



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 21 January 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Ms Diana Armstrong MLA

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Miss Jemma Dolan MLA

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Present by video-conferencing:

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Apologies: Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Claire Milliken (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Sarah Dowd (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in open session at 10:17am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

Kate Nicholl declared an interest in respect of her husband being a member of Chartered Accountants Ireland.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Informal Meeting

The Chairperson reminded Members that, as previously agreed, he attended an informal meeting on 20 January 2026 with representatives from the local councils involved in the provision of Go Succeed.

Noted: The Committee noted the circulated summary note.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister: indicating its support for Go Succeed; advising that local councils are understood as all having agreed to increase their funding to supplement Local Growth Fund support for Go Succeed; and seeking clarity on the Department's funding position going forward.

3.2 Job Losses

Diana Armstrong noted with concern reported job losses at Linden Foods retail packing facility.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department calling for appropriate mitigation measures and seeking clarity on the support that is to be provided by Invest NI etc. to the affected employees and employer.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 14 January 2026.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

6. Correspondence

6.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence

6.2 RHI Winter Uplift Tariff

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response providing clarification in respect of the costs of the RHI winter uplift tariff.

6.3 Executive Approval: RHI Closure

Noted: The Committee noted, pending receipt of the relevant draft regulations, Ministerial correspondence confirming that the Executive has approved the RHI closure regulations.

6.4 Ministerial statement: RHI closure regulations

Noted: The Committee noted a written Ministerial statement in respect of the RHI closure regulations.

6.5 Tourism NI ARFS 2024-25

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the Annual Report and Financial Statements 2024/25 for Tourism NI.

6.6 Tourism Ireland CLG ARFS 2024

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the Annual Report and Financial Statements 2024 for Tourism Ireland CLG.

6.7 CfF Budget Scrutiny

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance requesting a response on the Department's 2025-2026 spending and the draft budget 2026-2029/30.

6.8 Union Customs Code / EU Customs Authority

Noted: The Committee noted forwarded correspondence from the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee, from the Exchequer

Secretary to the Treasury, in respect of a proposed regulation establishing the Union Customs Code and the EU Customs Authority.

6.9 53rd Report ESR

Noted: The Committee noted the 53rd report of the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules, which includes SR 2025/140 The Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) (Amendment No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 and SR 2025/177 The Insolvency Practitioners (Amendment and Transitional Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025. The ESR had no comment on these rules.

6.10 'Rural Health and Wealth' Event

The Committee considered correspondence from Connect PA inviting the Committee to attend the 'Rural Health and Wealth' event on Monday 26 January 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for Members to respond individually if they wish to attend, diaries permitting.

6.11 Lidl Northern Ireland Event

The Committee considered an invitation from Lidl Northern Ireland to attend its 'Celebrating Local Suppliers and Communities' event on Tuesday 17 February 2026

Agreed: The Committee agreed for Members to respond individually if they wish to attend, diaries permitting.

Proceedings were suspended at 10:22am.
Proceedings continued in public session at 10:26am.

7. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Noted: The Committee noted that the Department had postponed its planned evidence session on the mid-term review of the Energy Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed:

- to schedule a briefing from Assembly Research on renewable energy inspection regimes on 28 January 2026;
- that it did not require further evidence from the RHA NI in respect of the RHI (Closure of Non-Domestic Scheme) Bill and
- that pending receipt of the draft RHI closure regulations and further Departmental responses, it would schedule informal deliberations in respect of the Bill on 4 February 2026

Agreed: The Committee agreed:

- to hold an external meeting at a Skills for Life and Work provider on 11 February 2026;
- to schedule an update briefing on the Magee Expansion Taskforce; and

- to refer the HMRC Windsor Framework NI Stakeholder Engagement team to the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee.

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

Proceedings were suspended at 10:30am

Proceedings continued in public session at 10:34am

8. Draft Budget – Evidence from the Minister for the Economy

The Minister for the Economy, Dr Caoimhe Archibald MLA joined the meeting at 10:34am with the following official:

- Ian Snowden, Permanent Secretary, DfE;

Key issues discussed included: energy policy, security of electricity supply, grid connection issues, the Renewable Electricity Price Guarantee Scheme and the delay of the renewables auction to the next mandate, the delayed development of offshore renewables, Barnett consequentials for the GB domestic renewable project; the Employment Rights Good Jobs Bill; Regional Balance, Invest NI investment methodology and data interpretation; the Magee expansion and student housing; the future of the Skill-Up programme; student mobility and UCAS/CAO alignment; job losses in Tyrone and Invest NI support; Higher Education funding and the publication of the HE financial needs assessment; trade issues, import/export statistics, FDI, and the Cantor Fitzgerald decision; tourism including the Hidden Heartlands marketing extension to Fermanagh; childcare sector supports; the AI Advisory Panel, and public sector cross-departmental data sharing.

Padraig Delargy declared an interest in respect of being a former participant of the Skill-Up programme.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and official for their evidence.
The Minister left the meeting at 11:57am.

Proceedings were suspended at 11:57am

Proceedings continued in public session at 12:02pm.

9. Business Plan Update – Evidence from the Department for the Economy

The following officials joined the meeting at 12:02pm

- Ian Snowden, Permanent Secretary, DfE; and
- Alan Russell, Head of Economic Priorities Policy Division, DfE

Key issues discussed included: Enhanced Investment Zones progress; the aviation strategy; the Irish language policy; legislative programme updates including the

progress of Bills; investment decisions; City and Growth Deals; tourism; and the ethical investment framework

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a further Departmental briefing in respect of the budget and to write to the Department seeking:

- clarification on trade data provided in a previous Ministerial Press Release, including the origin of the statistics and the nature of the NISRA analysis;
- examples of FDI decisions which were positively influenced by the Windsor Framework;
- clarification on the Cantor Fitzgerald investment decision including Invest NI and Departmental records of the relevant engagements;
- information on the Fibrus roll-out;
- further information on the Enhanced Investment Zone timelines, gateways, likely beneficiaries and the nature of support being provided;
- an update on the Department's Irish language policy; and
- clarity on the "compromise agreement" in the Tourism NI Annual Report and Financial Statements 2024/25.

10. Any Other Business

10.1 UCAS/CAO Issues

Padraig Delargy raised concerns in respect of student mobility on the island of Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Further and Higher Education in the Republic of Ireland suggesting that Higher Education entrance systems be aligned in the longer term, but that in the immediate term there should be a fairer equivalency between Leaving Certificate and A-level and Further Education qualifications in order to better support student mobility.

10.2 Legislative Programme

Padraig Delargy queried the origin of advice in respect of the anticipated timings of the Department's primary legislation programme.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 28 January 2026 at 10:00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 12:48pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

28 January 2026