



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 10 December 2025

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Diana Armstrong MLA
Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA
Mr David Honeyford MLA

Present by video-conferencing:

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA
Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA
Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Apologies: Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)
Miss Jemma Dolan MLA

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Kyle Lawlor (Clerical Officer)

Angela Kelly (Examiner of Statutory Rules) – item 1 only

Catriona Doherty (Legal Adviser) – item 1 only

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

1. RHI (Closure of Non-Domestic) Scheme Bill – ESR guidance

Angela Kelly, the Examiner of Statutory Rules (ESR), and Catriona Doherty, Assembly Legal Advisor, joined the meeting at 10:01am.

Angela and Catriona advised the Committee on the delegated powers of the RHI (Closure of Non-Domestic) Scheme Bill.

The Chairperson thanked Angela and Catriona for their briefing.

Angela Kelly and Catriona Doherty left the meeting at 10:16am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity in respect of:

- Clause 1(5) which authorises the Department to enter into agreements with other persons as to the exercise of specific functions on the Department's behalf and in collaboration with the Department; and
- Clause 1(10) as to whether it is intended that delegated legislation made under the Bill may have retrospective effect.

Proceedings continued in public session from 10:23am.

2. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Chairperson's Business

4.1 Security of Supply

The Deputy Chairperson reminded Members that, as agreed, the Chairperson had met informally with Departmental officials on 8 December 2025, in respect of security of electricity supply in Northern Ireland.

Noted: The Committee noted the previously circulated summary note.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency seeking clarity on any revision to its interpretation of the EU Industrial Emissions Directive and related energy efficiency requirements and the consequences for the running time limit for Kilroot's Open Cycle Gas Turbines.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the application of the EU emission trading scheme to Northern Ireland.

4.2 RHI Tariffs

The Deputy Chairperson reminded Members that during the debate on the RHI tariffs delegated legislation on 1 December 2025, reference was made to the annualised cost of the tariff increase being £10m. However, the SL1 had indicated that "the tariff uplift will cost an estimated £10.5m AME on tariff payments over the period November 2025-March 2026".

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the cost of the enhanced RHI tariffs for the period from the application of the statutory rule until 31 March 2026.

4.3 Fols Christmas Recess

The Deputy Chairperson reminded Members that it is usual 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 recess.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to delegate this authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 3 December 2025.

6. Matters Arising

6.1 Regional Balance

Sinéad Mc Laughlin noted with disappointment that a significant percentage of the new and supported investments reported by Invest NI at the meeting of 3 December 2025 were not located in the North West. She also contended that the Minister's objective of addressing regional imbalance was unlikely to be addressed by the

target of investment by number rather than value outside of the Belfast Metropolitan Area.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister: suggesting that Invest NI develops and publishes real time disaggregated data on regional investment; and seeking information on the value of supported investments, rather than the number of such investments, outside of the Belfast Metropolitan Area.

6.2 Hidden Heartlands

Pádraig Delargy welcomed the reported extension of the Fáilte Ireland Hidden Heartlands tourism brand to Fermanagh and the anticipated boost this will provide to local hospitality providers.

Diane Armstrong also welcomed the above but recorded concerns in respect of the disadvantage experienced by NI hospitality providers in respect of VAT compared to ROI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a briefing from Tourism Northern Ireland, Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland in respect of the extension of Fáilte Ireland branding to Northern Ireland.

7. Insolvency (Amendment) Bill – Committee Stage – Agreement of Report

The Committee considered a draft of its Insolvency (Amendment) Bill Committee Stage report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Background section, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Committee Approach section, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Consideration of the Bill section, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Clause by Clause Scrutiny section, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Appendices, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Executive Summary section, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the draft report should be published as its 5th report of the mandate.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to include an extract from the minutes of 10 December 2025 in the report.

8. Implementing Matrix AI Recommendations – Department for the Economy / Invest NI

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:34am:

- Alan Ramsey, Director of Trade, Innovation and Priority Sectors Division, DfE; and
- Paul McCoy, International Investment Manager, Invest NI.

Jonathan Buckley joined the meeting at 10:46am

Kate Nicholl joined the meeting at 10:53am

Key issues discussed included: the Chief Scientific and Technology Advisor's anticipated public sector AI strategy; the establishment of an AI advisory panel; the DfE AI strategic direction document; AI leadership awareness; agile workforce development; budget constraints including AI bids and applications to DSIT; dual market compliance issues; the review of the educational curriculum; NICS AI literacy and AI co-operation and governance issues; and productivity and GVA impact.

Jonathan Buckley left the meeting at 11:30am

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

The officials left the meeting at 11:33am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking confirmation of the AI Advisory Panel membership, the Terms of Reference for the panel and its progress.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from the Chief Scientific and Technology Advisor on the public sector AI Strategy which is expected to be published shortly.

9. SL1 – Disqualified Directors

The Committee considered the proposed statutory rule: The Disqualified Directors Compensation Orders (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025.

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

10. Correspondence

10.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence

10.2 Domestic Abuse Safe Leave regulations

The Committee considered Departmental correspondence that domestic abuse safe leave regulations and guidance will be in place by the end of the mandate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to NIC-ICTU.

10.3 Clean Heat Market Mechanism

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of the Clean Heat Market Mechanism statutory instrument.

10.4 Glue Traps

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of a UK Internal Market (UKIM) Act exclusion from the market access principles for glue traps.

10.5 Employee Voice in the Work Place

The Committee considered a Departmental research paper relating to employee voice in the work place.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a briefing on the research paper from Dr Lisa Wilson.

10.6 HSE 2024-25 ARA

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the 2024-25 Annual Report and Accounts for the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland.

10.7 SR 2025/195

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the agreed Statutory Rule: SR 225/195 The Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025.

10.8 Arms Length Bodies

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance in respect of the review of Arms Length Bodies

Jonathan Buckley rejoined the meeting at 11:38am

10.9 Corporation Tax

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from NIC-ICTU and the Nevin Economic Research Institute, to the Committee for Finance in respect of corporation tax.

10.10 Eco-design Household Tumble Dryers

Noted: The Committee noted a holding response from the HoL NI Scrutiny Committee in respect of EU regulations relating to the eco-design of household tumble dryers.

10.11 Electric Vehicle Association NI

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Electric Vehicle Association NI in respect of cost reductions to energy bills in Great Britain announced in the budget.

10.12 Domestic Abuse Safe Leave regulations

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from ICTU thanking the Chairperson for his support in respect of the domestic abuse safe leave regulations.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule the Ministerial briefing on the budget to 21 January 2026.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to schedule a Departmental briefing on its clustering strategy on 4 February 2026.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to seek to schedule a Departmental briefing on the Renewable Electricity Price Guarantee Scheme.

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

12. Any Other Business

12.1 EECG Scheme

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Invest NI seeking an update on the timescale for the report on the Energy Efficiency Capital Grant (EECG) scheme.

12.2 Evri

Diana Armstrong recorded concerns in respect of Evri delivery timescales for consumers during the Christmas period.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 14 January 2026 at 10:00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 11:45am

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

14 January 2026