



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 14 February 2024

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

In Attendance: Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Gary Middleton MLA

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Ms Sorchá Eastwood MLA

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Ms Sinead McLaughlin MLA

Mr Philip McGuigan MLA

Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA

Apologies: Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Bronagh Irwin (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Craig Mealey (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced at 10:02am in public session.

1. Apologies

As noted above.

2. Committee Composition

Noted: The Committee noted the composition of the Committee for the Economy.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson welcomed Members to the first meeting of the Committee for the Economy.

Members indicated their areas of interest including: economic development and investment opportunities; the skills agenda including but not limited to apprenticeships; Higher Education including the Maximum Aggregate Student Number; correcting regional economic imbalances; employment rights; tourism and the challenge of the Electronic Travel Authorisation scheme; and energy and the path to net zero.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that he and the Deputy Chairperson had met informally with Minister Conor Murphy MLA on Monday 12 February 2024.

4. Declaration of Interests

The Chairperson asked Members if they had any interests to declare.

Members declared the following interests:

Sorcha Eastwood MLA	Husband employed as a Civil Servant by the Department for the Economy
---------------------	---

David Honeyford MLA	Company Director at TAS Homes Limited
---------------------	---------------------------------------

5. Legacy Papers

The Committee noted a copy of the predecessor committee's legacy report.

The Committee agreed the following motion:

Agreed: "That the Committee for the Economy agrees to access and publish, as it considers appropriate, all unpublished papers obtained by all predecessor committees."

The Committee agreed to move to closed session at 10.14am.

6. Committee Procedures and Practices

The Committee noted the following guidance documents:

Powers and Operation of Statutory Committees for Chairpersons and Members;

Powers and operation of Standing and Ad Hoc Committees;

Role of the Chairperson;

Role and function of the Committee for the Economy office;

Committee interactions with Department for the Economy;

Committee Correspondence;

Questioning Witnesses; and

Courtesy in the Committee.

The Committee was briefed by the Clerk regarding committee procedures and practices.

The Committee agreed to return to public session at 10.40am.

7. Delegation to the Examiner of Statutory Rules

The Committee agreed the following motion:

Agreed: "That the Committee for the Economy, under Standing Order 43, resolves to delegate to the Examiner of Statutory Rules the technical scrutiny of statutory rules referred to the Committee under the above-mentioned Standing Order. The Committee further resolves that in carrying out this

function the Examiner shall be authorised to report her technical findings on each statutory rule to the Assembly, and to the relevant Department, as well as to the Committee itself and to publish her report.”

The Committee noted with some considerable concern that there had been inadequate time to consider and appropriately scrutinise the large number of complex statutory rules that were included in the agenda. Notwithstanding this, Members felt that faced with the possibility of administrative delay with potentially serious legal, financial or other consequences for individuals and organisations throughout Northern Ireland, they had no option other than to review the delegated legislation and express some limited views with these important reservations.

8. SR 2023/156 The Parental Bereavement Leave (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2023/156 The Parental Bereavement Leave (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2023/156 The Parental Bereavement Leave (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and subject to the ESR’s report, recommends that it be approved by the Assembly.”

9. SR 2023/155 The Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay (General) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2023/155 The Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay (General) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2023/155 The Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay (General) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and subject to the ESR’s report, recommends that it be approved by the Assembly.”

10. SR 2023/157 The Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay (Consequential Amendments to Subordinate Legislation) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2023/157 The Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay (Consequential Amendments to Subordinate Legislation) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2023/157 The Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay (Consequential Amendments to Subordinate Legislation) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and subject to the ESR’s report, recommends that it be approved by the Assembly.”

11. SR 2022/169 The Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay (Administration) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee noted statutory rule SR 2022/169 The Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay (Administration) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

12. SR 2022/170 The Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay (Persons Abroad and Mariners) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee noted statutory rule SR 2022/170 The Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay (Persons Abroad and Mariners) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

13. SR2022/183 The Further Education (Student Support) (Eligibility) (Amendment etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2022/183 The Further Education (Student Support) (Eligibility) (Amendment etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Philip McGuigan MLA indicated his opposition to the consequences of Brexit including the requirement for certain individuals and families including students to make use of the EU Settlement Scheme.

The Committee agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2022/183 The Further Education (Student Support) (Eligibility) (Amendment etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

14. SR 2022/201 The Education (Student Support, etc.) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2022/201 The Education (Student Support, etc.) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2022/201 The Education (Student Support, etc.) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

15. SR 2022/263 The Education (Student Support, etc.) (Amendment) (No.3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2022/263 The Education (Student Support, etc.) (Amendment) (No.3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

Philip McGuigan MLA noted that the Minister had indicated that student loan costs were not to be increased as part of a programme of revenue raising.

