



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 28 February 2024

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

In Attendance: Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA
Ms Sorchá Eastwood MLA
Mr David Honeyford MLA
Mr Philip McGuigan MLA
Ms Sinead McLaughlin MLA
Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA

In Attendance Remotely:

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Apologies: None.

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Bronagh Irwin (Assistant Assembly Clerk)



Craig Mealey (Clerical Supervisor)

Michael Doran (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 10:00am in public session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Declarations of Interests

Phillip Brett MLA declared an interest as an official from the Department for the Economy, Entrepreneurship and Partnership Division is a family member of his long-term partner.

Phillip Brett MLA also declared an interest as a former recipient of student support.

Pádraig Delargy MLA declared an interest as a former recipient of student support.

Sorcha Eastwood MLA declared an interest as a former recipient of student support.

3. Chairperson's Business

Members noted that, as previously agreed, the Chairperson had met informally with representatives of the City of London Corporation on Tuesday 27 February 2024 in respect of the expansion of financial and professional services in Northern Ireland.



4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting of 21 February 2024.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Delegated Legislation: Student Loans Repayment

The Committee considered the SL1 for the proposed statutory rule: The Education (Student Loans) (Repayment) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee has considered a proposal by the Department to make a Statutory Rule: The Education (Student Loans) (Repayment) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and agrees that it is content for the Department to make the rule.”

7. Departmental First Day Oral Briefing – Part 3

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Department.

The officials joined the meeting at 10.03am

The Committee received a briefing from:



Northern Ireland Assembly

Paul Grocott Head of Economic Strategy Group – Department for the
Economy

Richard Rodgers Head of Energy Group – Department for the Economy

Key issues discussed in relation to energy included: Northern Ireland Energy Strategy – the Path to Net Zero Energy; Energy Strategy Action Plan; the non-domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scheme; renewable energy investment; skills required to allow for a successful transition to a net zero economy; the realisation of the targets in the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022; cross-departmental working and collaboration with other jurisdictions; off-shore renewable electricity generation; the impact of the planning process for renewable energy development; business and consumer incentives; and the public sector estate.

Key issues discussed in relation to economic strategy included: utilisation of the Maze/Long Kesh site; Skills for a 10x economy - Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland; regional economic imbalance; City and Growth Deals; tourism; the business case for hosting UEFA Euro 2028 and the development of Casement Park; all-island economy; Project Stratum and rural broadband connectivity; and air connectivity.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

The officials left the meeting at 11.24am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification on the redacted information previously sent to the Committee on the non-domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scheme.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request further information on the capital investment and savings table included in the Energy Strategy. In particular, Members sought a breakdown in respect of the amounts of capital actually invested (for 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23) versus the amounts set out in the table and the level of achievement of energy actions and measures including those set out in the Energy Action Plan Update 2023.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the timescale for, and nature of, its proposed energy legislation and related renewable energy incentive measures.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for an update on the development of the Maze/Long Kesh site.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request more information on the conclusion of Project Stratum including the contract with Fibrus and the Project Gigabit procurement process.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for the Economy and the Minister for Infrastructure highlighting concerns in respect of the impact of planning delays on the development of renewable energy infrastructure.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an update on, and sight of, the Gateway Review for Studio Ulster.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request sight of the business case for hosting UEFA Euro 2028 and the development of Casement Park.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek further clarity on the development of metrics and indicators to assess the quality of “good jobs” delivered by Invest NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an update on the development of a new model of Further Education delivery.

8. Departmental Oral Briefing – Invest NI Action Plan

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Department.

The officials joined the meeting at 11.28am.

