 only

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:01am.

## **1. Apologies**

Apologies were as indicated above.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

Phillip Brett, Diana Armstrong, Pdraig Delargy and Emma Sherrin declared interests in that they are all members of different credit unions.

David Honeyford declared an interest in that he holds shares in a company that pays the industrial training levy.

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

### **3.1 Informal meeting – SSE Clean Energy Investment**

The Chairperson advised Members that, owing to the pressure of plenary business, he was unable to meet with representatives from SSE Plc as scheduled on Tuesday 1 July 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to reschedule the informal meeting.

### **3.2 Fols Summer Recess**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to submit views on the releasing or withholding of

information in any non-routine or contentious Freedom of Information requests received by the Committee during summer recess.

#### **4. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 25 June 2025.

#### **5. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

#### **6. National Franchised Dealers Association (NFDA) - evidence session**

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 10:03am:

- Alastair Peoples, Northern Ireland Advisor, NFDA;
- Jeff McCartney, Group Operations Director, Charles Hurst;
- Dave Sheeran, Group Managing Director, Donnelly Group; and
- Brian Robinson, Franchise Director, Agnews.

Key issues discussed included: EU and GB type approval process changes which are effective from January 2026; options for manufacturers including dual approval; the retail market for cars in NI - 45k cars are sold pa of which 42% are from the Motability Scheme, turnover of £3bn with 17.5k employees, 22% of cars are hybrids; changes in hybrid utility factors and other specification changes; the impact of the Benefits in Kind rate associated with EU specification cars on fleet/leasing purchases; different controls on used cars; car purchase tourism and the likely targeting of the NI market by GB sellers; the anticipated increase in NI lead times and limited choice for NI consumers owing to no access to the unsold car pipeline in GB; manufacturers potentially leaving the NI car market; a 20% anticipated cut in

sales; exposure to tariffs on Chinese car parts; very limited exports to RoI and existing traceability measures; and the NFDA engagement with UK government on this issue.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

The witnesses left the meeting at 10:54am.

Jonathan Buckley expressed dissatisfaction with the Windsor Framework; noted the limited remit of the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee and limited clarity in respect of Windsor Framework bodies; and suggested that further consideration may have to be given to addressing these issues.

Emma Sheerin noted that this regrettable situation was a consequence of Brexit and that had EU exit applied in the same way to NI as it had to the rest of the UK, the adverse economic impact for NI would have been more severe.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Minister for the Constitution and EU Relations indicating the Committee's concerns and its unanimous support for a derogation to support the NI car retail industry as the likely adverse impact of such a measure on the EU internal market would be minimal.

## **7. Federation of Small Businesses NI (FSB NI) – evidence session**

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 10:57am:

- Roger Pollen, Head of Federation of Small Businesses NI
- Rachel McCorriston, Head of Policy for FSB NI; and
- Lorna Muldoon, Policy Advisor for FSB NI.

Key issues discussed included: the impact of the Windsor Framework and issues relating to support for small businesses; evidence of GB traders withdrawing from the NI market; intra-organisational investment decisions influenced by Windsor Framework constraints; trade distortion; variations as to how the import control rulebook is applied; Trader Support Service costs; business to business parcel issues including “at risk” categories; the need for simplification of the UKIMS; the need for communication and co-ordination for Windsor Framework messaging; the

need to establish an Office of Regulatory Divergence; the validity of the FSB survey; carbon footprint considerations; and market realignment.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11:57am.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to FSB NI seeking further information on the sectoral impact of the Windsor Framework and seeking a further breakdown of the 32% of businesses that would no longer trade GB to NI in terms of numbers of firms; and the financial value of that business etc..

**Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland highlighting the issue and indicating its general support for FSB NI's recommendations.

**Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to write to the Office for the Internal Market seeking its comment of the FSB NI findings and suggesting that it produce a NI-focused report which could breakdown the sectoral issues including the impact on SMEs.

**Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to write to NetCompany declining its offer of a meeting.

The Committee agreed to revise the order of its agenda.

David Honeyford left the meeting at 12:01pm

## **8. Industrial Training Levy**

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2025/110 The Industrial Training Levy (Construction Industry) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 and agreed the following motion:

**Agreed:** "That the Committee for the Economy has considered the statutory rule: SR 110/2025 The Industrial Training Levy (Construction Industry)

Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule”

David Honeyford rejoined the meeting at 12:02pm.

Diana Armstrong left the meeting at 12:02pm.

