



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for the Economy

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Wednesday 26 June 2024**

**Meeting Location:** Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:** Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Mr Philip McGuigan MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

**Present via video-conferencing:**

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

**Apologies:** Mr Doug Beattie MLA

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Ms Sorchá Eastwood MLA

**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**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson thanked Sinéad McLaughlin for representing the views of the Committee during the Working Time Directive regulations debate on Tuesday 25 June 2024.

The Chairperson discussed Freedom of Information response arrangements during summer recess.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to submit views on the releasing or withholding of information in any non-routine or contentious Freedom of Information requests received by the Committee during summer recess.

### **4. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 19 June 2024.

## **5. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **6. Minister for the Economy - Oral evidence session**

The Minister and official joined the meeting at 10:03am.

The Committee received oral and written evidence from:

- Conor Murphy MLA, Minister for the Economy
- Ian Snowden, Permanent Secretary, Department for the Economy

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Key issues discussed included: the anticipated publication of the 3 year skills plan, the need for an employment survey and further spending allocations in respect of skills interventions including Skill-Up; the imminent consultation on the Employment Bill and the possibility of other smaller related Bills; the expansion of student numbers at Magee and the publication of the Magee Expansion Taskforce interim report and action plan; the establishment of the Tourism Partnership Board and further engagement in respect of air connectivity and related infrastructure issues; transformation plans relating to apprenticeships in the public sector, post-19 SEN provision and the longer term digitisation of the Insolvency Service; energy and planning issues; Invest NI and land-banking; support for the Early Learning and Childcare Strategy; RHI business cases; the Minister's further plans for legislation; hospitality, events tourism and support for the night-time economy.

Pádraig Delargy left the meeting at 11:40am.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and the official for their evidence.

The Minister and the official left the meeting at 11:59am.

**Noted:** The Committee noted tabled Departmental correspondence in respect of RHI, June Monitoring and the vires of the Utility Regulator.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister: seeking further information on the appointees to the Tourism Partnership Board;

expressing support for and seeking further information on the Department's transformation proposals in respect of: increasing public sector apprenticeships (including further information on the additional support to be provided to those studying for childcare qualifications), post-19 SEN, and in the longer term the digitisation of the Insolvency Service; and expressing support for additional funding for Skill-Up as a regional imbalance intervention tackling economic inactivity.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department again seeking a breakdown of the Magee expansion numbers in 2024-25 including the relationship with the MaSN cap and previous enrolments that exceeded this cap.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on the timing and the nature of the employment survey for NI which may replicate the recent UCD Working Ireland Survey.

## **7. Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill – consultation document**

The Committee considered a written Departmental submission in respect of the public consultation on the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill.

**Noted:** The Committee noted the written papers, pending an oral and written briefing from the Department on the feedback to the consultation after it concludes.

## **8. Correspondence**

### **8.1 Index**

**Noted:** The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

### **8.2 Air Connectivity Policy**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence confirming that the Department will brief on its air connectivity policy when this has been developed and following a limited industry consultation.

### **8.3 Estimates Memoranda**

The Committee considered a Departmental response in respect of Estimates Memoranda and briefings following the internal spending review later this year.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Finance for its consideration.

### **8.4 Skill-Up Programme Funding**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Departmental response indicating that funding for the Skill-Up Programme ended on 31 March 2024 but that consideration is being given to funding skills initiatives.

### **8.5 Examiner of Statutory Rule's 18th report**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rule's 18th report which included reference to the Draft S.R.: The Insolvency (Monetary Limits) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.

### **8.6 Careers support for SEN children and young people**

The Committee considered a response from Dr Hughes in respect of careers support for SEN children and young people.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Education, for its information.

### **8.7 Invitation to Re-Gen Waste**

The Committee considered an invitation to visit the Re-Gen waste sorting facility in Newry.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite Re-Gen to provide oral and written evidence at a future Committee meeting.

#### **8.8 Tabled Items - Debt Relief Order**

**Noted:** The Committee noted tabled Departmental correspondence indicating that the £90 application fee for access to a debt relief order has now been abolished.

#### **8.9 Tabled Item- 14-19 Education and Training Framework**

The Committee considered a Departmental response relating to the 14-19 Education and Training Framework and the reviews of general qualifications, vocational qualifications, occupational studies and the Entitlement Framework.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Education, for its information.

#### **8.10 Tabled Item - Independent review of education**

**Noted:** The Committee noted tabled correspondence from the Committee for Education on the independent review of education.

#### **8.11 Tabled Item – Post 19 SEN Provision.**

**Noted:** The Committee noted tabled correspondence from the Committee for Education including a letter to the Department for the Economy in respect of post-19 SEN provision.

#### **8.12 Tabled Item - Childcare Strategy Inter-Departmental Co-operation.**

**Noted:** The Committee noted tabled correspondence from the Minister for Education in respect of inter-departmental co-operation relating to the Early Years and Childcare Strategy.

### **8.13 Tabled Item - Competition and Markets Authority – Motor Insurance**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) in respect of motor insurance premiums in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the CMA and the Financial Conduct Authority highlighting its concerns and seeking their views as to whether competition is working appropriately and for the benefit of consumers in respect of motor insurance in Northern Ireland.

### **8.14 Tabled Item - Disability Action**

The Committee considered correspondence from Disability Action in respect of the treatment of individuals with disabilities attending employment tribunals.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking its commentary on Disability Action's claims.

## **9. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered a revised Forward Work Programme.

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

## **10. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

### **11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Thursday 5 September 2024 at 10:30am at SONI, Castlereagh.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:07pm.

**Phillip Brett MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for the Economy**

**5 September 2024**