



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for the Economy

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday 5 September 2024**

**Meeting Location:** Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:**

Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Mr Philip McGuigan MLA

**Present via video-conferencing:**

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

**Apologies:**

Mr Doug Beattie MLA

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

**In Attendance:**

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Anthea Matthews (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Michael Doran (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in public session at 12:00noon.

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were as indicated above.

### **2. Declarations of Interests**

David Honeyford declared an interest in respect of his business interests in the construction industry including holding shares in a construction company which contributes to the Industrial Training Levy.

David Honeyford also declared an interest as he has a child who is in receipt of student finance.

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Ms Sorcha Eastwood MP thanking her for her service to the Economy Committee and congratulating her on her election to Westminster and expressing its best wishes for the continuing recovery of her husband.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Mr Doug Beattie MLA thanking him for his service to the Economy Committee.

### **4. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 26 June 2024.

## **5. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **6. SR 157 Student Support and Student Fees**

The Committee considered a statutory rule laid by the Department in respect of student support and student fees and agreed the following motion:

**Agreed:** “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2024/157 The Education (Student Support, etc.) (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024, and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule”

## **7. SR 146 Industrial Training Levy**

The Committee considered a statutory rule laid by the Department in respect of the industrial training levy and agreed the following motion:

**Agreed:** “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2024/146 The Industrial Training Levy (Construction Industry) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule”

## **8. SL1 PPE at Work Regulations**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make the proposed statutory rule The Personal Protective Equipment at Work (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024.

## **9. Correspondence**

### **9.1 Index**

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

## **9.2 DfE 2024-25 Budget Briefing**

The Committee considered a response from the Permanent Secretary following the Department's 2024-25 budget briefings on 22 May and 5 June 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write again to the Department formally commissioning the production of Estimates Memoranda for the Spring Supplementary and Main Estimates and seeking annual briefings on the Department's internal spending reviews and business plan.

## **9.3 City and Growth Deal Monthly Capital Reports**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Departmental responses in respect of the monthly capital reports and the reporting of progress on City and Growth Deal capital projects.

## **9.4 May-June Capital and Resource Outturn**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the May-June capital and resource outturn, pending a briefing on the Department's October Monitoring Round submission.

## **9.5 Non-Domestic RHI Legal Costs**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Departmental correspondence advising on the legal costs associated with ongoing cases linked to the non-domestic RHI scheme.

## **9.6 Magee Expansion**

The Committee considered Departmental correspondence in respect of the Magee expansion and the impact on the MaSN cap for home undergraduates at UU and in respect of increasing Allied Health Professional places.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking a detailed breakdown of the increases to the Magee student complement including information on the additional places by course and location.

### **9.7 Sub Regional Economic Action Plans**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Departmental correspondence on sub-regional economic action plans, pending a further related Department oral briefing in October 2024.

### **9.8 Departmental Transformation Bids**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence in respect of the Department's transformation bids, pending a related oral briefing on the October Monitoring Round.

### **9.9 Post-19 SEN provision**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of post-19 SEN provision at FE colleges including the Skills for Life and Work programme for Entry Level and Level 1. The Committee also noted an invitation to a Caleb's Cause event which had been previously circulated.

### **9.10 Additional Disability Support Consultation**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Department advising of the launch of the consultation in respect of the integration of additional disability support within DfE training programmes at Entry Level and

Level One (ELL1), pending the post-consultation brief which is scheduled for November 2024

#### **9.11 14-19 Framework Review and the Apprenticeship Challenge Fund**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Departmental correspondence referring to the stakeholder engagement phase of the 14-19 Framework review and the Apprenticeship Challenge Fund which is to encourage apprenticeships from under-represented groups.

#### **9.12 Joint Concurrent meeting on Careers Provision**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a response from the Department in relation to queries from the joint concurrent meeting on careers provision.

#### **9.13 Career's Portal**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence in respect of the development of the career's portal.

#### **9.14 Early Learning and Childcare Strategy**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister offering reassurance that departments are working together in order to develop the Early Learning and Childcare Strategy.