The Committee received a briefing from:

Kieran Donoghue Chief Executive Officer, Invest NI

Paul Grocott Head of Economic Strategy Group – Department for the Economy

Michelle Scott Entrepreneurship and Partnership Division – Department for the Economy

Key issues discussed included: remit and business processes of Invest NI; the public policy framework in which Invest NI operates; the Independent Review of Invest NI (2023); the partnership arrangement between the Department and Invest NI; funding sources; partnering with Further Education colleges; regional economic imbalance; support for indigenous businesses; changes in production methods; artificial intelligence technologies; drivers for international investment; the impact of the



Northern Ireland Assembly

Maximum Student Number (MaSN) formula; and collaboration between businesses and the Further and Higher Education sectors.

Mr McGuigan left the meeting at 12.29pm.

The officials left the meeting at 12.32pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request it is provided with a regular update of the progress of the implementation of the recommendations of the independent report on Invest NI. The Committee also agreed to write to the Department to ask for sight of the new partnership agreement between Invest NI and the Department of the Economy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request sight of its recently commissioned research on supporting dual market access.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek figures on the level of job assistance provided in Belfast compared with other sub-regions of Northern Ireland, including particularly the North-West.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek an update on its plans to develop a sub-regional investment and development model including closer alignment with district councils and Further Education colleges.

9. Correspondence

9.1 Index



Northern Ireland Assembly

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence setting out the role and responsibility of the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee.

9.3 Examiner of Statutory Rules

Noted: The Committee noted the first report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

9.4 Public Service Pensions

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the report on the impact of the Public Service Pensions Act (NI) 2014.

9.5 Written Ministerial Statement: Flooding

Agreed: The Committee considered a copy of the Written Ministerial Statement on flooding support and agreed that the Clerk should informally advise the Department that the Committee expects such statements should be issued prior to the related press release.

9.6 Mineral Products Association

Noted: The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Mineral Products Association.

9.7 Secondary Students Union of Ireland

Agreed: The Committee considered correspondence from the Community Relations Officer of the Secondary Students Union of Ireland raising issues about the RoI Central Applications Office and agreed to respond to the correspondent asking him to give a little more detail in respect of the



Northern Ireland Assembly

issues he wishes to discuss and also seeking further background from Mr Honeyford MLA.

9.8 Belfast Harbour

Agreed: The Committee considered a request from Belfast Harbour to host a future Committee meeting and undertake a tour of the Harbour Estate. The Committee agreed that the Clerk should schedule the external meeting and tour.

9.9 Dalradian

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from Dalradian to the Minister in respect of Foreign Direct Investment and polymetallic mining in Northern Ireland.

9.10 Pivotal

Agreed: The Committee considered correspondence from Pivotal seeking a meeting with the Chairperson and agreed that it was content for him to take the meeting, subject to his availability.

9.11 FE Partnership Agreements

Noted: The Committee noted copies of the partnership agreements between the Department and FE colleges: Belfast Metropolitan College; Northern Regional College; Southern Regional College; South-Eastern Regional College; South-Western Regional College and North-Western Regional College.

9.12 Londonderry Chamber of Commerce



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: The Committee considered a request from Londonderry Chamber of Commerce to host a future Committee meeting. The Committee agreed that the Clerk should schedule the external meeting.

9.13 Dr Edward Cooke

Agreed: The Committee considered further correspondence from Dr Edward Cooke and agreed to advise the correspondent that with regret it could be of no further assistance in resolving the matters in question.

9.14 Queen's University of Belfast

Agreed: The Committee considered a request from the Vice-Chancellor of the Queen's University of Belfast seeking a meeting with the Chairperson and agreed that it was content for him to take the meeting, subject to his availability.

9.15 Association of British Insurers

Noted: The Committee noted an interim report published by the Association of British Insurers.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft of its Forward Work Programme.

Noted: The Committee noted that the Minister for the Economy, Conor Murphy MLA, will brief the Committee on 20 March 2024.

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



11. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed pay awards for staff in Further Education colleges.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request clarification on whether the pay award for staff has been agreed/implemented and will be paid before the end of the financial year.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for the Economy will be at 10am on Wednesday 6 March 2024 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.40pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

6 March 2024