## **9. Assembly Research briefing – Credit Union Issues**

Michael and Rachel joined the meeting at 12:02pm.

Key issues discussed included: credit union membership; financial inclusion; and related Barnett consequentials.

Padrig Delargy indicated that credit unions play a crucial role in promoting financial literacy.

The Chairperson thanked Michael and Rachel for their briefing.

Michael and Rachel left the meeting at 12:12pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider credit union matters again following the conclusion of the Department's related consultation.

## **10. Correspondence**

### **10.1 Index**

**Noted:** The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

### **10.2 Energy Efficiency Capital Grant Scheme**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of the Energy Efficiency Capital Grant Scheme setting out the estimated GVA of £147m; and the timeline for the review of the Scheme.

### **10.3 Sustainable Aviation Fuel - Legislative Consent**

The Committee considered Departmental correspondence relating to anticipated legislative consent in respect of the Westminster Sustainable Aviation Fuel Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a Departmental evidence session on the anticipated LCM.

### **10.4 'Get Me Home Safely' Campaign**

The Committee considered a Departmental response in respect of the Unite the Union campaign 'Get Me Home Safely' which relates to public transport in the evening and the nightmover service.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Finance.

### **10.5 QUB Funding**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Departmental response providing recent resource and capital allocations to the universities.

### **10.6 Sectoral Action Plans**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Departmental response indicating that the Department is not planning an update to the Sectoral Action Plans.

### **10.7 Medical Student Support**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of differing medical student support packages across the UK.

### **10.8 InterTrade Ireland ARA 2023**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the Annual Report and Financial Statements 2023 for InterTrade Ireland

#### **10.9 2023-2024 Insolvency Service ARA**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the 2023-2024 Insolvency Service Annual Report and Account.

#### **10.10 City and Growth Deals**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Finance in respect of the tracking of City and Growth Deals progress.

#### **10.11 Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a memo from the Committee for Finance in respect of the Committee Stage of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill which includes DfE provisions.

#### **10.12 Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill.**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a memo from the Committee for Finance in respect of the Committee Stage of the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council Bill.

#### **10.13 Committee Stage**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a memo from the Committee for the Executive Office in respect of the Committee Stage of the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.



#### **10.14 Outturn/Forecast May 2025**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the Department of Finance financial outturn and forecast outturn for May 2025.

#### **10.15 US Tariffs**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of correspondence to the SoS NI from the HoL NI Scrutiny Committee in respect of the UKG's US tariff agreement.

#### **10.16 Wastewater Infrastructure Group**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of a letter to the Minister for Infrastructure from the Wastewater Infrastructure in Northern Ireland campaign group.

#### **10.17 Ulster Farmers Union**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Ulster Farmers Union raising concerns around a small-scale wind power generator and poor process by an electricity supplier with whom he had contracted..

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to UFU suggesting that the individual raises the issue with his local MLA.

#### **10.18 OU Skills Barometer**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the Open University report including the UK Business Barometer – Skills for Today and Tomorrow.

#### **10.19 Tourism NI invitation**

The Committee considered an invitation from Tourism NI to the Chairperson to attend the 153rd Open.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to attend, dairy permitting.

#### **10.20 Post SEN**

**Noted:** The Committee noted further forwarded correspondence in respect of post-school SEN.

#### **10.21 Concerned Individual**

**Noted:** The Committee noted further correspondence from a concerned individual in respect of post-school SEN.

#### **10.22 Student Loans**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a response from the Student Loans Company in respect of medical student support.

#### **10.23 Minerals Licensing Policy**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of Departmental correspondence indicating that it has begun a review of Minerals Licensing Policy and the associated regulatory framework – this includes both exploration and mining.

#### **10.24 Renewable Heat Association NI**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a further exchange of correspondence between the Renewable Heat Association NI and the Department.

#### **10.25 Capital Investment Update**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the June 2025 capital investment update for the Department.

#### **10.26 June Monitoring**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a June Monitoring Round update from the Department.

#### **10.27 Student Teacher Numbers**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education in respect of student teacher numbers.

#### **10.28 Support for Childcare Providers**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of its commissioned research into support for childcare providers.

## **11. Forward Work Programme**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed its forward work programme, as drafted.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to issue a call for evidence letter and the list of stakeholders to which it will be issued for the Committee Stage of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the following motion

“That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 12 December 2025, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill”

## **12. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

## **13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 10 September 2025 at 10:30am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 12:19pm.

**Phillip Brett MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for the Economy**

**10 September 2025**