



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 19 June 2024

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings Belfast

Present: Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Doug Beattie MLA

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Present via video-conferencing:

Mr Philip McGuigan MLA

Apologies: Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Anthea Matthews (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Craig Mealey (Clerical Supervisor)

Michael Doran (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:01am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interests

David Honeyford declared an interest as he has two children who are currently students and who are in receipt of student loans.

Pádraig Delargy declared an interest as he was in receipt of a student loan.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson welcomed Doug Beattie to the Economy Committee.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that Gary Middleton and his wife have recently welcomed a new-born baby.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Gary Middleton and his wife to congratulate them on the birth of their child.

The Chairperson advised that he was to speak at the Advice NI Living Wage event on Thursday 20 June 2024 in the Long Gallery.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 12 June 2024.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Good Jobs - Oral evidence from the Nevin Economic Research Institute

The witness joined the meeting at 10:02am.

The Committee received oral and written evidence from:

- Dr Lisa Wilson, Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI)

Key issues discussed included: the adoption of the Carnegie Framework in respect of job quality; the impact of job quality in creating strong sustainable economic growth; the need to address regional economic imbalance; gender and age differentials in respect of pay and job security; the need for more and better data in order to map the provision of job quality; the need for skills growth, training and career progression for existing employees; and the need for new legislation.

Pádraig Delargy left the meeting at 10:43am.

The Chairperson thanked the witness for her evidence.

The witness left the meeting at 10:56am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department indicating its disappointment that officials had again failed to inform the Committee of an important policy development. The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking confirmation of the adoption of the Carnegie framework for job quality and seeking the timescale for a detailed job quality survey for Northern Ireland including the assessment of gender, age, sub-regional and part time/full-time employment issues.

7. Technology Clusters Consultation

The Committee considered written evidence from the Department on the feedback to its consultation on 10x technology clusters.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the written response pending an oral and written briefing on the technology sectoral action plans in September.

8. Delegated Legislation - The Further Education Regulations – SR2024/128

The Committee considered a statutory rule: SR 2024/128 The Further Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.

The Committee agreed the following motion:

“That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2024/128 The Further Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rule, has no objection to the rule”

9. SL1 - Student Support and Student Fees

The Committee considered a proposed statutory rule in respect of student support and student fees and the eligibility for home fee status.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make the rule.

10. SL1 - Student Support – Ukraine Permissions

The Committee considered a proposed statutory rule in respect of student support and student fees which will extend home fee status to those granted leave to remain under a new Home Office Scheme, the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make the rule.

11. SL1 – Industrial Training Levy

The Committee considered a proposed statutory rule relating to the industrial training levy.

David Honeyford declared an interest as a company director at TAS Homes Ltd.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make the rule.

12. Correspondence

12.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

12.2 Financial Provisions Bill

The Committee considered correspondence relating to the Department of Finance's Financial Provisions Bill. The Committee noted that a consultation in respect of Department for the Economy provisions within the Bill is expected shortly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response and to schedule a briefing on the relevant aspects of the Bill from the Department for the Economy in September 2024.

12.3 Tourism Strategy

The Committee considered a Departmental response relating to the Tourism Strategy. The Committee noted that the Tourism Partnership Board had not been established nor had its Terms of Reference been agreed. The Committee noted that the 10-year Action Plan would likely include: the extension of Failte Ireland brands to NI following an audit of the Causeway Coastal Route; an events framework; a skills action plan; measures to incentivise hotel development; and the promotion of political tourism.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the promotion of 'political tourism' and seeking clarity on the appointments to the Tourism Partnership Board.

12.4 Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism – EU Regulations

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.

12.5 Departmental Budget 2024-25

The Committee considered a response to Committee queries on the budget including information on funding for the expansion of student numbers at Magee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Department seeking further information on the increase to student numbers in 2024-25 including whether MaSN is to be increased and what the impact on other campuses may be of the increase at Magee, if any.

12.6 Finance Committee Request

The Committee considered correspondence from the Finance Committee seeking feedback on Departmental briefings in respect of the budget and June Monitoring.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond to the Finance Committee indicating the briefing received.

12.7 Interim Public Sector Transformation Board

The Committee considered correspondence from the Finance Committee indicating that an interim Public Sector Transformation Board had been established and that departments had submitted transformation plans.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking sight of its transformation plans.

12.8 Vires of the Utility Regulator

Noted: The Committee noted a response from the Minister for Communities on the vires of the Utility Regulator.

12.9 Childminding Provision

The Committee noted a response to Committee queries from the Department of Education in respect of childminding provision.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to NICMA.

12.10 Training Pathways for Childminding

The Committee noted confirmation of the Department for Communities support for different training pathways for childminding.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to NICMA.

12.11 Non-Standard Emergency Accommodation

Noted: The Committee noted a response in respect of the use of non-standard emergency accommodation from the Communities Minister.

12.12 Chief Science and Technology Adviser.

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence confirming that Professor Helen McCarthy has been appointed as the Chief Science and Technology Adviser.

12.13 Joint Concurrent Meeting - Education Committee.

Noted: The Committee noted a letter of thanks, in respect of the joint concurrent meeting, from the Education Committee.

12.14 Joint Concurrent Meeting - Youth Assembly

Noted: The Committee noted a letter of thanks, in respect of the joint concurrent meeting, from the Youth Assembly.

12.15 Monthly Capital Reports

The Committee considered a response from ISNI in respect of suggestions that university capital expenditure be included in monthly capital progress reports. The Committee noted that a NICS Board project is underway in respect of monitoring capital projects with a sub-project being taken forward to revise the monthly capital reports.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department again, suggesting the inclusion of university capital expenditure and to also share the ISNI correspondence with other statutory committees.

12.16 Arbitration Bill

The Committee noted a response from the Federation of Small Businesses in respect of the Arbitration Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Justice Committee.

12.17 Motor Insurance Premiums

The Committee considered a response from the Association of British Insurers indicating that its members don't collect information by jurisdiction in respect of motor insurance premiums paid.

The Committee also considered tabled correspondence from the Financial Conduct Authority indicating that if the relevant information was actually collected, then ABI could likely share this with the Committee in confidence.

The Committee considered a request from ABI for a joint evidence session with the Committee for Justice on legal costs in NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Justice for its information.

12.18 North South Interconnector

Noted: The Committee noted a response from EirGrid advising that the North South interconnector construction will commence in RoI in Q2 2025 with project completion by Q2 2028 rather than later in 2027.

12.19 Farnborough International Air show

The Committee considered an invitation to the Chairperson to attend the Farnborough International Air Show including the NI Reception on 23 July 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to attend, subject to his availability.

13. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a revised Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme, as amended.

14. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

15. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 26 June 2024 at 10:00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:14am.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

26 June 2024