Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 4 November 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30

Present:	Ms Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
	Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA
	Mr David Honeyford MLA
	Mr Declan Kearney MLA
	Mr Peter Martin MLA
	Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA
	Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA
	Ms Kate Nicholl MLA
Apologies:	Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

In Attendance:	Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
	Michael Greig (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)
	Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
	Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:02am.

Sinead McLaughlin declared an interest in respect of being the Bill Sponsor of the Regional Balance Bill.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

Declan Kearney joined the meeting at 10:03am.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Domestic Abuse Safe Leave

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Minister has advised that the regulations to support domestic abuse safe leave are expected to be published for scrutiny shortly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department, welcoming the anticipated regulations and seeking an estimated timeframe for their introduction.

3.2 Electricity Security of Supply

The Chairperson advised Members of recent media coverage in respect of a reported fault associated with the Moyle interconnector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department and the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) seeking further information in respect of the fault to the interconnector and the associated implications for the security of electricity supply.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meetings of 20 October 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meetings of 21 October 2026.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill – Agreement of Report

Agreed: The Committee formally agreed it was content with Clause 1 of the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill as amended.

Padraig Delargy joined the meeting at 10:06am.
Padraig Delargy recorded his concerns in respect of how the Utility Regulator will be able to pay for the enhancement to its role in the Committee's amendment in respect of the provision of decarbonisation advice to departments other than the Department for the Economy.

The Committee considered a draft of the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) 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 also agreed to include an extract from the minutes of 4 November 2026 in the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the report should be published as its 11th report of the mandate.

7. Commercial Payments Bill LCM – written briefing

The Committee considered a Departmental written response in respect of the Commercial Payments Bill legislative consent memorandum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department welcoming the application of the measures but also seeking clarity as to why the construction parts of the Westminster Commercial Payments Bill are not being taken forward in Northern Ireland at this time.

Agreed: The Committee again agreed to seek oral evidence from the Office of the Small Business Commissioner.

8. Regional Balance Bill – Rural Community Network and Centre for Cross Border Co-operation

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 10:16am:

- Aidan Campbell, Research Programmes Development Manager, Centre for Cross Border Cooperation; and
- Niall O'Donnellan, Senior Research Associates, Centre for Cross Border Co-operation.

And via video conferencing:

- Samantha Gallagher Policy & Research Manager, Rural Community Network;

Proceedings were recorded by the Official Report.

Key issues discussed included: sectoral clustering; data issues; the granularity of interventions; cross-border considerations; equity of opportunity; the Rural Needs Act; the need for whole of Government support; skills and infrastructure; remote working; cost of living disparities; and place-based interventions.

Declan Kearney left the meeting at 11:33am.
The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.
The witnesses left the meeting at 11:37am.
David Honeyford left the meeting at 11:37am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Rural Community Network seeking a copy of its Department for Communities paper in respect of partnership working.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Centre for Cross Border Co-Operation seeking sight of its reports on clustering models.

9. Regional Balance Bill - Glenshane Community Development Ltd and Community Foundation NI

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 11:38am:

- Colum McNicholl, Chairman, Glenshane Community Development Ltd;

- Dr Mairead McCormack, Chief Executive, Glenshane Community Development Ltd;
- Mairead McMahon, Director of Policy, Community Foundation NI; and
- Gerard Deane, Trustee, Community Foundation NI

Proceedings were recorded by the Official Report.

David Honeyford rejoined the meeting at 11:39am.
Declan Kearney rejoined the meeting at 11:49am.

Key issues discussed included: co-design of interventions; the weighting of deprivation measures; flexible review of the Framework; the meaning of "due regard"; a reported NISRA data refresh; community engagement; opportunity provided by the Bill; and the role of philanthropic investment.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.
The witnesses left the meeting at 12:21pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Community Foundation NI seeking further information on the different co-design models.

10. Regional Balance Bill - NI Productivity Forum

The following witness joined the meeting at 12:22pm:

- Dr David Jordan, Northern Ireland Productivity Forum

Proceedings were recorded by the Official Report.

