



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 27 May 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Diane Forsythe (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA
Mr David Honeyford MLA
Mr Declan Kearney MLA
Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Present via video conferencing:

Ms Diana Armstrong MLA
Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Apologies: Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

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

Sarah Dowd (Clerical Officer)

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to adopt a revised agenda.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 SEN Review

The Chairperson reminded Members that during Question Time, in response to AQO 3598, the Minister referred to a review of post-school SEN provision in Further Education colleges; careers support for families; and disability-focused Challenge Fund projects.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking details of: the findings of the ETI review of SEN provision in FE; how it has strengthened information and careers support for families; and its disability-focused Challenge Fund projects.

3.2 Microsoft Ireland

The Chairperson advised Members that Microsoft Ireland had requested an informal meeting on AI related matters.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to meet informally with Microsoft Ireland.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 20 May 2026.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. LirIC - Transmission Investment Ltd – oral evidence

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 10:03am:

- James Dickson, Project Development Director, Transmission Investment Ltd;
- Mark Fitch, Corporate Development Director, Transmission Investment Ltd;
and
- Glen Evertsen, Project Director, Transmission Investment Ltd

Diana Armstrong left the meeting at 10:42am.

Key issues discussed included: the LirIC interconnector project; regulatory uncertainty and the need for grid connection framework clarity; the need for policy development, Departmental engagement and leadership; cap and floor payment mechanisms, mutualisation and the associated risks to consumers; net consumer benefits in respect of the interconnector project; consenting and planning challenges; timeline and slippage; impact on investment and the experience in other jurisdictions; assessing and managing any environmental impact; and the Department's Energy Strategy Action Plan update 2026.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11:00am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister: expressing concern in respect of the reported lack of senior Departmental engagement and consequent timeline slippage; seeking information on whether these reported engagement practices may have impacted on other investments; urging the appointment of a designated senior Department official to act as overarching senior responsible officer; and seeking clarity on the deliverables and milestones to support the project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed write to Transmission Investment suggesting that it follows-up with the Minister in respect of the identification of a senior Departmental contact; an overarching senior responsible officer; and an agreed milestone action plan.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to seek a Departmental briefing on the Energy Strategy Action Plan 2026.

7. SL1 RHI (Closure) Regulations 2026 – oral evidence

The following official joined the meeting at 11:04am:

- Catriona Harkin, Acting Director of Energy Operations, Department for the Economy

The session was recorded by the Official Report.

Key issues discussed included: the addition of 24 notice periods for inspections; changes to boiler replacements; a voluntary withdrawal mechanism; and revised costs.

The Committee recorded its thanks to the official for her work on the RHI legislation. The official left the meeting at 11:18am.

Noted: The Committee noted the proposed rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking a breakdown of the £213m cost and information on how any under utilised AME will be used.

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

8. DfE Spending 2025-26 2026-27 – written briefing

The Committee considered; a Departmental written briefing in respect of Year-End spending 2025-26 and correspondence from the Committee for Finance on 2026-27 drawdown and contingency spending arrangements.

Key issues discussed included: Departmental pressures; 2026-27 rate of resource spending; capital and Financial Transactions Capital; the cash flow plan; and the impact on the disclaimed accounts.

Jonathan Buckley left the meeting at 11:20am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department: noting its budget pressures; seeking clarity on the capital outturn for 2025-26; expressing concerns at the apparent rate of spending in 2026-27 and seeking clarification on the Department's cashflow plan.

9. Correspondence

9.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 Defence Spending Allocation

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of the £50m UKG defence spending allocation.

9.3 Childcare Issues

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response, indicating that the Department of Education takes the lead for childcare and the provision of support and advice to providers and also information on the roll-out of Assured Skills Academies for childcare.

Jonathan Buckley rejoined the meeting at 11:29am.

9.4 South West Region Growth Deal

Noted: The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance, providing an update on the Mid South West Region Growth Deal.

9.5 Call for Evidence – Nil Responses

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure and Committee for Education indicating nil responses to the Petroleum Exploration Licensing (Repeal) Bill and the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill.

9.6 CAERA to DfE: Green Growth Initiatives

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to the Department for the Economy, requesting clarification on collaborative frameworks supporting green growth initiatives.

9.7 CfF: Energy Cost Support

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance, providing limited further information on the development of the £81m energy cost support measure.

9.8 A-Level Reform and Student Mobility

Noted: The Committee noted a response from the Education Minister welcoming reviews of the CAO points allocated to NI A-levels; indicating that the voice of young people has been included in the development of his reform proposals; and advising of careers information for Higher Education pathways.

9.9 Trinity College Dublin's NI Feasibility Study

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Irish Universities Association providing information on a recent Trinity College Dublin quota system for NI students.

9.10 US tariffs

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee to the Department for Business and Trade in respect of the impact of US tariffs on NI.

9.11 Anaka Collective

The Committee considered a request from the Anaka Collective to brief on the Stranded Dreams proposal designed to address education and skills provision for 16+ newcomers.

Noted: The Committee noted the request to brief in the context of its ongoing forward work programme pressures.

9.12 Sustainable Energy Communities

Noted: The Committee noted an invitation to the Sustainable Energy Communities conference in the Long Gallery on Monday 8 June.

9.13 Thank You Letter

Noted: The Committee noted a thank you letter from Leslie Orr.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold an additional meeting on 23 June 2026 to receive a Ministerial briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule the stakeholder event which had been provisionally scheduled for 24 June 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to postpone the Invest NI/DfE briefing on trade and investment to the autumn when the International Plan is to be ready.

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

11. Any Other Business

11.1 FE/HE APG

Padraig Delargy invited Members to the Further and Higher Education All Party Group meeting on Tuesday 2 June 2026.

11.2 AI APG

Kate Nicholl advised Members that they will receive an invitation to a visit to Queen's University Belfast's AI Centre in June 2026, on behalf of the Artificial Intelligence All Party Group.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next scheduled Economy Committee meeting will begin on Wednesday 3 June 2026 at 10:00am in Room 30 Parliament Buildings.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 11:36am.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

10 June 2026