



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 18 September 2024

Meeting Location: Great Hall, Magee, University Ulster

Present: Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA
Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA
Mr David Honeyford MLA
Mr Philip McGuigan MLA
Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Apologies: Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Colin Crawford MLA
Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Anthea Matthews (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)
Michael Doran (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in public session at 12:07pm.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Deputy Chairperson welcomed members to the Foyle constituency and noted the historic signing-off of the next stage of the City and Growth Deal for the Derry City and Strabane District Council area.

The Deputy Chairperson noted with concern the recent uncertainty generated by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in respect of the funding position for all of the City and Growth Deals. The Deputy Chairperson noted that although welcome assurances had lately been provided for the City and Growth Deal in the Belfast region and for the Derry City and Strabane District Council area, concerns remained in respect of the Causeway Coast and Glens and Mid-South West City and Growth Deals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland setting out the Committee's concerns; welcoming the unpausing of the City and Growth Deals for the North West and Belfast; and urging the UK Government to provide funding certainty for the Causeway Coast and Glens and Mid-South West City and Growth Deals.

The Deputy Chairperson also noted with concern the position in respect of Harland and Wolff and noted that the Committee hoped that issues would be resolved without job losses for this important employer.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should write to the Minister seeking an update on the position in respect of Harland and Wolff and seeking also assurances that the Department would take all appropriate measures to minimise or avoid job losses.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 11 September 2024.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Magee Expansion Taskforce – oral and written evidence

Witnesses joined the meeting at 12:09pm.

The Committee received oral evidence from:

- Stephen Kelly, Chairperson of the Magee Expansion Taskforce; and
- Moira Doherty, Head of Skills and Education Group, Department for the Economy.

Key issues discussed included: clarification of the target number of student places for the Magee expansion; the capital costs in respect of university infrastructure and bespoke student accommodation including imminent related acquisitions; the next steps including the required adoption of the final Taskforce plan by the Executive; the importance of the expansion's inclusion in the Investment Strategy; the need for cross-border co-operation in respect of student mobility and the co-ordination of the development of the Higher Education offering in the region; the importance of marketing Magee as a destination campus including the development of the night-time economy; planning challenges in respect of infrastructure; the importance of the

social enterprise model in the development of the overall Higher Education offering; and the nature of the opportunity that the expansion provides for the city and the wider region.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence and expressed the Committee's appreciation for the significant and professional commitment of the members of the Taskforce.

Witnesses left the meeting at 1:32pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Ulster University seeking clarity in respect of: its Higher Education market share in the North West and the possible impact on other Higher Education provision as student places increase to 10,000 at Magee; the competition issues which might restrict the further transfer of UU students from other campuses to Magee; and a detailed breakdown of the students currently at Magee in respect of full-time and part-time numbers, FTE numbers, course allocations and a projected breakdown as numbers increase to 7,000 and to 10,000.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Magee Expansion Taskforce to brief the Committee in Magee when its final report is available in January 2025. Additionally, the Committee agreed to undertake a briefing on regional imbalance at that time. Finally, the Committee agreed to undertake a further visit to Foyle and evidence sessions after Easter 2025 on cross-border co-operation in respect of Further and Higher Education and tourism in the North West.

7. Delegated Legislation: PPE at Work Regulations

The Committee considered a statutory rule laid by the Department in respect of Personal Protective Equipment at Work and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 161/2024 The Personal Protective Equipment at Work (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024,

and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule.

8. Correspondence

8.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 Unfunded Over-Commitment for 2024-25

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence which advised of an increase to its unfunded over-commitment for 2024-25 in respect of a possible FE staff pay claim.

8.3 Draft PfG

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office in respect of the draft Programme for Government.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a briefing from the Department on its Business Plan and relevant aspects of the PfG in order to inform its response to the Committee for the Executive Office.

8.4 Insurance Premiums

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council in respect of insurance premiums.

8.5 City and Growth Deals Tracking

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of tracking information for the capital projects in the City and Growth Deals.

8.6 Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules (ESR)

Noted: The Committee noted the 22nd report of the ESR.

8.7 NIAO Departmental Report

The Committee noted a copy of a Northern Ireland Audit Office summary report on the Department for the Economy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Comptroller and Auditor General seeking her view on the Financial Provisions Bill and the extent to which it will address the NIAO's previous qualifications of Departmental accounts.

8.8 Revised RHI tariffs

Noted: The Committee considered a copy of correspondence provided in respect of a Freedom of Information request relating to the consultation on the revised RHI tariffs.

8.9 SL1 Revised RHI Tariffs

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Renewable Heat Association (RHA) to the Department in respect of the recent evidence session on delegated legislation relating to revised RNI tariffs.

8.10 RHA Correspondence

The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the RHA in respect of a delegated legislation relating to revised RHI tariffs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite RHA to brief the Committee on 25 September 2024 in respect of the revised RHI tariffs and to provide the related SL1 briefing materials. The Committee further agreed that the briefing would be limited to the relevant delegated legislation and would not include the proposals for the termination of the scheme.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

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

Noted: The Committee noted the recent publication of a NIAO report on skills and noted also that the Public Accounts Committee would likely exercise primacy in respect of the scrutiny of this report.

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 Wednesday 25 September 2024 at 10:00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:39pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

25 September 2024