Key issues discussed included: productivity measures; granularity; baselining; ONS estimates and data gaps; and the need for a NISRA data review.

The Chairperson thanked the witness for his evidence.
The witness left the meeting at 12:43pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance and the Executive Office in respect of the data issues raised by the NI Productivity Forum and seeking further information as to how NISRA is to refresh its data set and upgrade the accuracy of data, particularly at local government and lower levels and how the relevant departments will ensure the publication and sharing of data.

Declan Kearney left the meeting at 12:45pm.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to share the Regional Balance Bill Evidence Table with the Bill Sponsor and the Department.

11. SR 2026/183 The Employer's Liability Regulations

The Committee considered the statutory rule: SR 2026/183 The Employer's Liability (Compulsory Insurance) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the following motion:

> "That the Committee for the Economy has considered: SR 2026/183 The Employer's Liability (Compulsory Insurance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule."

12. SL1 – The Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Regulations

Noted: The Committee noted the proposed statutory rule: The Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a call for views on Citizen Space and to publish the proposed rule and related papers on the Committee's delegated legislation webpage.

13. The Insolvency (Amendment) (2026 Act) (Commencement No. 1 and Transitional Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

Noted: The Committee noted the commencement order for provisions of the Insolvency Act (NI) 2026.

14. Correspondence

14.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

14.2 Domestic Abuse Leave

The Committee considered the Minister's final policy decision to operationalise domestic abuse leave measures and the publication of the consultation response.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department, welcoming the anticipated regulations and seeking an estimated timeframe for introduction.

14.3 Energy Efficiency Capital Grant Scheme

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence, advising that the paused Energy Efficiency Capital Grant Scheme has had its business case revised to allow for lower grant aid rates.

14.4 Biomethane Support Scheme

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of the agreement in principle to use the RHI AME underspend for a biomethane support scheme for non-domestic renewable heat.

14.5 Social Housing Tenancy and Entrepreneurship

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental holding response in respect of whether social house tenancy prevents home-based entrepreneurship, pending receipt of a Department for Communities response on the matter.

14.6 DfE on the ATU All-Island Student Mobility Pilot

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response, in respect of the ATU all-island student mobility pilot.

14.7 CCEA - BTEC results

The Committee considered a response from CCEA Regulation, in respect of the timing of issuing BTEC results to Higher and Further Education providers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CCEA Regulation once more, suggesting again that it considers the viability of automating BTEC results as is the case for A-levels.

14.8 NI Skills Council

The Committee considered a response from the NI Skills Council, regarding the review of the NI Skills Council and a request to brief the Committee in February 2027

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing in February 2027.

14.9 CCNI 2026-2032 Corporate Plan

The Committee considered a request from the Consumer Council NI to present its new 2026-2032 Corporate Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing in February 2027.

14.10 ISNI Report

Noted: The Committee noted the ISNI report for October 2026.

14.11 Bill Sponsor - Regional Balance Bill

Noted: The Committee noted further written evidence on the Regional Balance Bill from the Bill Sponsor, pending the Bill Sponsor evidence session, later in November.

14.12 DoJ - Regional Balance Bill

Noted: The Committee noted a Department of Justice response in respect of Regional Balance Bill.

14.13 CfF - Regional Balance Bill

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance in respect of the Regional Balance Bill.

14.14 Fisheries, Aquaculture and Water Environment Bill call for evidence

The Committee considered a call for evidence from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in respect of the Fisheries, Aquaculture and Water Environment Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to provide a nil response.

14.15 CfF - September R6 Outturn

Noted: The Committee noted a memo from the Committee for Finance, providing September R6 outturn and forecast expenditure outturn for departments.

14.16 WFDSC - Union Customs Code

Noted: The Committee noted a memo from the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee in respect of its report on revisions to the Union Customs Code.

14.17 HoL NISC - Union Customs Code

Noted: The Committee noted House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee correspondence to the Paymaster General seeking clarity on the changes to the Union Customs Code and the implications for NI.

