



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 4th June 2025

Meeting Location: South West Regional College, Enniskillen

Present:

- Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)
- Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Ms Diana Armstrong MLA
- Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA
- Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Apologies:

- Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA
- Mr David Honeyford MLA
- Ms Kate Nicholl MLA
- Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Stuart Gilmour (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:42am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Informal meeting

The Chairperson reminded Members of the Committee's informal meeting with BORMAC on 3 June 2025.

Noted: The Committee noted that a summary note of the informal meeting had been circulated.

3.2 Department's Legislative Programme

The Chairperson advised Members that in AQW 26966/22-27 the Minister appeared to advise that 3 insolvency/director disqualification Bills had been drafted but not introduced.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarity on its legislative programme and the timing of Bills.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 28 May 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the joint concurrent Committee meeting of 28 May 2025.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 Overgrown Trees

Further to the joint concurrent Committee meeting of 28 May 2026, the Committee considered concerns raised by Members in respect of overgrown trees in rural areas; the damage they can cause to overhead cabling in major storm events; and liability issues in respect of preventative action by landowners.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to seek further information on the measures that it is to adopt to address the issue of preventative action by landowners in respect of overgrown trees in rural areas and related liability issues.

6. Fermanagh and Regional Tourism – Joint Evidence Session

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:44am:

- Ciaran Doherty, Head of Regions, Tourism NI;
- Helen McGorman, Head of Northern Ireland Stakeholder Engagement, Tourism Ireland;
- Cllr Thomas O'Reilly, Chairperson, Fermanagh Lakeland Tourism; and
- Cllr Barry McElduff, Chairperson, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.

Key issues discussed included: the all-island Strategic Tourism Group; the Visitor Experience Development Plan; the 10 year Tourism Vision and Action Plan; the

development of sub-regional Destination Stewardship Plans; the extension of the Hidden Heartlands brand; aspects of the tourism offer in the region - low tourism spend, cross-district and cross-border opportunities, competition with RoI providers owing to differing VAT rates and the ETA, the need for marketing support, the importance of the wedding trade, regional accessibility issues including the A5, a deficit in hotel places in Omagh; the importance of tourism real-time statistics; sustainability offers; and the marketing of tourism including the role of influencers and social media.

Phillip Brett left the meeting at 12:02pm

The Committee lost its decision making quorum and Gary Middleton assumed the Chairpersonship of the meeting.

Phillip Brett returned to the meeting at 12:04pm

The Committee achieved its decision making quorum and Phillip Brett reassumed the Chairpersonship of the meeting.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

The officials left the meeting at 12:13pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Tourism Northern Ireland seeking further information on: Destination Stewardship case studies in other jurisdictions; the timeline for the development and launch of the Destination Stewardship pilot(s) for Northern Ireland; and the process and evidence base for the selection of the pilot(s).

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to Tourism Northern Ireland in respect of the extension of the Hidden Heartlands brand to include the Fermanagh Lakelands.

7. Balcas Ltd – alternative heat fuels – evidence session

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 12:15pm:

- Brian Murphy, CEO, Balcas;
- Ian McCracken, Business Development Director, Balcas;
- Nigel Manley, Group Supply Manager, Balcas; and

- Brenda McStravick, HR Manager, Balcas.

Sinead McLaughlin left the meeting at 12:15pm.

The Committee lost its decision making quorum.

Sinead McLaughlin rejoined the meeting at 12:19pm.

The Committee achieved its decision making quorum.

Key issues discussed included: Invest NI support; markets for renewable heat; pellet powder developments; the importance of the skills pipeline; infrastructure challenges; sustainable forestry; tax relief for research and development; and the impact of the RHI scheme.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their briefing.

The witnesses left the meeting at 1:02pm.

8. Correspondence

8.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 Post-19 SEN Oral Statement

Noted: The Committee noted a notice from the Minister in respect of an oral statement on Post-19 SEN.

8.3 Higher Education Places

The Committee considered a Departmental response in respect of 2025-26 Higher Education places.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to QUB, in order to inform the evidence session on 11 June 2025.

8.4 NI Productivity 2040 report

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of the NI Productivity 2040 report.

8.5 Maze/Long Kesh

Noted: The Committee noted a response from the Executive Office in respect of the Maze/Long Kesh site and its inclusion in the draft Investment Strategy.

8.6 Period Product Act report May 2022 – May 2025

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the Period Product Act report May 2022 - May 2025 confirming that 18 ALBs associated with DfE are compliant with the requirements of the Act.

8.7 ISNI capital investment activity report

Noted: The Committee noted the ISNI capital investment activity report for May 2025.

8.8 Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill

The Committee considered the Committee Stage of the Deaths, Still-Births and Baby Loss Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that as the Bill was not within its remit, it would make no response to the Committee Stage call for evidence.

8.9 Insurance Issues

Noted: The Committee noted further feedback from the Association of British Insurers on insurance issues.

8.10 Budget Outturn

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the budget outturn information for 2024-25, for all departments.

8.11 Consumer Council NI

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the Consumer Council NI annual report and accounts 2022-23.

8.12 Fermanagh and Omagh District council

The Committee considered a request from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council to brief the Committee on its Rural Affairs Sub-Committee's research findings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Fermanagh and Omagh District Council in order to seek sight of the relevant report.

8.13 RSPB Event

Noted: The Committee noted the invitation to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds event on offshore renewable development, at 12noon on 9 June 2025, in Parliament Buildings.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme including the delay to the introduction of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill and the rescheduling of an evidence session on vehicle emissions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its forward work programme, as amended.

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 11 June 2025 at 10.00am in Queen's University Belfast.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 1:04pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

4 June 2025