



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 14th May 2025

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

Present:

- Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)
- Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Ms Diana Armstrong MLA
- Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA
- Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

Present by video-conferencing:

- Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA
- Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Apologies:

- Ms Kate Nicholl MLA
- Mr David Honeyford MLA

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)
Stuart Gilmour (Clerical Officer)
Michael Scholes (Research Officer) – item 7 only

The meeting commenced in public session at 9:45am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's business.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 7 May 2025.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Department for the Economy – Product Regulation and Metrology (PRaM) Bill Legislative Consent – evidence session

Mark McGregor, Head of Legislation, Goods Regulation and Chemicals Branch, Department for the Economy, joined the meeting at 9:47am.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Diana Armstrong joined the meeting at 9:50am.

Key issues discussed included: the use of the Product Regulation and Metrology Bill to roll-out EU regulations (applicable to Northern Ireland) to the rest of the United Kingdom; and policy areas in which the Bill may be applied, including eco-design, AI, product safety and lithium ion batteries.

The Chairperson thanked the official for his briefing.

Emma Sheerin joined the meeting at 9:56am.

The official left the meeting at 9:56am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to support the anticipated legislative consent motion and that it would consider a related report on the PRaM Bill at its next meeting.

7. Assembly Briefing – Employment Rights Legislation

Michael Scholes joined the meeting at 9:57am.

Key issues discussed included: the economic and productivity impact of employment rights reform in Northern Ireland; the options for the reform of zero hours contracts and flexible working.

Noted: The Committee noted tabled papers including in respect of the UU EPC report on carers leave.

The Chairperson thanked Michael for his briefing.

Michael Scholes left the meeting at 10:09am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission an Assembly Research paper on the economic and productivity impact of changes to employment rights legislation in Northern Ireland and comparing approaches to the reform of zero hours contracts in different jurisdictions.

8. Correspondence

8.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 Further Education Lecturers' Pay

Noted: The Committee noted a Written Ministerial Statement in respect of the Further Education Lecturers' pay dispute.

8.3 Energy Efficiency Capital Grants

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department advising of a pause to the energy efficiency capital grant scheme for businesses.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further evidence from the Department for the Economy in respect of the pause to the energy efficiency capital grant scheme for businesses.

8.4 Departmental Accounts

Padraig Delargy declared an interest as he is a member of the Public Accounts Committee.

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of the disclaimed 2023-24 Annual Accounts and noted also that the Departmental accounts will likely be disclaimed or qualified for 2024-25, 2025-26 and possibly 2026-27.

8.5 Tourism NI's ARA 2022-2023

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of Tourism NI's Annual Report and Accounts 2022-2023.

8.6 Tourism NI's ARA 2023-2024

Agreed: The Committee noted a copy of Tourism NI's Annual Report and Accounts 2023-2024.

8.7 AI Research

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of AI research including a baseline study by the AI Collaboration Centre (AICC) is to be published in the summer with a further study by Matrix to be published in the autumn.

8.8 Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.

The Committee considered the Department for Economy response in respect of its role in relation to the PfG priority of Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Committee for the Executive Office.

8.9 EU Regulations: Vehicle Emissions

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure on EU regulations relating to vehicle emissions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Infrastructure in order to arrange a joint concurrent session with evidence on vehicle emission regulations from the National Franchised Dealer Association and other stakeholders as appropriate.

8.10 Cost of Doing Business in Northern Ireland report.

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the Cost of Doing Business in Northern Ireland report.

8.11 PfG Priorities

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the response from the Minister of Finance setting out the disaggregation of the funding under each PfG priority.

8.12 Sentencing Practice

Noted: The Committee noted an invitation from the Lady Chief Justice's Office to an in-person event on Sentencing Practice in Northern Ireland on 20 May 2025.

8.13 Concerned Individual

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned individual in respect of the regulation of employment judges in NI and the timeframe for judgements to be issued.

8.14 Main Estimates Memorandum 2025/26.

Noted: The Committee noted the Main Estimates Memorandum for 2025/26, pending a further budget briefing in May 2025.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme including in respect of evidence sessions relating to: renewable energy; the Utility Regulator; and AI.

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

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 21 May 2025 at 10:00am in Studio Ulster.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 10:19am.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

14 May 2025