



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 4 February 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Ms Diana Armstrong MLA

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Present by video-conferencing:

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Miss Jemma Dolan MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Apologies: Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Sarah Dowd (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:05am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Temporary Chairperson

The Chairperson recorded the Committee's thanks to Mr Honeyford for acting as the temporary chairperson at the Economy Committee meeting of 28 January 2026.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 28 January 2026.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Clustering Strategy – oral and written evidence

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:06am:

- Alan Ramsey, Director of Trade, Innovation and Priority Sectors, DfE;
- Linda Jamison, Head of Collaboration and Clusters, Invest NI;
- Martin Robinson, Director of Strategy, InterTradeIreland; and

- Rachael Corridan, Programme Manager, InterTadelreland

Key issues discussed included: the definition of clustering; sectoral action plans; the Enhanced Investment Zone; the Local Innovation Partnership Fund; the Cluster Acceleration Programme – support for super clusters and the linkage to capital investment; the Synergy Programme; the absence of a formal Cluster Strategy; the skills challenge, the Fintech Academy and linkage to academia; R&D supports; Life and Health Sciences clusters; AI implications; support for apprenticeships; dual market access, all-island and international connections; InterTrade Ireland Trade Hub; and support for BORMAC.

Jonathan Buckley left the meeting at 11:08am

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

The officials left the meeting at 11:18am

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking:
- a breakdown of the projects to be supported by the £30m from the Local Innovation Partnership Fund for the Belfast-North West innovation corridor;
 - information on the economic value of clustering;
 - statistics on the impact clustering support has had on the development of the Fintech Corridor; and
 - a breakdown of goods vs service data for the Life and Health Sciences sector.

- Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to schedule a Departmental briefing in respect of the Enhanced Investment Zone progress and the Local Innovation Partnership Fund.

7. Grid Connections Policy Framework – oral and written evidence – Department for the Economy

The following officials joined the meeting at 11:21am:

- Catriona Harkin, Deputy Director, Energy Operations, DfE; and
- Linzi Hyvart, Head of Wholesale Electricity and Networks, DfE

Key issues discussed included: the build-out of the distribution network; the work of the Grid Development Monitoring Group; supporting decarbonisation; the benefits for rural and congested urban areas; and delivery and monitoring of the policy.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

The officials left the meeting at 11:38am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the electricity grid connection costs per dwelling for developments of 12 houses or more.

8. Disposal of Documents – FE Sector

The Committee considered the Further Education retention and disposal schedule laid before the Assembly by the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the schedule as drafted.

9. SL1 The Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order

Noted: The Committee noted the proposed rule: The Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a call for views on Citizen Space and publish the proposed rule and related papers on the Committee's website.

10. Correspondence

10.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence

10.2 RHI Closure Regulations

Noted: The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence providing the Departmental response to the recent public consultation on the closure regulations for the RHI Non-Domestic Scheme.

10.3 NSMC Tourism

Noted: The Committee noted Ministerial notification for an oral statement on 9 February 2026 in respect of the outcome of the North South Ministerial Council Tourism Sectoral meeting.

10.4 NSMC Trade

Noted: The Committee noted Ministerial notification for an oral statement on 9 February 2026 in respect of the outcome of the North South Ministerial Council Trade and Business Sectoral meeting.

10.5 DfE Year Two Progress Report

Noted: The Committee noted the Department's Year Two Progress Report on Delivering the Economic Vision.

10.6 Call for Evidence: Biofuels

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental briefing paper in respect of the Call for Evidence on using biofuels to transition away from fossil fuels for heating.

10.7 CfJ Employment Tribunals

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Justice to the Department in respect of the non-publication of the outcomes of employment tribunals and the implications where there are Non-Disclosure Agreements.

10.8 CfF 2025-26 Public Expenditure Outturn

Noted: The Committee noted a memo from the Committee for Finance, enclosing the 2025-26 Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn.

10.9 Youth Assembly

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Youth Assembly, providing an update on the outcome of the first Youth Assembly plenary.

10.10 GB/EU Vehicle Type Approvals

The Committee considered a response from the Secretary of State for Transport in respect of the NI car market and GB/EU vehicle type approvals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the National Franchise Dealers Association and to the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee.

10.11 Intra-EU transfers of Defence-related Products

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the House of Lords, Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee to the Minister for Trade seeking details of the implications for NI of changes to rules on intra-EU transfers of defence-related products and the simplification of security and defence procurement.

10.12 Ecodesign Requirements

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the House of Lords, Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee to the Minister for Energy in respect of ecodesign requirements for external power supplies, wireless chargers, wireless charging pads, battery chargers for portable batteries of general use and USB Type-C cables.

10.13 UCAS Applicants Data

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from UCAS, showing that the number of 18-year old university applicants from NIMDM Quintile 1 has increased by +6.9% from 1,600 to 1,710 applicants.

10.14 Advice NI - Showcase Event

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from Advice NI in respect of proposed dates for a Showcase Event in May to highlight the progress made in the Sustainable Energy Communities NI project.

10.15 Commission on the Status of Women Event

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give further consideration to a reported invitation to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) event at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, USA.

10.16 Pivotal

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of Pivotal's Programme for Government and Executive Progress tracker report.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Noted: The Committee noted that it was to undertake an external meeting at Impact Training on 11 February 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed:

- to schedule a joint briefing from Hospitality Ulster, Food To Go and the NI Hotel Federation on 25 February 2026;
- to schedule an external meeting on 11 March 2026 at Magee Campus, where the Committee will receive a briefing from the Magee Taskforce and may receive a Departmental briefing in respect of the Enhanced Investment Zone progress and Local Innovation Partnership Funds;
- to receive a Departmental briefing on the Higher Education Financial Needs Assessment on 4 March 2026;
- to schedule Departmental briefings on the draft budget and regional balance, when available; and
- to schedule a briefing from UCAS, Central Applications Office and the Irish University Association on student mobility on the island of Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to refer the HMRC Windsor Framework Stakeholder Engagement Team and associated road haulage matters, to the Westminster NI Affairs Committee.

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

12. Any Other Business

12.1 Press Release

Agreed: The Committee agreed a draft press release for the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) covering the Committee's visit to SONI on 4 February 2026.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 11 February 2026 at 10:00am in Impact Training, Lanark Way.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 11:47am.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

11 February 2026