

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

20 October 2026

Your Ref: EC2026:1115

Dear Peter,

Thank you for your correspondence of 14 October 2026 providing an update on the Committee's consideration of the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill and seeking information on the number and scope of decarbonisation queries received in recent years from both the Department for the Economy (DfE) and other departments.

We have reviewed the requests received from Northern Ireland departments for advice and support and provided a high level overview in Annex A.

Over the past number of months, Utility Regulator (UR) has provided advice, information or assistance on more than 170 occasions. This has included technical and regulatory advice to support the development of departmental policy, partial or full input to Assembly Questions, responses to FoI queries and input to Ministerial submissions.

The nature and extent of this support has varied considerably, with many cases involving follow-up requests and several iterations of information before reaching a conclusion. The figure of 170 should therefore be understood as an aggregate of the support provided, rather than as 170 directly comparable, like-for-like requests.

In addition to this ad hoc support UR participates in more than 30 working groups across a number of NICS Departments, a full list is included in Annex A. Participation levels varies across these groups depending on frequency and departmental assistance required.

The majority of UR's advice and support has been provided to the Department for the Economy (just under 75%). The Committee will appreciate UR also has statutory responsibilities relating to the economic and environmental regulation of the NI water sector and, as a result, has provided advice and support to the

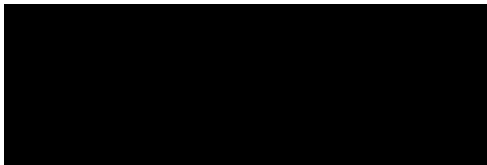
Department for Infrastructure. We have also assisted the Department for Communities and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

The subject matters on which we have provided advice, support and assistance, has been wide-ranging and are also set out in Annex A. They include (but are not limited to) areas such as offshore energy, electricity-system matters, connections, networks, flexibility, grid development and security of supply. Other significant areas include fuel poverty and the just transition, biomethane, smart meters, energy storage and water.

Given the limited timeframe available to review the relevant information, these figures may not be fully exhaustive. Nevertheless, we trust that they provide a helpful indication of the breadth and volume of advice support and assistance currently provided by the Utility Regulator.

I trust this information is helpful. If you or Committee members require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

All the best,



John French
CEO

Department	DfE	DfI	DfC	DAERA	DoH	OFMDfM	DE	DoJ	DoF
Total requests	159	13	5	1	0	0	0	0	0
Subject areas covered	Offshore	Water	Just transition and fuel poverty	Just transition and fuel poverty					
	Biomethane	Waste water		Biomethane					
	Energy Storage, including LDES (Long Duration Energy Storage) and biomass as								
	Smart meter work program								
	Security of supply, including Risk Preparedness Plans and network								
	Connections, including connection charging, firm access, producer pays and transmission contestability								
	Grid development								
	Networks, including wayleaves and								
	Renewables, including decommissioning of onshore renewables								
	Work on the development of a CfD scheme to enable the development of low carbon generation (Renewable Electricity Hydrogen, specifically hydrogen for power								
	Heat networks								
	Gas network decarbonisation, including the hybrid heat-pump trial								
	Energy efficiency and wider decarbonisation measures, including the new energy-efficiency scheme and NISEP								
	Future energy system outlook								
	RP7 / consumer measures, particularly NIE								
	Networks handling of energy-transition enquiries and complaints								
	Consumer protection, including severe-weather standards								

	Just Transition								
	NIRO Domestic Electricity Discount								
	Grid code / regulatory matters associated with DfE workstreams. Datacentres								
Working Group Involvement	1. Storm Eowyn working group.	1. PC28 working groups	1. DfC Residential Decarbonisation Co-ordination Group	1. Inter-departmental Biomethane Working Group					
	2. NIRO Domestic Electricity Discount	2. WSSG (Water Senior							
	3. New energy-efficiency scheme project	3. ORG (Outputs Review							
	4. Smart Meter Oversight Group.	4. Environmental Quality							
	5. Smart Meter Programme Management Office.	5. Drinking Water							
	6. Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan Working Group(OREAP)	6. Consumer Measures							
	7. Offshore Transmission Working Group	7. Social Policy							
	8. Grid Development Monitoring Group	8. DFI Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure taskforce							
	9. DfE Gas Network Strategic Working								
	10. Inter-departmental Biomethane Working Group								
	11. UR/DfE Gas Network Working Group								
	12. Derrylin Community Pathfinder Working Group								
	13. Renewable Electricity Price Guarantee Working Group								
	14. DfE Hydrogen Consultation Working								
	15. Dispatch Down Working Group								
	16. Energy Production and Supply Sector Working Group								
	17. 80x30 Working Group								
	18. Hydrogen Blending NI Working								
	19. Heat Networks Working Group								



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

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

Our Ref: **EC2026:1115**

14 October 2026

Dear John,

Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill

At its meeting of 14 October 2026, the Committee received evidence from Departmental officials in respect of the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill.

The Committee considered matters relating to the regulation of the home heating oil market in Northern Ireland including the identification of vulnerable customers; protections for all customers in respect of breach of contract issues; and domestic home heating oil price regulation.

The Committee noted that home heating oil consumers had been subject to considerable unregulated price variations and that proportionate measures were urgently required. The Committee noted also the recent CMA report and UK Government response on these matters and the differing regulatory regimes in other parts of the UK and in respect of other parts of the energy sector.

For your information, the Committee informally agreed, with considerable regret, that the Bill was unlikely to provide a suitable legislative vehicle in respect of any of the above aspects of the regulation of the home heating oil market in Northern Ireland.

The Committee also considered the provision of decarbonisation advice by the Utility Regulator. The Committee noted previous Departmental advice that the scope of related queries would be agreed on a case-by-case basis by the Department and the Utility Regulator and that where a query might fall outside of the remit covered by gas and electricity fees, the Department would make an application for support on behalf of the Utility Regulator to the Department of Finance.



Given the above, the Committee therefore agreed to give further consideration to an amendment which would permit the Utility Regulator to provide decarbonisation advice to all Executive departments. The Committee agreed to seek the Department's commentary on this.

The Committee also agreed to write to the Utility Regulator, seeking information on the number and scope of decarbonisation queries received in recent years including from other departments.

Owing to the short timeframe for the completion of the Committee Stage of the Bill, the Committee would greatly appreciate a written response on or before **Tuesday 20 October 2026** so as to inform the Committee's formal Clause by Clause consideration on 21 October 2026. The Committee would also greatly appreciate any related background policy information that you can provide as appropriate.

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