



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 28 January 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present:

- Ms Diana Armstrong MLA
- Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA
- Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA
- Mr David Honeyford MLA
- Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA
- Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Present by video-conferencing:

Miss Jemma Dolan MLA

Apologies:

- Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)
- 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)

Aidan Stennett (Research Officer) – item 8 only

The meeting commenced in open session at 10:04am.

1. Appointment of a Temporary Chairperson

In the absence of the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, nominations were sought for the role of Temporary Chairperson.

Sinead McLaughlin nominated David Honeyford as Temporary Chairperson.

Jonathan Buckley seconded the nomination.

In the absence of any other valid nominations David Honeyford assumed the role of Temporary Chairperson.

Proceedings were suspended at 10:05am.

Proceedings continued in public session at 10:17am.

Pádraig Delargy and Kate Nicholl joined the meeting at 10:17am.

2. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Chairperson's Business

4.1 Informal Meeting

The Chairperson reminded Members of the informal meeting with (the Committee for Finance and) representatives from Chartered Accountants Ireland on 21 January 2026, in respect of the devolution of Corporation Tax.

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

Noted: The Committee noted the circulated summary note.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a follow-up informal meeting with Chartered Accountants Ireland in due course.

4.2 Hospitality Sector Issues

The Chairperson advised Members of a considerable level of concern in respect of the adverse economic impact on the hospitality and tourism sector of the business rates revaluation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from Hospitality Ulster, Pubs of Ulster; the NI Hotels Federation and representatives of the Food to Go sector to discuss the related economic challenge for the hospitality and tourism sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for the Economy urging her to undertake an economic impact assessment of reval 2026 for the hospitality and tourism sector.

Members exchanged views in respect of the communication by the Department of Finance with the hospitality and tourism sectors on reval 2026 and whether this matter was indeed within the remit of the Committee for the Economy.

The Committee divided on the following motion:

“To write to the Minister for Finance, conveying the considerable surprise of the hospitality sector at the extent of the reval 2026 changes including the inappropriate use of turnover as a determinant of business rates payment and indicating concern at the unsatisfactory communication of the changes to the sector.”

Ayes: David Honeyford; Kate Nicholl; Sinead McLaughlin; Diana Armstrong; Jonathan Buckley

Noes: Padraig Delargy, Jemma Dolan

The motion was passed

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 21 January 2026.

6. Matters Arising

6.1 Cantor Fitzgerald Minutes

Jonathan Buckley referred to the sharing of the Cantor Fitzgerald minutes with the BBC prior to its provision to the Economy Committee.

Padraig Delargy indicated that the matter had been addressed and the information had been provided by the Department to the Committee.

The Committee divided on the following motion:

“To write to the Minister for the Economy recording its disappointment at the discourtesy shown to the Committee in respect of the provision of the information to the BBC before it was provided to the Committee; and asking for an explanation of the processes relating to the provision of this information”

Ayes: David Honeyford; Kate Nicholl; Sinead McLaughlin; Diana Armstrong; Jonathan Buckley

Noes: Padraig Delargy, Jemma Dolan

The motion was passed

7. Low Carbon Heating and the DEEHP Scheme – evidence from the Department for the Economy

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:43am:

- Ryan White, Director, Heat Buildings and Climate Change Directorate, DfE: and
- Simon Miskelly, Heat of Heat Policy, DfE

Key issues discussed included: retrofitting of existing homes; the Fabric First approach and insulation measures; the role of councils; cross-departmental co-operation and the Residential Co-ordination Hub; the Building Regulations’ Executive paper and new builds – the application of the Future Homes standard; the GB Warm Homes Scheme; other technologies and the use of biofuels in hybrid heating systems; planning permission rule changes for heat pumps; heat pump operation; capital and operating costs; smart metering; the need for a heat pump information campaign; developing a supplier/installer base; the importance of green skills, apprenticeships and industry-related college curricula.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.
The officials left the meeting at 11:33am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the GB Warm Homes Scheme and the related Barnett consequential for Northern Ireland.

8. Renewable Heat Inspection Scheme – Assembly Research Briefing

Aidan Stennett joined the meeting at 11:34am

The Committee noted the Assembly Research paper on the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH) in the Republic of Ireland.

