



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 5 November 2025

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Ms Diana Armstrong MLA

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Present by video-conferencing:

Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

Apologies:

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Kyle Lawlor (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:00am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Informal meeting

The Chairperson reminded Members that, as previously agreed, he had met informally with the Chief Executive of East Belfast Enterprise (who is also Chairperson of Enterprise NI) on 4 November 2025, in respect of the Go Succeed programme. A summary note of the meeting had been circulated by the Clerk.

Noted: The Committee noted the circulated summary.

4. Draft Minutes

Diana Armstrong asked that the minutes of 22 October 2025 be amended so as to reflect her commentary at item 10.9, in respect of the Minister's competence regarding international trade.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes, as amended.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Lord Murphy – Windsor Framework Report – oral and written evidence

The following witness joined the meeting at 10:01am:

- The Rt Hon, Lord Murphy of Torfaen, Member, House of Lords

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.
Sinead McLaughlin joined the meeting at 10:02am.
Emma Sheerin joined the meeting at 10:07am.
Kate Nicholl joined the meeting at 10:08am.

Key issues discussed included: UK internal market access; tracking EU legislation; the need for NI agreement; the democratic deficit and the need for democratic oversight; Departmental actions in respect of the Windsor Framework; the impact on SMEs; the need for transparency for Windsor Framework EU-UK bodies; Article 2 considerations; Electronic Travel Authorisation; Windsor Framework issues including – the new SPS agreement, the application of General Product Safety Regulations, Westminster co-operation with the DSC and resources for the Office for the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels; and the constitutional question.

The Chairperson thanked the witness for his evidence.
The witness left the meeting at 11:31am.
Proceedings were suspended at 11:31am.
Proceedings resumed at 11:38am.
Jonathan Buckley left the meeting at 11:38am.

The Chairperson advised Members of the recent publication of the UK Internal Market Guarantee report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland seeking a timeline for his response to Lord Murphy's report on the Windsor Framework.

7. Road Haulage Association (RHA) – oral and written evidence

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 11:39am:

- Martin Reid, Policy Director (Scotland, Wales and NI), RHA;
- Alistair Gunn, Policy Lead for Trade and Borders, RHA;
- Mark Tait, Managing Director, Target Transport; and
- Alistair Hobson, Customs Manager, Montgomery Transport Group.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Key issues discussed included: the Duty Reimbursement Scheme; hauliers' legal and risk burden; haulier business closures and recruitment challenges; customs bureaucracy; very limited haulier profit margins, additional costs and 120 day

delayed duty repayments; the Trader Support Scheme; the need for a one-stop-shop; tachograph issues; flouting of regulations; backlog of declarations; the need for a Trusted Haulier Scheme; the “at risk” categorisation; inexplicable limits and rules devised by the GB Civil Service and the absence of feed-in from GB businesses; the introduction of the Import Control Scheme (ICS)²; easier and more accessible transit routes from RoI; a complex haulier data picture; and the role of the HMRC Windsor Framework NI Stakeholder Engagement Team.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

The witnesses left the meeting at 12:32pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a briefing from the HMRC Windsor Framework NI Stakeholder Engagement Team.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland:

- indicating its support for the establishment of a Trusted Haulier Scheme;
- indicating its support for the reform of the Duty Reimbursement Scheme;
- seeking an explanation in respect of the ICS² introduction and inexplicable GB Civil Service rules in respect of e.g. parcels and the 100kg limit and the increasing categorisation of goods being “at risk” owing to groupage issues;
- seeking clarity on the Trader Support Scheme (TSS) tender and assurance that good use of IT solutions will be made, in future;
- expressing concerns about unlawful movements and seeking clarity as to any study of the impact of such movements;
- seeking commentary on moving the risk from the haulier to the point of sale and clarity on possible unintended consequences of the current haulier risk scenario; and
- seeking assurance that the above will be fed into the reset talks with the EU.

8. Insolvency (Amendment) Bill – Insolvency Practitioner

The following witness joined the meeting at 12:35pm:

- Ian Leonard, former Chairperson of R3, Insolvency Practitioner

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Key issues discussed included: alignment with England and Wales; administrative streamlining; deemed consent; assignment of rights of action; and petitioning the court.

The Chairperson thanked the witness for his evidence.

The witness left the meeting at 12:49pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give further consideration to matters relating to the petitioning of the court in respect of bankruptcy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response from the Department in respect of the delegated powers of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill to the Examiner of Statutory Rules for further comment.

9. SR Insolvency Practitioner

The Committee considered the statutory rule: SR 170/2025 The Insolvency Practitioners (Recognised Professional Bodies) (Revocation of Recognition) (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025.

Noted: The Committee noted the laid statutory rule.

10. Delegated Legislation – RHI Winter Tariffs SL1

The Committee considered the proposed statutory rule: The Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make the rule.

11. Delegated Legislation – Energy Bills Relief and Bills Discount SL1

The Committee considered the proposed statutory rule: The Energy Bill Relief Scheme and Energy Bills Discount Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make the rule.

12. Delegated Legislation – FE Accounting Year End Date SL1

The Committee considered a proposed statutory rule under the powers conferred by Article 19(7) and 24(6) of the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 in respect of changes to the accounting year end for Further Education colleges.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make the rule.

