Economy Committee
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

12 October 2026

Dear Mr McCallion,

Thank you for your correspondence regarding the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill and your request for clarification on the potential resourcing implications of extending the Utility Regulator's advisory role to departments beyond the Department for the Economy.

The Utility Regulator recognises that decarbonisation is inherently cross-cutting and that there may be circumstances where our regulatory and technical expertise could usefully support work across government. If the advisory function were to be extended beyond the Department for the Economy, we would consider it important that the scope of that function is clearly defined and supported by appropriate resourcing arrangements.

We could not, however, confirm that such an extension would have no resource implications. Any resource requirement would depend on the nature, scope, volume and complexity of the requests received.

The Utility Regulator can only undertake work on matters where it has the necessary legal vires and financial ambit to do so. Any extension of our advisory role would therefore need to ensure that these requirements are met, and that funding arrangements reflect the nature of the work undertaken. Activities falling within our existing functions could be funded through existing licence-fee arrangements. However, where requests relate to matters outside those functions, appropriate funding arrangements would need to be agreed and clearly defined.

I hope this clarification is helpful. Should the Committee require any further information, we would be pleased to assist.

All the best,

[redacted]

John French
Chief Executive

Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

John French
Chief Executive
Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation
[redacted]

Our Ref: **EC2026:1080**

8 October 2026

Dear John,

Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill

At its meeting of 7 October 2026, the Committee for the Economy considered a briefing from the Assembly Bill Office, in respect of potential amendments to the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill.

The Committee has considered responses to the Call for Evidence, in which several respondents have suggested that the advisory role of the Utility Regulator set out in the Bill should not be restricted to engagement with a single Department – namely the Department for the Economy – in order to support the wider delivery of objectives under the Climate Change Act.

There was some suggestion that the alteration of the UR's vires in this regard might present a resourcing challenge. The Committee therefore agreed to write to the Utility Regulator seeking formal confirmation that an extension of its vires to provide decarbonisation advice to departments in addition to the Department for the Economy would not likely present a resourcing issue.

A written response on or before 14 October 2026 would be very greatly appreciated.

The Committee has also written to the Department seeking:

- clarity on the resourcing implications of the extension of the vires of the Utility Regulator to provide decarbonisation advice to departments in addition to the Department for the Economy;
- an update on its work in respect of the regulation of the home heating oil market as regards vulnerable customers and breach of contract issues; and
- clarity on the development of Guaranteed Service Standards and the extent to which these might provide a legislative vehicle for the extension of home

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heating oil market measures including protections for the vulnerable and those addressing breach of contract issues.

If you require further information or clarification in respect of the above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Peter McCallion

Peter McCallion
Clerk to the Committee for the Economy