The Chairperson thanked Aidan for his briefing.
Aidan left the meeting at 11:39am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission Assembly Research to supplement the paper with information on the number of SSRH payments that were withheld as a consequence of inspection.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that pending receipt of: the draft RHI closure regulations; further Departmental responses as part of the deliberation process; and the information on SSRM payments, it would not seek further evidence as part of the Committee Stage of the RHI (Closure of Non-Domestic Scheme) Bill.

9. SL1 Parental Bereavement Miscarriage Leave – evidence from the Department for the Economy

The following officials joined the meeting at 11:41am:

- Colin Jack, Director of Business and Employment Regulation Division, DfE
- Geraldine Lavery, Head of Employment Relations Work/Life Balance and EU Exit Branch, DfE
- Joseph Ward, Deputy Principal, Employment Relations Work/Life Balance and EU Exit Branch, DfE

The session was recorded by the Official Report.

Key issues discussed included: HMRC system changes; issuing of guidance to employers and employees; partner rights; wellbeing of employees; associated costs; and the related changes in Great Britain.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.
The officials left the meeting at 12:10pm.

Noted: The Committee noted the proposed rule and welcomed the delegated legislation.

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

10. SR Chemicals/GMO

The Committee considered the draft statutory rule: The Chemicals (Health and Safety) and Genetically Modified Organism (Contained Use) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

Jonathan Buckley indicated concerns including the absence of oversight of the revised regime.

The Committee divided on the following motion:

“That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2026/9 The Chemicals (Health and Safety) and Genetically Modified Organism (Contained Use) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026, and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule.”

Ayes: David Honeyford; Kate Nicholl; Padraig Delargy; Sinead McLaughlin; Jemma Dolan

Noes: Jonathan Buckley; Diana Armstrong

The motion was passed

11. Correspondence

11.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence

11.2 Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS).

Noted: The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence on Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service, pending a related briefing from the Utility Regulator.

11.3 Widening Participation in Higher Education

The Committee considered Departmental correspondence, providing notice of a consultation on a review of the approach to Widening Participation in Higher Education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a Departmental briefing on the feedback to the consultation.

11.4 DfE Tourism Progress Report

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence providing a copy of the Department's progress report on the Tourism Partnership Board and Tourism Vision and Action Plan.

11.5 CAERA: Trade tariffs

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to the Department for the Economy, seeking commentary on the impact of US trade tariffs.

11.6 CfC: Warm Homes Scheme

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Communities on the Warm Homes Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the Warm Homes Scheme Barnett consequentials.

11.7 CfC: Housing Supply

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Communities in respect of the Construction Employers Federation budget response and seeking commentary on cross-departmental work on the Housing Supply Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on the Housing Supply Strategy.

11.8 Infrastructure Levy

Noted: The Committee noted a Construction Employers Federation press release on the Infrastructure Levy.

11.9 Youth Assembly

Noted: The Committee a copy of the Youth Assembly's Big Youth Survey Report 2025.

11.10 Competition and Markets Authority

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the Competition and Markets Authority Draft Annual Plan 2026 to 2027.

11.11 HoL NI Scrutiny Committee: CBAM

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from HoL NI Scrutiny Committee to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, disputing his assertion that the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism does not apply in NI.

11.12 UCAS

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from UCAS, announcing the expansion of application fee waivers to care leavers.

11.13 Concerned Individual

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned individual on an ICO complaint in respect of The Crown Estate/Mines Royal.

11.14 DfE Cantor Fitzgerald

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of minutes from a Ministerial meeting with Cantor Fitzgerald in New York on 11 March 2025.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Noted: The Committee noted that the Department has declined to provide a briefing date in respect of the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme or the Higher Education Financial Needs Assessment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed:

- to receive Departmental briefings on clustering and grid connections on 4 February 2026;
- to reschedule informal deliberations of the RHI (Closure of Non-Domestic Scheme) Bill to 11 February 2026, pending receipt of the draft regulations and related Departmental responses;
- to schedule a Departmental briefing on the draft budget for 4 March 2026, if available; and
- to schedule an external meeting on 11 March 2026, where the Committee will receive a briefing from the Magee Taskforce and will visit Seagate following the meeting.

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

13. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 4 February 2026 at 10:00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 12:23pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

4 February 2026