#### **9.15 DARD Report - Rural Childcare Scheme**

The Committee considered a DARD report into a previous rural childcare scheme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking the DE Early Years and Childcare Group's commentary on the recommendations in the DARD report.

### **9.16 Skills Agenda**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the Minister's statement on the skills agenda pending the Skills Council briefing scheduled for September 2024.

### **9.17 Hospitality Ulster**

The Committee considered the Department's response to Committee suggestions that Hospitality Ulster be included in the Labour Relation Agency and the NI Skills Council.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the Department's response to Hospitality Ulster, for its information.

### **9.18 Additional Support for Hospitality**

The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Finance in respect of Committee suggestions on additional support for hospitality through business rate exemptions etc..

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the Minister's response to Hospitality Ulster, for its information.

### **9.19 Translink - Night-time Transport**

The Committee considered a response from the Chief Executive of Translink to concerns in respect of night-time public transport.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to copy the Translink correspondence to the Infrastructure Committee for its information and to note pending the informal meeting with Hospitality Ulster and Translink provisionally scheduled for 1 October 2024.

## **9.20 North South Ministerial Council**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the oral statement made by the Minister on the North South Ministerial Council in tourism format.

## **9.21 Tourism Board**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department which advised that letters of invitation to the new members of the Tourism Board had been issued with ToRs and an action plan to be agreed in September.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking the names of the new members of the Tourism Board.

## **9.22 Return on Marketing Investment for Tourism NI.**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a revised response from the Department to Committee queries on the return on marketing investment for Tourism NI.

## **9.23 Consultation on the Employment Bill**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the consultation on the Employment Bill which is to close on 13 September 2024, pending a Departmental briefing on the feedback to the consultation.

## **9.24 Employment Bill**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Department which confirmed that the Employment Bill will be informed by the Management Expectations Survey and the Skills and Employment Survey which will be complete in later 2024 and 2025 respectively as well as a possible all-island work quality survey.

### **9.25 Micro-business Innovation**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Department in respect of the Micro-business Innovation survey, pending a Departmental briefing on technology clusters later in September.

### **9.26 Domestic Abuse Safe Leave Consultation**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Departmental correspondence on a consultation on domestic abuse safe leave, pending a Departmental briefing on the feedback to the consultation.

### **9.27 Disability Action**

The Committee considered a Departmental response to Committee queries originating from Disability Action in respect of the treatment of individuals with disabilities at employment tribunals.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to Disability Action and the Committee for Justice and to seek a related oral briefing from Disability Action.

### **9.28 UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities**

**Noted:** The Committee noted further information on tribunals and information on the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities provided by Disability Action.

### **9.29 Individuals with disabilities at Employment Tribunals**

**Noted:** The Committee noted restricted correspondence in respect of the treatment of individuals with disabilities at employment tribunals, pending the briefing on related matters from Disability Action.

### **9.30 Post Graduate Award Scheme**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Departmental correspondence and a briefing paper on a consultation on the post graduate award scheme, pending a Departmental briefing on the feedback to the consultation.

### **9.31 LCM Digital Markets Competition and Consumers Act**

The Committee considered correspondence relating to a Legislative Consent Motion for the Westminster Digital Markets Competition and Consumers (DMCC) Act

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an oral Departmental briefing on the relevant aspects of the Bill.

### **9.32 CMA Digital Markets Competition and Consumers Act**

**Noted:** The Committee noted guidance on the Digital Markets Competition and Consumers Act and an invitation to a related hybrid event on 9 September 2024.

### **9.33 Competition and Markets Authority ARA**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Competition and Markets Authority Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24.

### **9.34 Informal meeting with ABI**

The Committee considered an invitation to an informal meeting hosted by the Committee for Justice with the Association of British Insurers in respect of insurance premiums on Tuesday 15 October 2024 in Parliament Buildings.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to attend the informal meeting.

### **9.35 CMA – Insurance Market in NI**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a response from CMA in respect of the motor insurance market in Northern Ireland.

### **9.36 FCA - Insurance market in NI**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a response from the Financial Conduct Authority indicating that the motor insurance market is competitive in the UK but that limited market competition in NI may account for higher insurance premium costs.

