



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for the Economy

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Wednesday 2nd April 2025**

**Meeting Location: Game of Thrones Studio Tour, Banbridge.**

**Present:**

- Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)
- Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Ms Diana Armstrong MLA
- Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA
- Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA
- Mr David Honeyford MLA
- Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA
- Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

**Apologies:**

- Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

**In Attendance:**

- Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
- Anthea Matthews (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Stuart Gilmour (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:35am.

## **1. Apologies**

Apologies were as indicated above.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

### **3.1 Miscarriage Leave**

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Department had previously advised that it was to bring a paper to the Executive in respect of delegated legislation which would provide for paid parental bereavement leave which was to be extended to include miscarriage.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the development of the relevant regulations and a timescale for their roll-out.

## **4. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 26 March 2025.

## **5. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **6. Department for the Economy– Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan (OREAP) consultation - oral evidence session**

David Honeyford joined the meeting at 10:37am.

Pádraig Delargy joined the meeting at 10:37am.

The following Departmental officials joined the meeting at 10:37am:

- Jimmy Graham, Director, Business, Gas, Minerals and Renewable Electricity;
- Michael Mageean - Offshore Renewable Electricity Team; and
- Jordan Todd – Offshore Renewable Electricity Team.

Key issues discussed included: the timeline for the next steps of OREAP; offshore renewable energy legislation and regulation; the need for improved communication in order to inform the public's understanding of offshore renewable energy in terms of the environmental impact and the contribution to Net Zero targets; the likelihood of progress in respect of meeting Net Zero targets; environmental and visual impacts; the need for engagement with the Scottish Government in respect of its offshore renewable development programme; the need for cross-border co-operation; funding opportunities; existing strategic infrastructure and the need for further grid development; the role of interconnection and long-term storage; and the Green Skills Action Plan and the need for engagement with Further Education and Higher Education in regards to skills pipeline development.

Ms Emma Sheerin joined the meeting at 10:52am.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

The officials left the meeting at 11:16am.

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department:
- seeking an update on the outcome of the consultation on the Strategic Environment Assessment report and the Report to Inform Appropriate Assessment;
  - an update as to how the Department is to address the regulatory gaps as identified in Theme E of the OREAP;

- encouraging it to ensure better public awareness of the offshore renewable energy development process and its impact in terms of carbon reduction;
- urging it to more usefully engage with Further Education and Higher Education providers in line with Theme D of the OREAP in order to better develop the green skills pipeline; and
- encouraging it to better engage with the Scottish Government in order to ensure coordination of offshore renewable energy development plans and the appropriate exploitation of relevant synergies.

## **7. Game of Thrones Studio Tour - oral evidence session**

The following witnesses from the Game of Thrones Studio Tour joined the meeting at 11:17am:

- Sam Harding, Managing Director, Game of Thrones Studio Tour; and
- Andrew Webb, Executive Director, Game of Thrones Studio Tour.

Key issues discussed included: the tourism potential of the Game of Thrones Studio Tour and the associated constraints including infrastructure and branding issues; competition with tourism assets supported by City and Growth Deals and receiving marketing support from Tourism NI; tourism opportunities including film tourism and set jetting; the adverse impact of ETA; and link-ups with Ulster University and creative skills development.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their briefing.

The witnesses left the meeting at 12:17pm.

## **8. Delegated Legislation -The Employment Rights Order**

Diana Armstrong left the meeting at 12:17pm

**Noted:** The Committee noted the statutory rule: SR 2025 / 63 The Employment Rights (Increase of Limits) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025.

## **9. Correspondence**

### **9.1 Index**

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

### **9.2 Holiday Pay**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of holiday pay confirming that there is no intention to replicate the provision in Britain and provide a two-year backstop for holiday pay claims linked to overtime.

### **9.3 Night Time Economy**

The Committee considered a Departmental response in respect of supporting the night time economy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to Free the Night, Hospitality Ulster, the Federation of Small Businesses and Retail NI.

### **9.4 Autumn Statement Joint Event**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the report on the Committee for Finance and Committee for the Economy joint event on the Chancellor's Autumn Budget Statement.

### **9.5 Disability Benefit Changes**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Communities seeking the Economy Committee's views on changes to disability benefits as advised recently by UKG.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to respond advising that the Economy Committee has had no advice in respect of the proposed disability benefit changes.

### **9.6 Disability Benefit Changes**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the Committee for Communities letter to the Minister for the Economy in respect of disability benefits.

### **9.7 Competition and Markets Authority Annual Plan**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Competition and Markets Authority Annual Plan 2025-26.

### **9.8 Internal Market Annual Report 2024-2025**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Office for the Internal Market Annual Report 2024-2025.

### **9.9 Certification Office Annual Report 2023-24**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the 2023-24 Annual Report of the activities of the Certification Officer.

### **9.10 Invitation - Utility Regulator**

The Committee considered an invitation for the Committee Chairperson to an informal invitation with the Utility Regulator Chairperson and Infrastructure Committee Chairperson on 21 May 2025.

### **9.11 Economist Article - Electricity Costs**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of the recent Economist article on electricity costs provided by the Utility Regulator.

### **9.12 After Dark Alliance**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Free the Night response providing the ToRs for the After Dark Alliance.

### **9.13 Speakers for Schools**

The Committee considered a request from Speakers for Schools to brief the Committee on work experience issues.

### **9.14 Request for Committee to Sponsor Event**

The Committee considered correspondence from the BMA NI Medical Students Committee requesting that the Committee sponsor a proposed event in Parliament Buildings in May.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to advise BMA NIMSC to book the event with Assembly Events Office.

Diana Armstrong rejoined the meeting at 12:19pm

## **10. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its forward work programme, including:

- a proposed Assembly Engagement Team briefing on Balmoral Show arrangements on 9 April 2025;
- a Departmental Enhanced Investment Zone briefing on 21 May 2025;
- an informal meeting between the Association for Project Safety with the Chairperson on 27 May 2025
- a visit to SONI on 3 September 2025; and
- a possible visit to Belfast Stories on 24 September 2025.

**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 9 April 2025 at 10:00am in Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 12:22pm.

**Phillip Brett MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for the Economy**

**9 April 2025**