Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 21 October 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30

Present: Ms Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Mr Declan Kearney MLA

Mr Peter Martin MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Present via video conferencing:

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Apologies: Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Michael Greig (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Aoibheann Baker, Bill Clerk – item 6 only

Ross Connolly, Assembly Research Officer – item 8 only

Nathan Mulholland, Assembly Research Officer – item 8 only

Stephanie Mallon, Bill Clerk – Items 9 and 15 only

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

Padraig Delargy, Sinead McLaughlin and Kate Nicholl all declared an interest in respect of being members of a credit union.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Congratulations

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Phillip Brett MLA offering congratulations on the birth of his daughter.

3.2 Hospitality Ulster Event – 4 November

The Chairperson advised Members that Hospitality Ulster had invited the Committee to attend an informal meeting with Sacha Lord following the Committee meeting on Wednesday 4 November 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to accept the invitation to the informal meeting.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 14 October 2026.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed the revised minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 7 October 2026.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to revise the order of its agenda.

Proceedings continued in closed session from 10:06am.

6. Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill – Bill Office Advice

Aoibheann Baker joined the meeting at 10:07am.

Declan Kearney joined the meeting at 10:09am.

Bill Office provided advice in respect of possible amendments to the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill.

Noted: The Committee noted the paper provided by the Bill Office.

Noted: The Committee also noted responses from the Department and the Utility Regulator in respect of the provision of decarbonisation advice to other departments and other matters.

The Chairperson thanked Aoibheann for her advice.
Aoibheann Baker left the meeting at 10:19am.

Proceedings continued in open session from 10:19am.

7. Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill – formal clause by clause

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:20am:

- Kellie Sprott, Director, Energy Strategy and Corporate Services, DfE; and
- Paul Skillen, Energy Bill Team, DfE.

Proceedings were recorded by the Official Report.

The Committee formally deliberated on amendments to the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill.

Clause 1: power to provide advice, information or assistance to support the Department

The Committee divided on the amendments set out below:

Amendment 1: Clause 1, page 1, line 3

Leave out ‘Department’ and insert ‘Northern Ireland departments’

Amendment 2: Clause 1, page 1, line 4

Leave out from "Department" to "considers" in line 5 and insert "Northern Ireland departments are required, or consider"

Amendment 3: Clause 1, page 1, line 7

Leave out 'Department' and insert 'Northern Ireland departments'

Amendment 4: Clause 1, page 1,

Leave out line 11 and insert –

"departments" has the meaning given by the Departments (Northern Ireland) Order 1999'

Amendment 5: Long title

Leave out " Department for the Economy" and insert "Northern Ireland departments"

Ayes: Diane Forsythe, Peter Martin, Mike Nesbitt; David Honeyford; Kate Nicholl; Sinead McLaughlin

Noes: Declan Kearney; Padraig Delargy

The motion was passed

Agreed: The Committee agreed Clause 1 as amended.

Clause 2. **Commencement**

Agreed: The Committee agreed it was content with Clause 2, as drafted.

Long Title

Agreed: The Committee agreed it was content with the Long Title, as amended.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.
Officials left the meeting at 10:25am