### **9.37 Debt Relief Order**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the regulatory impact assessment covering the changes to Debt Relief Order eligibility criteria.

### **9.38 Cross-border FE/HE Co-operation**

The Committee considered a response from Atlantic Technological University (ATU) to Committee queries in respect of cross-border FE/HE co-operation and the recently agreed MoU with Ulster University and Peace Plus and other projects.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an oral briefing from ATU and its partners at a further possible visit to Foyle.

### **9.39 2024-27 DfE Research Programme**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of the 2024-27 DfE research programme.

### **9.40 Financial Provisions Bill**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Departmental correspondence relating to the Financial Provisions Bill.

#### **9.41 Broadband Investment in NI**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the memorandum of response on the PAC report on Broadband Investment in NI.

#### **9.42 Commissioner for Older People's report**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the Commissioner for Older People's report entitled: At the Centre of Government Planning: The Programme for Government and Preparing for an Ageing Population.

#### **9.43 Renewable Energy Support Scheme Auction**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Departmental response to the Infrastructure Committee indicating that a renewable energy support scheme auction will be likely held in early 2026.

#### **9.44 Low Carbon Heat and Heat Pumps**

The Committee considered correspondence on Departmental research publications relating to low carbon heat and heat pumps.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to send a copy of the Aecom report to the Infrastructure Committee in respect of planning issues and domestic heat pumps, for its information.

**Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to give consideration to an informal event with the Infrastructure Committee to consider renewable energy and planning issues.

#### **9.45 North South interconnector**

The Committee considered correspondence from a residents' group opposed to the over-ground additional North South interconnector and seeking a meeting with the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the group indicating that it had no role in respect of the issues that it had raised.

#### **9.46 Renewable NI**

The Committee considered correspondence from Renewable NI which included a paper by KPMG on distributed renewable energy assets.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking its views on the use of distributed assets and their inclusion in the upcoming Contracts for Difference auction.

#### **9.47 Phoenix Energy Responsible Business report 2023**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the Phoenix Energy Responsible Business report 2023.

#### **9.48 National Energy Action's UK Impact report 2023-24**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of National Energy Action's UK Impact report 2023-24.

#### **9.49 NI Human Rights Commission's newsletter & Invitation**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the NI Human Rights Commission's newsletter and invitation to the launch of the annual report on Article 2 of the Windsor Framework on 12 September 2024.

#### **9.50 Office of the NI Executive in Brussels April-May 2024 Report.**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the Office of the NI Executive in Brussels April-May 2024 Report.

#### **9.51 Invest NI's ARA 2023-24**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Invest NI's Annual Report and Accounts for 2023-24, pending a briefing on related matters in October.

#### **9.52 Bedford Street Developments Ltd - financial statements 2023-24**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Bedford Street Developments Ltd (BSDL) directors' report and financial statements 2023-24.

#### **9.53 McAleer, Rushe and Dunloe Ewart Ltd - financial statements 2023-24**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the McAleer, Rushe and Dunloe Ewart (MRDE) Ltd directors' report and financial statements 2023-24.

#### **9.54 Labour Relations Agency ARA 2023-24**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Labour Relations Agency Annual Report and Accounts for 2023-24.

#### **9.55 Health and Safety Executive NI ARA 2023-24**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24 for the Health and Safety Executive NI.

#### **9.56 Insolvency Service and Official Receiver ARA 2023-24**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Annual Report and Accounts for 2023-24 for the Insolvency Service and Official Receiver.

### **9.57 Complaint to the UK Parliament**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of complaint to the UK Parliament from a concerned individual.

### **9.58 Impact of Brexit on cross-border FE participation**

The Committee considered a request for information for a thesis on the impact of Brexit on cross-border FE participation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the student signposting her to the Department directly.

## **10. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered a revised Forward Work Programme including: anticipated RHI legislation; a revised agenda for the visit to Foyle on 18 September 2024 and a further visit to Foyle later in the mandate; an effective questioning training session; and a strategic planning session.

**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 Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 11 September 2024 at 10:00am in Room 30

The meeting was adjourned at 12:40pm.

**Phillip Brett MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for the Economy**

**11 September 2024**