David Honeyford MLA declared an interest as a parent of two children who are in receipt of a student support.

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

Gary Middleton MLA declared an interest as a former recipient of student support.

Jonathan Buckley MLA declared an interest as a former recipient of student support.

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

The Committee agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2022/263 The Education (Student Support, etc.) (Amendment) (No.3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

16. SR 2023/136 The Student Fees (Inflation Index) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2023/136 The Student Fees (Inflation Index) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2023/136 The Student Fees (Inflation Index) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

17. SR 2024/19 The Education (Student Support, etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2024/19 The Education (Student Support, etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2024/19 The Education (Student Support, etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

18. SR 2022/241 The Insolvency Practitioners (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2022/241 The Insolvency Practitioners (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2022/241 The Insolvency Practitioners (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

19. SR 2022/242 The Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (Prescribed Part) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2022/242 The Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (Prescribed Part) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2022/242 The Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (Prescribed Part) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

20. SR 2022/184 The Industrial Training Levy (Construction Industry) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022

David Honeyford MLA declared an interest as the director of a company that contributes to the Industrial Training Levy.

David Honeyford MLA left the meeting at 11.03am.

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2022/184 The Industrial Training Levy (Construction Industry) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2022/184 The Industrial Training Levy (Construction Industry) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

21. SR 2023/99 The Industrial Training Levy (Construction Industry) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2023/99 The Industrial Training Levy (Construction Industry) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2023/99 The Industrial Training Levy (Construction Industry) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

22. SR 2022/261 The Industrial Court (Membership) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

David Honeyford MLA rejoined the meeting at 11.06am.

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2022/261 The Industrial Court (Membership) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2022/261 The Industrial Court (Membership) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

23. SR 2023/36 The Employment Rights (Increase of Limits) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2023/36 The Employment Rights (Increase of Limits) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2023/36 The Employment Rights (Increase of Limits) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

24. SR 2023/223 The Working Time (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2023/223 The Working Time (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2023/223 The Working Time (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of the Economy to request that it be kept up-to-date on changes to employment legislation and employment rights at Westminster that impact upon Northern Ireland.

25. SR 2022/248 The Gas (Designation of Pipe-lines) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2022/248 The Gas (Designation of Pipe-lines) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2022/248 The Gas (Designation of Pipe-lines) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

26. SR 2022/290 The Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) (Amendment No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2022/290 The Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) (Amendment No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2022/290 The Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) (Amendment No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

27. SR 2023/114 The Grading Inspection of Certified Tourist Establishments (Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

The Committee considered statutory rule SR 2023/114 The Grading Inspection of Certified Tourist Establishments (Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2023/114 The Grading Inspection of Certified Tourist Establishments (Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and subject to the ESR’s report, has no objection to the rule.”

28. Draft SR 2023/0000 The Period Products (the Department for the Economy Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023

The Committee considered statutory rule Draft SR 2023/0000 The Period Products (the Department for the Economy Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2023/0000 The Period Products (the Department for the Economy Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 and subject to the ESR’s report, recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.”

29. Departmental First Day Briefing

The Committee noted a First Day Brief from the Department.

The officials joined the meeting at 11.14am.

Members received a briefing from:

Ian Snowden Permanent Secretary – Department for the Economy

David Malcolm Head of Management Services and Regulations Group –
Department for the Economy

Philip McGuigan declared an interest as a Member of Cycling Ireland.

Key issues discussed included: Higher Education/ Maximum Aggregate Student Number (MASN) formula; employment rights; Skills for a 10x Economy - Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland; Invest NI; tourism and air connectivity; city deals projects; the Energy Strategy; Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) system; and the joint-bid to host the opening stages of the Tour de France.

The officials left the meeting at 12.24pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for the Economy to request information on the estimated return on investment for Invest NI, InterTrade Ireland, Tourism Ireland, NI Screen and Tourism NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should write to the Minister for the Economy to highlight concerns in respect of the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) system including its impact on tourism and suggesting that he seeks an appropriate package of mitigating derogations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for the Economy to seek an update on policy measures and support packages which were reportedly in place at the end of the previous mandate and which were designed to encourage the staging of business conferences across Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for the Economy indicating its concerns relating to revenue raising. In particular, Members expressed serious reservations about the adverse economic impact of proposals to limit industrial de-rating. The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking sight of the recent paper summarising the issues and the responses to the consultation on changes to undergraduate tuition fees and supports for the Higher Education sector. Further to the above, the Committee agreed to ask the Department to update it and keep it informed in respect of any proposed revenue raising measures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Finance in order to share its serious reservations about the adverse economic impact of proposals to limit industrial de-rating and asking that Committee to keep it

informed of the progress of the consultation and the introduction of related measures, if any.

