



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 24 April 2024

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

- Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)
- Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA
- Mr David Honeyford MLA
- Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA
- Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA
- Mr Philip McGuigan MLA

Apologies: Ms Sorcha Eastwood MLA

Present via video-conferencing:

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Anthea Matthews (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Craig Mealey (Clerical Supervisor)

Michael Doran (Clerical Officer)

Chris Rothwell (Research Officer) – item 7 only

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:01am

Agreed: The Committee agreed to revise its agenda so as to consider the Assembly Research briefing in closed session.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed the Committee that, as previously agreed, he had met informally on 23 April 2024 with the British Holiday and Home Parks Association. The Clerk had circulated a note of the meeting to Members.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that the Department had requested an informal meeting with him and the Permanent Secretary on Tuesday 7 May 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to undertake the informal meeting with the Permanent Secretary.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting of 17 April 2024.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Oral Evidence Session – City and Growth Deals Update

Officials joined the meeting at 10.02am.

The Committee received oral and written evidence from:

Ciaran McGarrity, Head of City and Deals Programme, Department for the Economy;

Carolyn Lyness, Deputy Programme Director, City and Deals Programme, Department for the Economy; and

Adrian Grimshaw, Capital Advisor, City and Deals Programme Department for the Economy.

Mike Nesbitt MLA joined the meeting at 10.36am.

Key issues discussed included: City and Growth Deal programme governance; job creation; possible erosion of funding owing to delays and inflation; translation research; and different sources of funding.

Officials left the meeting at 11.03am.

The Committee expressed support for cross-departmental working so as to ensure City and Growth Deal project synergies are properly understood and exploited and wasteful duplication is avoided.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance and the Department for the Economy seeking clarity in respect of City and Growth Deal programme governance and adherence to the Prince2 methodology including: the production of Project Initiation Documents; the maintenance of risk registers; and the provision of project/programme plans. The Committee agreed to seek sight of the programme plan and relevant project plans.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department of Finance and the Department for the Economy seeking a breakdown of the jobs

which are to be generated by the City and Growth Deal projects by location, sector and anticipated salary band.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance and the Department for the Economy indicating its support for a phased approach to the funding of projects in order to minimise delay and to ensure that funding benefits were not eroded by inflation.

7. Closed Session – RaISe Briefing - Economic Fundamentals

Proceeding continued in closed session from 11.06am.

The meeting was suspended at 11.06am and resumed at 11.10am.

The Committee received an oral and written briefing from the Assembly Research and Information Service on economic fundamentals.

Key issues discussed included: the measurement of economic performance including GDP, GVA etc; the development of economic wellbeing measures; Northern Ireland labour market information; and levels of economic inactivity.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information from RaISe in respect of Northern Ireland's trade figures and other UK regions; the impact of childcare support on economic inactivity; and detailed sub-regional economic inactivity data.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should advise the Committee of relevant academic research including in respect of "good jobs"; and hidden unemployment etc.

Proceedings continued in public session from 12.01pm

8. Oral Evidence Session - NICVA - Loss of EU funding and Economic Impact

Witnesses joined the meeting at 12.01pm.

The Committee received oral evidence from:

Ms Celine McStravick, CEO NICVA

Ruth Cooper, Senior Head of Partnerships NI, Prince's Trust

Paula Jennings, CEO, Stepping Stones

Anne McVicker, Director, Women's Resource and Development Agency

Key issues discussed included: the loss of European Social Fund support; issues in respect of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund; NICVA members providing support for women, young people, the disabled etc. to access the labour market; job losses and uncertainty in the 3rd sector; the need for a transition fund and a co-design process for 3rd sector economic inactivity supports.

Gary Middleton MLA made a declaration of interest as his wife works in the learning disability sector.

Jonathan Buckley MLA left the meeting at 12:23pm

Witnesses left the meeting at 12.59pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities seeking clarity on the longer-term funding position in respect of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the 3rd sector in Northern Ireland and indicating the Committee's support for a transition fund and a co-design process for the provision of services to address economic inactivity.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity in respect of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and urging officials to work in a co-ordinated manner across departments in order to ensure that labour market partnerships are supported and that a co-design process is adopted going forward for these important economic inactivity measures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to NCVA seeking further information on the impact of the loss of UK Shared Prosperity Fund support in respect of its members and the programmes they provide.

9. Correspondence

9.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 Diverse Youth NI report

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Education to the Department for the Economy in respect of a Diverse Youth NI report

9.3 Common Frameworks

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office in respect of Common Frameworks.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond indicating that the MRPQ and Services Frameworks are under consideration by the Department and forwarding relevant correspondence from DLUHC.

9.4 PAC – NIAO Reports

The Committee considered correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee indicating those NIAO reports that it will not be considering and which can be scrutinised by the Economy Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to take no action in respect of these reports.

9.5 9th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules

Noted: The Committee noted the 9th report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

9.6 EU Regulations Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The Committee considered correspondence from the House of Lords Windsor Framework Committee to the Minister of Energy Security and Net Zero in respect of EU regulations relating to greenhouse gas emissions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking its views on the economic impact of the relevant EU regulations.

9.7 Fuel Poverty Brief

Noted: The Committee noted a briefing paper from National Energy Action NI on fuel poverty.

9.8 Renewable Heat Association

The Committee considered correspondence from the Renewable Heat Association in respect of its dispute regarding the non-domestic Renewable Heat Incentive scheme.

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence pending resolution of ongoing legal action.

9.9 SSUNI Briefing

Noted: The Committee noted a SSUNI briefing document on North – South student mobility.

9.10 Scrutiny of Universities

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned individual in respect of the scrutiny of universities.

9.11 SONI Business Breakfast

Members considered a tabled invitation from SONI to a business breakfast on Thursday 6 June 2024 at 10:30am in Castlereagh House.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that as it would be taking evidence from SONI on 8 May 2024 and hoped to visit Castlereagh House in September, the Committee would note this invitation and Members could respond individually if they were to attend.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft of its Forward Work Programme.

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

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for the Economy will be at 10.00am on Wednesday 1 May 2024 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.06pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

1 May 2024