14.18 HoL NISC - Customs Tariff Changes

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee to the Paymaster General including commentary on some possible customs tariff changes for goods entering NI.

14.19 HoL NISC - Cost Effective Decarbonisation

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero seeking clarity on the impact for NI of EU rules on cost effective decarbonisation.

14.20 GBE Community Fund presentation

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the Sustainable Energy Communities NI Team's presentation on Great British Energy – Community Fund application process.

14.21 Visual Arts Ireland Reports

The Committee considered two Visual Arts Ireland Reports and a request that the Committee consider asking the Department how cultural infrastructure is reflected in regional balance, tourism and creative-economy policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the reports to the Department, seeking its commentary.

14.22 NI Screen Complaint

The Committee considered a complaint from Independent Film Sector Review (NI) about NI Screen.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department seeking its commentary.

14.23 UCAS October Figures

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from UCAS, providing October figures on applications for medicine, dentistry and veterinary science.

14.24 SERC Compliance Issues

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from a concerned individual in respect of reported compliance issues at South Eastern Regional College.

Proceedings continued in closed session from 12:51pm.

15. Forward Work Programme – Renewable Electricity Generation Bill – evidence table

Peter Martin rejoined the meeting at 12:52pm.

Noted: The Committee noted the written submissions received to the Call for Evidence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its programme of oral evidence-taking in respect of the Committee Stage of the Renewable Electricity Generation Bill and agreed to seek evidence from the following stakeholders:

- Community Energy Northern Ireland;
- Save the Moat;
- Energy Cloud;
- KiWind;
- Renewables NI and RES Group;
- Low Carbon Contracts Company;
- SONI; and
- the Utility Regulator.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking its commentary on:

- questions raised by the RES Group in respect of strike price, technology neutrality, suppliers levy and the nature of the community benefit payments;
- questions raised by BH Estates in respect of the counterparty continuity, smaller scale generators, indicative timetables for auction rounds, publication of exemption costs, community benefits;
- questions raised by Flogas in respect of the supplier levy and on regulation-making powers;
- questions raised by Renewables NI in respect of levy exemptions;

- questions raised by Indaver in respect of the calculation of community benefits;
- questions raised by Scottish Power Renewables in respect of the definition of community benefits; and
- questions raised by SONI in respect of the territory of generators, bidding behaviours, financial assessment and choice of the counterparty, allocation rounds, definition of system operator, allocation scheme criteria, the modification of standard terms; the provision of information; monitoring and reviewing; and the recovery of costs; and
- questions raised by CENI relating to community ownership, the counterparty, and the need for an allocation road map etc.

Proceedings continued in public session at 12:52pm.

16. Draft Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed to put down the following motion for debate in plenary:

''*That in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 29 January 2027, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Credit Unions (Amendment) Bill''*

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

17. Any other business

17.1 Magee Student Figures

Padraig Delargy welcomed the indication from Ulster University that student numbers at Magee have increased substantially.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Magee Taskforce and Ulster University congratulating them on the progress of increasing student numbers, and inviting the Magee Taskforce to brief the Committee in February 2027.

17.2 Halloween celebrations

Padraig Delargy noted the success of the 40th anniversary of the Halloween celebrations in the City of Derry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the write to the Department; Visit Derry; Derry City and Strabane District Council; Tourism Ireland and Tourism NI thanking them for their work in organising and marketing the event and recognising its success as a unique economic driver.

Peter Martin and the Chairperson indicated that they anticipated that the Committee would also recognise other tourism events in NI in the same way going forward

17.3 SPS agreement

Sinead McLaughlin noted the recent press reports of an imminent Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement between the UK and EU.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the write to the Department seeking information on the anticipated impact of the agreement for Northern Ireland.

18. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next scheduled Economy Committee meeting will begin on Wednesday 11 November 2026 at 9:00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 1:03pm.

Diane Forsythe MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

11 November 2026