



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 16 September 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Ms Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Mr Declan Kearney MLA

Mr Peter Martin MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Present by video-conferencing:

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Apologies:

Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)
Aoibheann Baker (Assembly Bill Clerk) – item 12 only

The meeting commenced in open session at 10:33am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Committee Membership

Sinead McLaughlin joined the meeting at 10:34am

The Chairperson welcomed Peter Martin MLA to the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Jonathan Buckley MLA and to Diana Armstrong MLA, to thank them for their service to the Committee.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 9 September 2026.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. LCM Sporting Events Bill – Departmental evidence

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:34am:

- Dan Cartland, Head of Tourism Partnership, DfE; and
- Damien Doherty, Chief Inspector Trading Standards Service, DfE.

Proceedings were recorded by Hansard.

Key issues discussed included: the Executive's agreement in principle to the Westminster legislation; the need for alignment with the Republic of Ireland for all-Ireland events; the triggering of the provisions by the Assembly or Executive Ministers; and impact for major national events.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.
The officials left the meeting at 10:48am.

- Agreed:** The Committee welcomed the legislation as an opportunity to promote related economic growth and agreed to write to the Department seeking:
- an update on engagement with local sporting events providers and clarity as to how the legislation might support upcoming NI and UK-wide events;
 - an update on the Department's engagement with Republic of Ireland counterparts in respect of all-Ireland events; and
 - clarity on how or whether the legislation might be triggered by the Executive or by an individual Executive Minister.

7. Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill - Utility Regulator evidence

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 10:49am:

- John French, Chief Executive, Utility Regulator; and
- Shauna McAuley, Head of Legal Services, Utility Regulator

Proceedings were recorded by Hansard.

Key issues discussed included: the recent review of the role of Ofgem and the differences in respect of the UR's role; the role of the Consumer Council NI and the Memorandum of Understanding with the Utility Regulator; regulatory independence and the Guaranteed Service Standards disagreement; amending the Bill to allow the Utility Regulator the ability to provide advice to all Executive Departments; home heating oil regulation including the development of the care and vulnerable customer register; gas/electricity prices, market dynamics and the energy demand strategy; hydrogen regulation; new powers for the UR, additional resources, related horizon scanning and funding mechanisms.

Kate Nicholl joined the meeting at 11:16am

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.
The witnesses left the meeting at 11:38am.

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that sufficient evidence on the Committee Stage of the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill had been taken.

8. Interconnection Policy - Departmental evidence

The following officials joined the meeting at 11:40am:

- Catriona Harkin, Acting Director Energy Operations, DfE
- Tim Cox, Technical Advisor (NIE Networks Seconded)

Key issues discussed included: NI's interconnection requirement; security of supply and grid development issues; the Utility Regulator's formal assessment in respect of East/West interconnection; the Minister's Energy Strategy Policy Position Statement; the potential re-coupling of electricity markets; dispatch down; and the North/South interconnector.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.
The officials left the meeting at 12:13pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department, the Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment in the Republic of Ireland; and SONI seeking details of timelines, engagement and associated issues in respect of the delays to the commissioning of the North South interconnector.

Proceedings were suspended at 12:15pm.
Proceedings resumed at 12:21pm.
Kate Nicholl left the meeting at 12:21pm.

9. Correspondence

9.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 Departmental Research Bulletins

Noted: The Committee noted a number of Departmental research bulletins.

9.3 RHI (Closure) Regulations

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the approved statutory rule: The Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme (Closure) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

9.4 71st ESR Report

Noted: The Committee noted the 71st report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules (ESR), including The RHI Scheme (Closure) Regulations (NI) 2026, on which the ESR made no comment.

9.5 CfTEO Nil Response – UR Bill

Noted: The Committee noted a nil response in respect of the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill from the Committee for The Executive Office.

9.6 CfTEO Nil Response – PEL (Repeal) Bill

Noted: The Committee noted a nil response in respect of Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill from the Committee for The Executive Office.

9.7 CfF Revision of resources to DoF and DoJ

Noted: The Committee noted a memo from the Committee for Finance advising of a limited revision of total resources and cash available to the Department of Finance and Department of Justice.

9.8 CfF June/July Budget Position

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance in respect of the June/July budget position.

9.9 Belfast Met Language Courses

Noted: The Committee noted, pending an update from the Further Education colleges on budget pressures, correspondence from a concerned individual in respect of Belfast Metropolitan College's reported cancellation of language courses,

9.10 NRC Chairperson Arrangement

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of the extension of emergency chairpersonship arrangements at Northern Regional College.

9.11 Impact Training Ltd

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from Impact Training to the Department in respect of concerns around a recent change in the operational requirements in respect of Skills for Life and Work eligibility.

9.12 CfF FTC Underspend

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance advising of the repayment of Financial Transactions Capital (FTC) loan by Ulster University which, has generated a quarterly FTC underspend in 2026-27.

9.13 UCAS Clearance

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from UCAS, providing further information on student places at university.

9.14 CfF Costs and Legislation

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance advising Statutory Committees to consider the costs associated with the outworking and implementation of legislation.

9.15 CfF UUEPC Research

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance in respect of the commissioning of UUEPC to undertake

research on the public procurement environment for microbusinesses, SMEs and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises.

9.16 CfF Car Insurance Premiums

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing a copy of correspondence from the Association of British Insurers in respect of car insurance premiums in NI.

9.17 CfF Parcels and Tariffs Issues

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance including an exchange of correspondence with the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee on parcels and tariffs issues.

9.18 HoL NISC Industrial Capacity

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee to the Department for Business Innovation, Science and Technology in respect of the framework for the acceleration of industrial capacity and decarbonisation in strategic sectors.

9.19 ARINS Research Programme

The Committee considered a request from ARINS Research Programme QUB, to brief the Committee in respect of its research on practical and legal barriers to cross-border working on the island of Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from the ARINS Research Programme, subject to legislative scrutiny pressures.

9.20 Mental Health Foundation

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Mental Health Foundation in respect of its latest research on employment and mental health inequality, including new Northern Ireland-specific findings.

9.21 NIHRC event

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the NI Human Rights Commission in respect of the upcoming Frontier Workers Case Studies Booklet Launch on 7 October.

9.22 Concerned Individual

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of a complaint from a concerned individual to the Utility Regulator in respect of the current wholesale electricity pricing mechanism in NI.

10. Any other business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next scheduled Economy Committee meeting will begin on Wednesday 23 September 2026 at 10:00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

Proceedings continued in closed session from 12:25pm.

12. Draft Forward Work Programme

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the Credit Union (Reform) Bill, including potential introduction dates, and any other legislation planned to be introduced within this mandate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking sight of its budget returns submission, which is due on 18 September 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold the date of 25 November 2026, 6pm to 9pm, for an informal evidence-taking event for the Credit Union (Reform) Bill, if introduced.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 12:41pm.

Diane Forsythe MLA

Deputy Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

23 September 2026