13. Correspondence

13.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

13.2 Spending Review Bid

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response providing a breakdown of spending review bid (number 22) including support for tourism but providing no information on aviation route development policy.

13.3 HSE NI Consultation

Noted: The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence in respect of a Health and Safety Executive NI consultation on changes to Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations.

13.4 Social Enterprise Consultation

Noted: The Committee Ministerial correspondence advising of the launch of a consultation on the definition of a social enterprise, designed to inform categorisation for funding purposes.

13.5 Social Enterprise Invitation

The Committee considered Ministerial correspondence inviting the Chairperson to a social enterprise event on 14 April 2026, at 10am in the Long Gallery.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Chairperson would attend the event, diary permitting.

13.6 Rol Students

The Committee considered a Ministerial response in respect of engagement with Rol Minister Lawless who has given a commitment to engage on A-level recognition in Rol and in respect of the CAO requirement for NI applicants to have a second language.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister seeking a further update on measures to address the assignment of additional MaSN places to Rol students.

13.7 Energy Consultations

The Committee considered a Departmental response offering to provide feedback on the consultation on low carbon heating in residential properties and the scheme design for the new Domestic Energy Efficiency and Heat Programme. The Department also offered to share the final decision paper on the grid connection framework.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule related Departmental oral and written evidence sessions.

13.8 Energy Efficiency Capital Grant Scheme

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of the Energy Efficiency Capital Grant (EECG) Scheme.

13.9 Sub-Regional Skills

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response on how skills shortages vary by sub-region in Northern Ireland.

13.10 Short-Term Lets Research

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response clarifying that the research into the impact of short-term lets on the supply of housing is being led by DfC. This will report in mid-2026.

13.11 GEMS NI Report 2024/25

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Northern Ireland Report 2024/25.

13.12 NIAO Energy Report

Noted: The Committee noted a report from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) into the Northern Ireland Energy Strategy, pending a reply from the Department on the review of the Energy Strategy.

13.13 UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Communities seeking Members' agreement on a joint letter (from CfC, CfF and CfE) to the Department and to the UK Treasury, expressing concerns in respect of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to support the joint letter.

13.14 Water, Sustainable Drainage and Flood Management Bill

The Committee considered correspondence in respect of the Committee Stage of the Water, Sustainable Drainage and Flood Management Bill

Agreed: The Committee agreed to provide a nil response.

13.15 Access to Bar NI

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice to the Department in respect of a concerns about the lack of access to the Bar of Northern Ireland for students.

13.16 Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance in respect of the relevant delegated powers in the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill.

13.17 December Monitoring Round

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance advising that DoF has commissioned a December Monitoring Round. It is understood that there will be no January Monitoring Round.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking sight of the DfE submission.

13.18 Forecast Financial Outturn

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance in respect of the September (R6) public expenditure outturn and forecast outturn.

13.19 Committee for Finance: Banking Inquiry

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence to the Economy Minister in respect of the Committee for Finance banking inquiry.

13.20 UU Response: Multi-campus cost

Noted: The Committee noted a Ulster University response in respect of multi-campus costs.

13.21 UU Response: CCNI report

The Committee considered a Ulster University response in respect of the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland report entitled: Enough on their plates?

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to CCNI, for its information.

13.22 UCAS data

Noted: The Committee noted UCAS correspondence providing data on university applications for medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine and to Oxford/Cambridge.

13.23 Brussels Report

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels providing a copy of the Brussels Report July-September 2025.

13.24 HoL Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the HoL Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee in respect of the adoption of comparable ecodesign and energy labelling standards in GB as those to be adopted by the EU for household tumble dryers.

13.25 HoL Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the HoL Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee indicating those EU regulations that the NISC will no longer scrutinise.

13.26 Corporation Tax

The Committee considered a request from the Chartered Accountants Ireland requesting to brief the Committee on a renewed campaign to secure a reduction in corporation tax for Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an informal session with the Chartered Accountants Ireland.

13.27 Advice NI

The Committee considered correspondence from Advice NI inviting Members to a Living Wage Week event on Thursday 13 November 2025 at NICVA

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would respond individually indicating if they were to attend.

13.28 QUB AI event

Noted: The Committee noted a link to a recording of the Queen's University Belfast: AI and the Future of Work event, which was held on 22 October 2025, pending the briefing from Matrix on 19 November 2025.

13.29 Concerned individual

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from a concerned individual in respect of Dalriada Gold Mining prospecting etc.

14. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its visit to a Disability Support Services provider until the new year.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule Departmental oral and written evidence, in respect of the Department's energy consultations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule Departmental oral and written evidence in respect of the Skills Action Plan and the Sectoral Action Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its forward work programme, as amended

15. Any Other Business

15.1 Kilroot

The Chairperson advised Members that it was understood that Kilroot power station may be seeking a further extension to its running hours owing to continuing maintenance issues at Ballylumford and Coolkeeragh.

16. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 12 November 2025 at 10:00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 1:02pm.

Gary Middleton, MLA

Deputy Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

12 November 2025