The meeting was suspended at 12.29pm.

The meeting re-commenced at 12.36pm.

30. General Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee agreed to dispose of a number of items of general correspondence as indicated in the correspondence index note.

Noted: The Committee noted a number of reports from the Speaker's Office in respect of decision-making by departments in the absence of an Executive.

Noted: The Committee noted a report from the NI Audit Office on Ministerial Directions.

Agreed: The Committee noted the impending review of the Labour Relations Agency and agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the review and in respect of the relevant aspects of the review of public sector bodies which was undertaken by the Executive in the previous mandate.

Agreed: The Committee noted a copy of a statement from the predecessor Minister of Finance setting out the financial outturn for 2021-22; and agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the financial outturn for 2022-23 and 2023-24.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the policy and related legislation on miscarriage leave and pay.

Agreed: The Committee noted correspondence from the Department providing confirmation that if Tourism NI ceased to exist, the Department would provide pension contributions to the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) scheme for the relevant employees. The Committee agreed to write to Department seeking

information on the number of employees affected and the extent of any liability.

Noted: The Committee noted information in respect of the Department's capital works programme which are largely related to Further Education capital works.

Noted: The Committee noted the notification from the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Parliament in respect of legislative consent relating to a number of Westminster Bills.

Agreed: The Committee noted correspondence from the Welsh Parliament Public Accounts Committee on the common frameworks for procurement and late payments and agreed write to the Department and seek an update on the status of the relevant common frameworks and the Department's view on them.

Noted: The Committee noted information in respect of the review of Inter-Governmental Relations.

Noted: The Committee noted a report from the Equality Commission and Human Rights Commission in respect of Article 2 matters and including some commentary on parental bereavement legislation.

Noted: The Committee noted a notice of a competition for the chairperson of the Health and Safety Executive NI.

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from Allied Irish Bank referring to the withdrawal of First Trust bank notes.

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of written statement from the predecessor Minister of Education indicating how the awarding of CCEA qualifications were to return to normal following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels activity report for October to December 2023.

Agreed: The Committee noted correspondence from Carers NI requesting to brief the Committee on the need for new legislation to allow carers one week's

unpaid caring leave as in rest of the UK. The Committee agreed to write to the Department and seek clarity on its plans to legislation in respect of carers' leave.

Agreed: The Committee noted correspondence from the System Operator for Northern Ireland offering a briefing and a tour of its Castlereagh site and agreed for the Clerk to arrange the briefing as part of a future external meeting of the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee noted correspondence from the Construction Employers Federation requesting the opportunity to brief the Committee and agreed for the Clerk to arrange the briefing as part of a future meeting of the Committee.

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Edge Foundation providing information on Further Education and Skills across the UK.

Agreed: The Committee noted correspondence from Renewables NI requesting the opportunity to brief the Committee and agreed for the Clerk to arrange the briefing as part of a future meeting of the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee noted an invitation to the Chairperson to attend the NI Food and Drink Awards on 15 March 2024 and agreed that the Chairperson could attend, subject to his availability.

Agreed: The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister offering an informal meeting on Monday 12 February 2024 to the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson.

Agreed: The Committee considered an invitation for the Chairperson to meet with the Policy Chairman of the City of London Corporation on 27 or 28 February 2024 to discuss financial professional services development in NI and agreed that the Chairperson could attend, subject to his availability.

Agreed: The Committee noted the large number of reports that were laid or sent to the Committee Office during the period of Assembly dissolution and agreed they are content with the treatment of these reports.

31. Westminster EU Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note of a number of items of EU-related correspondence from the House of Lords and House of Commons on EU scrutiny and the Windsor Framework.

32. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft of its Forward Work Programme.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed that meetings should, as a rule, be held in public session, unless the Committee agrees there is an overriding reason for proceedings to be in closed.

33. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should write to the US Special Economic Envoy Joe Kennedy III thanking him for his successful business investment conferences and inviting him to engage with the Committee for the Economy.

There was no other business.

34. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for the Economy will be at 10am on Wednesday 21 February 2024 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.48pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

21 February 2024