REQUEST FROM: FINANCE COMMITTEE – DALO READOUT - MEETING WEDNESDAY 9 September 2026

Point 8 – Members would request clarification that legislative provision for NF Divorce will not be progressed in this current mandate and if it will be prioritised in the next mandate.

Response –

The Committee will be aware that in May 2024, the Assembly supported amending the law on divorce and dissolution by adopting a no-fault system. The then Finance Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald MLA began the process for amending the existing law. When Minister O'Dowd took over as Finance Minister in 2025 he continued that process, initiating a public consultation.

When the consultation closed last autumn, the Minister circulated policy proposals for amending the current law to Executive colleagues. These are proposals which he believe reflected and respected the diversity of the consultation responses.

The proposals that were circulated would seek to reduce unnecessary conflict by removing the requirement to assign blame when a relationship has irretrievably broken down. They would help couples resolve matters more constructively, shorten what can otherwise be a lengthy and distressing process, and, most importantly, support better outcomes for children by encouraging cooperation rather than confrontation between parents.

The objective was not to diminish the importance of marriage or civil partnership, but to ensure that where relationships have irretrievably broken down, the legal process is as fair, dignified and family-focused as possible.

Unfortunately, despite repeated requests the Minster has been unable to obtain the Executive's agreement to proceed.

It is a matter of regret that it is now too late in the present mandate to progress legislation on this important issue, but the Minister will continue to advance the case for reform, and he hopes that the process resumes early in the next mandate.