



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR THE ECONOMY**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

**3 JUNE 2020**

**ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

**10:00am**

Present: Dr Caoímhe Archibald (Chairperson)  
Ms Sinéad McLaughlin (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Gordon Dunne MBE  
Mr Gary Middleton  
Mr John O'Dowd  
Mr John Stewart  
Ms Claire Sugden

In Attendance: Mr Peter Hall (Assembly Clerk)  
Ms Sinead Kelly (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Michael Greer (Clerical Supervisor)  
Mr Thomas Manning (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Stewart Dickson

*The meeting began at 10:04am in open session.*

**1. Apologies**

As noted above.

## 2. Minutes

*Agreed:* the Committee agreed the Minutes from 26<sup>th</sup> May 2020

*Agreed:* the Committee agreed the Minutes from 27<sup>th</sup> May 2020

## 3. Chairpersons Business

The Chair raised an issue regarding the Assembly motion to extend the UK Exit from the European Union transition period

*Agreed:* Members agreed to write to the Minister for the Cabinet Office regarding the Assembly motion and asking for an update on the Business Engagement Forum

*Agreed:* Members agreed to write to the Treasury Select Committee seeking further information on the proposed £50 million training fund for companies.

## 4. Oral Briefing by Teleconference from SONI Ltd – Energy Strategy

*The witnesses joined the meeting at 10.07am*

Members received a briefing from:

<b>Ms Jo Aston</b>	Managing Director, SONI ltd
<b>Mr Alan Campbell</b>	Head of Grid Infrastructure, SONI Ltd
<b>Dr David McGowan</b>	Senior Lead Engineer, SONI Ltd

Key issues discussed included: The role the Electricity sector will have in addressing climate change, the need for increased investment from Government to improve infrastructure for a greener energy, the need for the North-South Interconnector, the security of supply and the role SONI has in the development of the Energy Strategy.

*The witnesses left the meeting at 11.15am*

## 5. Oral Briefing by Teleconference from the Department – Energy Strategy

*The officials joined the meeting at 11.18am*

Members received a briefing from:

<b>Mr Thomas Byrne</b>	Head of Energy Strategy, DfE
<b>Mr Richard Rodgers</b>	Head of Energy Group, DfE
<b>Ms Meabh Cormacain</b>	Energy Division, DfE

Key issues discussed included: The progress on development of the Energy Strategy, impact of the current crisis on energy, responses to the call for evidence, development of an Energy Transition Model, research being sought from the academic community and the need to merge energy strategy with building the economic recovery.

*The officials left the meeting at 11.57am*

## **6. Matters Arising**

*Noted:* Members noted a response from the House of Commons Treasury Select Committee regarding the problems experienced by self-employed people here using the HMRC portal.

*Noted:* Members noted a letter from the Minister to Claire Sugden regarding the support available for Social Enterprises.

*Noted:* Members considered further information from Social Enterprise NI regarding the Committee's request for information on those business who still have not been able to access support

*Agreed:* To forward the information onto the Department for comment.

*Noted:* Ministerial noted a letter informing the Committee the Minister has written to the Minister for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy agreeing that NI is included in the transposition of three articles contained in the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive 2018

*Noted:* Members noted a response from the Minister of Health providing an update on the Graduate Entry School at the Magee Campus.

*Agreed:* to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister seeking clarity on deadlines.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure to the Economy Minister urging her to produce a fully costed financial package for the Taxi Industry and the Road Haulage Industry.

*Agreed:* to write to the Department to indicate the Committee's support for a financial package and to ask the Department to provide the Committee with a copy of its response

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the MEGA network, which represents Manufacturing and Engineering companies in Mid Ulster regarding the need for Government support to implement a Manufacturing & Engineering initiative in Mid Ulster for recruitment and training of apprentices.

*Agreed:* to forward this correspondence to the Department to ask what involvement, if any, the Department has had and for its views on this initiative.

*Noted:* Members noted response from the Minister at in response to a number issues raised by the Committee on the response to Covid-19.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence at from the Committee for Finance regarding letters it has sent to the Economy and Finance Ministers around groups excluded from Covid-19 support.

*Noted:* Members noted a response from the Minister of Finance regarding support for sole traders.

*Noted:* Members noted a press statement regarding the cap imposed by the Department for Education in England on the number of English-domiciled students that can attend Northern Ireland higher education providers in 2020/21.

*Agreed:* to write to Queen's University, Ulster University, St Marys College and Stanmillis College to seek their views on the potential impact of this decision.

*Noted:* Members noted a response from the Department at to correspondence the Committee received from Claire Hanna MP regarding the small business support grant.

*Agreed:* to forward a copy of the response to Claire Hanna MP.

*Noted:* Members noted a response from the Department at regarding the Enterprise Barometer Survey carried out by Enterprise Northern Ireland.

*Agreed:* to forward a copy of the response to Enterprise NI.

## **7. The Protocol (EU Exit)**

Members considered a number of papers on The Protocol (EU Exit).

*Agreed:* to forward the Assembly Research papers to the Department for comment on the questions raised.

## **8. Correspondence**

*Noted:* Members considered correspondence from the Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs at regarding the EU Emissions Trading Scheme, which ceases on 31 December 2020, and the proposals for the new UK scheme

*Agreed:* to forward the briefing paper to the Department for comment on any impact on SEM.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Education to the Education Minister on the issue of Newly Qualified Teachers gaining employment in September 2020

*Noted:* Members considered correspondence from Mid and East Antrim Borough Council regarding the re-opening procedures for estate agents.

*Agreed:* to write to the Department for Health DALO to seek a response.

*Noted:* Members noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules Eleventh report of this session.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from a sole trader regarding support for the self-employed.

*Agreed:* to forward to the Department for a response.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from a small business owner concerning Hardship Grant eligibility.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the Presbyterian Mutual Society concerning the Society's collapse in 2008.

*Agreed:* to forward to the Department for a response

*Noted:* Members noted series of correspondence from a small business owner concerning access to financial support.

*Agreed:* to forward to the Department for a response on the issues raised.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from Local Retailers concerning the failure of Government grant schemes to support multiple groups.

*Agreed:* to forward to the Department for a response.

*Noted:* Members noted the latest summary of issues table from the Department.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence at from the think-tank 'Pivotal' regarding the its series of briefing papers on how Northern Ireland recovers from Covid-19.

*Noted:* Members considered a briefing paper from Queen's University research taskforce on its potential losses and the vital role of the University across various sectors in economic recovery.

*Agreed:* to arrange a future informal briefing with Queen's to explore this further.

*Noted:* Members noted correspondence from the Freight Transport Association regarding the continued financial hardship faced by hauliers and requesting a tailored aid package.

## **9.Any Other Business**

Members discussed the North-South Interconnector following the briefing by SONI

*Agreed:* to write to the Minister for Infrastructure urging a decision on this matter.

Members discussed the access to the Departmental Hardship fund.

*Agreed:* to send on the details of the Committee's survey to the Economy Minister and the Finance Minister.

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

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2020 in the Senate, Parliament Buildings at 10am.

*The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.56pm*

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**Dr Caoímhe Archibald**  
**Chairperson**  
**Committee for the Economy**  
**10<sup>th</sup> June 2020**