



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 19 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 Kate Nicholl MLA

Present by video-conferencing:

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

Apologies:

None

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 10:02am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There was no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Employment Bill

The Chairperson advised Members that during Question Time on 17 November 2025, reference was made to the introduction of the Employment Bill in January 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister seeking: an update on Executive agreement in respect of the Bill; the timeline for the introduction of the Bill; and an update on the anticipated content of the Bill, including matters relating to Theme C trade union rights.

3.2 Domestic Abuse Safe Leave

The Committee considered tabled correspondence from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) in respect of regulations relating to the Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act (NI) 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity and a timeline for the relevant delegated legislation and the implementation of domestic abuse safe leave measures.

3.3 Committee Membership

The Chairperson recorded the Committee's thanks to Ms Emma Sheerin MLA for her service to the Economy Committee.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 12 November 2025.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Matrix – Artificial Intelligence Report - oral and written evidence

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 10:04am:

- Patricia O'Hagan, Deputy Chairperson, Matrix;
- Tom Gray, Chairperson of the AI and Future of Work Steering Group, Matrix;
- Steve Orr, Catalyst CEO and member of Matrix Steering group; and
- Jill Shaw, Open University, Matrix member.

Padraig Delargy joined the meeting at 10:04am

Kate Nicholl joined the meeting at 10:10am

Jonathan Buckley joined the meeting at 10:36am

Key issues discussed included: the need for upskilling and reskilling of the workforce; stackable credentials and standardised qualifications; training delivery and co-operation with Further Education colleges; the digital divide and skills barrier collapse; critical thinking skills in schools; the gender impact of AI affected roles; ethical concerns, protection for children and public communications; AI promotional programmes and diffusion of AI knowledge across the Northern Ireland economy; AI change management within business; regional needs; the complex regulatory environment; place-based supports; and Executive responsibility for developing AI literacy in the public and private sectors.

Padraig Delargy declared an interest in respect of being a former participant in the Go Succeed programme.

David Honeyford left the meeting at 11:15am

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11:27am.

Kate Nicholl declared an interest in respect of her husband's business renting office space at Catalyst.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update briefing on the Matrix recommendations and how the Department will

support AI development through the Skills Action Plan and Invest NI supports.

Proceedings were suspended at 11:27am.

Proceedings resumed at 11:37am.

David Honeyford rejoined the meeting at 11:37am.

7. National Franchised Dealers Association (NFDA) – Car Registration Issues - oral and written evidence

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 11:37am:

- Alastair Peoples, Northern Ireland Advisor, NFDA;
- Jeff McCartney, Group Operations Director, Charles Hurst;
- Dave Sheeran, Group Managing Director , Donnelly Group; and
- Alan Murphy, Group Finance Director, Agnews.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Key issues discussed included: car registration issues; Benefit in Kind tax thresholds; limited availability of car brands in NI; the impact of fleet and Motability new car purchases; dual approval cost, safety standards and timing issues; the need for a derogation extension and the registration cliff edge; and the potential impact on car dealer employment in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

The witnesses left the meeting at 12:16pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for the Constitution and European Union Relations calling for the extension of the relevant derogations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: indicating that it believed that car registration issues had not been satisfactorily resolved; urging action to be taken to address the impending registration cliff edge; and encouraging the Secretary of State to engage with the National Franchised Dealers Association in respect of these issues.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Windsor Framework Independent Monitoring suggesting that it undertakes a related inquiry on the impact on the UK internal market.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister indicating the Committee's unanimous support for action to be taken on these important matters.

8. SR 2025/177 Insolvency Practitioner Regulations

The Committee considered delegated legislation relating to insolvency practitioner bonds.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the following motion:
“That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2025/177 The Insolvency Practitioner (Amendment and Transitional Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025, and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule.”

9. Correspondence

9.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 DfE ARA 2024/25

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Department's Permanent Secretary to the Public Accounts Committee in respect of the disclaimed 2024/25 DfE Group Annual Report and Accounts (ARA).

9.3 Energy Strategy

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response advising that the mid-term review of the Energy Strategy is to be published before the end of the year.

9.4 Energy Policy

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of energy policy publication dates as follows:

- Interconnection policy to be completed by the end of 2026
- A smart metering decision paper to be published this year with procurement in 2026 and installation in 2027.
- A grid connection socialisation decision paper to be published before the end of 2025.
- A response to the low carbon heat consultation to be published in 2025
- No timeline was given for the consultation on the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme or for Offshore Renewable Energy.

9.5 Retrofitting Houses

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Department in respect of cross-Departmental work on energy efficiency retrofitting and future-proofing homes.

9.6 RHI Bill: Delegated Powers

The Committee considered a copy of the RHI (Closure of Non-Domestic Scheme) Bill Delegated Powers Memorandum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Delegated Powers Memorandum to the Assembly Examiner of Statutory Rules.

9.7 NI Screen Budget Cut

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of the NI Screen budget cut including an interim evaluation of Opening Doors 3.

9.8 Apprenticeship Action Plan

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of the Apprenticeship Action Plan, including further information on apprenticeship levy contributions, public sector apprenticeships and the uptake of apprenticeship by local government area.

9.9 Tourism NI Partnership Agreement

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the Tourism NI partnership agreement with the Department for 2025-26.

9.10 Financial Outturns and Forecasts

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing a notice of revised guidelines to departments in respect of reporting financial outturns and forecasts.

9.11 Growth Mission Fund

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing information on the Growth Mission Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on its Growth Mission Fund bids to HM Treasury.

9.12 NICS Ethics

Noted: The Committee noted forwarded information from the Department of Finance on the role of that Department in respect of NICS ethics.

9.13 CCNI Report: Enough on their plates?

The Committee considered a response from Queen's University Belfast in respect of the CCNI report: 'Enough on their plates?' The Committee noted that the QUB Residential Life Team has provided cooking and nutrition demonstrations in collaboration with Queens Sport etc, in student accommodation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Consumer Council Northern Ireland (CCNI).

9.14 Belfast Harbour

The Committee considered an invitation to attend Belfast Harbour's Annual Festival Reception for Stakeholders, on Tuesday 9 December 2025 at Belfast Harbour Office.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would advise Belfast Harbour individually, if they wished to attend.

9.15 Motor Insurance

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Association of British Insurers advising of its latest UK-wide motor insurance cost tracker.

9.16 Wayleaves

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Utility Regulator to a concerned individual in respect of wayleave arrangements and payments.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme including the cancellation of a Departmental evidence session on the Higher Education Financial Needs Assessment.

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

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 26 November 2025 at 10:00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 12:22pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

26 November 2025