



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 8 October 2025

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Ms Diana Armstrong MLA

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Present by video-conferencing:

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

Apologies:

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Kyle Lawlor (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:00am.

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 that they had met informally with the Utility Regulator on 1 October 2025 and that a summary of the meeting had been circulated by the Clerk.

Noted: The Committee noted the circulated summary.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule oral and written evidence from the AES Group, the owners of Kilroot Power Station.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 1 October 2025.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. RHI (Closure of the Non-Domestic Scheme) Bill – Departmental oral and written evidence

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:02am

- Sarah Brady, Director, Energy Operations, Department for the Economy; and
- Alan Smith, RHI closure lead officer, Energy Group, Department for the Economy

The evidence session was reported by Hansard

Pádraig Delargy joined the meeting at 10:12am.

Key issues discussed included: the cost of Non-Domestic RHI closure and Treasury approval; the calculation of the internal rate of return for the closure payments and State Aid rule compliance; the use of the 2017-2019 heat output statistics to calculate closure payments; the timing of winter uplift and closure regulations; the impact of legislative slippage; engagement with stakeholders; levels of fraud and loss of accreditation; planned levels of inspection for the closure process; and the production of closure guidance for boiler owners.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

The officials left the meeting at 11:04am.

Members recorded concerns in respect of the length of time it has taken to devise the closure legislation and the reasoning underpinning the modelling of relevant costs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would likely seek an extension to the Committee Stage in order to ensure that the Committee has sight of the feedback to the closure regulations consultation and the draft regulations prior to the end of the Committee Stage.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking:

- clarification on the timing of the winter uplift regulations;
- confirmation that feedback to the consultation on the closure regulations will be provided to the Committee, along with the draft closure regulations in January 2026 at the very latest and prior to the end of the Committee Stage;

- information on the actual level of fraud and loss of accreditation that has been recorded by the Department in respect of the Non-Domestic RHI Scheme;
- an update on the RHI statistics including the number of installations, the number of inactive installations and the number receiving payments;
- sight of, and comparison between, the 2 tariff/closure calculation models produced by the Department and Professor Rooney; and
- information on the profile of the closure DEL spending.

Proceedings were suspended at 11:11am.

Proceedings resumed at 11:18am.

7. Northern Ireland Skills Council (NISC) – oral and written evidence

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 11:18am

- Kathleen O'Hare, Chairperson of NISC;
- Lorna McAdoo, Co-Chair of SEDI (Skills, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion);
- Barry Neilson, Vice-Chair of the Green Energy Delivery Group, CEO CITB; and
- Mary Meehan, NI Skills Council.

Key issues discussed included: NEETs; inter-departmental co-operation; Level 2 Essential Skills; gender equality; lifelong learning and pre-apprenticeship training courses; transition to work from the justice system; review of the Skills Council; the need for a Talent Development Agency; green skills; apprenticeship issues; AI and skills impact; mutual recognition and portability of qualifications between RoI and NI; cross-border working; clustering strategies; skills provision in FE; skills shortages by region; transitioning from modular to linear curricular models in schools; and the funding model for sixth form pupils.

Pádraig Delargy declared an interest in respect of being a Member of the Public Accounts Committee and as being the spokesperson on Skills for Sinn Féin.

David Honeyford left the meeting at 12:22pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

The officials left the meeting at 12:44pm.

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for the Economy asking for an update on the Skills Action Plan and her review of the Northern Ireland Skills Council.
- Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to write to the Department for the Economy seeking information on skill shortages per sub-region of NI.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education seeking clarity on Level 2 Essential Skills and indicating the difficulties of balancing demand from employers and the loss of recognition for these qualifications in schools.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Skills Council seeking sight of exemplar AI plans for other jurisdictions.

8. End of Session - Committee Report

The Committee considered a draft of its end of session report.

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the draft report should be published as the Committee's third report of the mandate.

9. Sustainable Aviation Fuel Bill – Committee Report

The Committee considered a draft of its report on the legislative consent memorandum in respect of the Sustainable Aviation Fuel Bill.

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the draft report should be published as the Committee's fourth report of the mandate.

10. Correspondence

10.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

10.2 Security of Supply

Noted: The Committee noted a Ministerial statement in respect of electricity security of supply issues.

10.3 Tourism NI Pensions

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence advising that the letter of comfort laid by the Department, in respect of Tourism NI pensions, was laid in error and that the document has been withdrawn.

10.4 Creative Industries Taskforce

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of the Creative Industries Taskforce which has recognised high potential city regions and clusters in NI within the Creative Industries Sector Plan.

10.5 EU Tariffs: Aluminium

The Committee considered a Departmental response in respect of EU tariffs on aluminium sheet raw material.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee and to KME Steelworks.

10.6 Hydrogen Project Support.

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of Hydrogen Project Support.

10.7 October Monitoring Round

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance confirming that the October Monitoring Round has not yet been commissioned by the Department of Finance.

10.8 Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance in respect of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill, indicating that a children's rights assessment on the provisions relating to Higher Education has not been completed as only a small number of children would be effected.

10.9 Insolvency (Amendment) Bill – The Bar of Northern Ireland

The Committee considered a response in respect of the call for evidence for the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill, from the Bar of Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to: schedule a briefing from the Bar of Northern Ireland; forward the response to the Department for comment; and publish the response on the Committee webpage.

10.10 Insolvency (Amendment) Bill – The Law Society of Northern Ireland

The Committee considered a response in respect of the call for evidence for the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill, from the Law Society of Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to: schedule a briefing from the Law Society of Northern Ireland; forward the response to the Department for comment; and publish the response on the Committee webpage.

10.11 The Bytes Project

The Committee considered a request from the Bytes Project to brief the Committee on the digital infrastructure and cybersecurity risks across the community and voluntary sector (CVS).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to decline the briefing owing to forward work programme pressures.

10.12 Seagate Technology

The Committee considered an invitation to Committee Members to visit and tour the facilities of Seagate Technology in the North West.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add a visit to Seagate Technology to its forward work programme.

10.13 Joseph Roundtree Foundation roundtable

The Committee considered an invitation from the Joseph Roundtree Foundation to the Chairperson, to attend the JRF International Day for the Eradication of Poverty event at the Mac, Belfast Friday 17 October 2025 10am-1pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to attend, diary permitting.

10.14 YouthAction NI

The Committee considered an invitation from YouthAction NI to a young peoples' lived experience event on economic inactivity on Wednesday 15 October 2025 in YouthAction's theatre space in College Square North, Belfast.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would advise YouthAction NI individually, if they are able to attend.

Emma Sheerin left the meeting at 12:49pm.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme including timings for legislative scrutiny evidence sessions.

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

12. Any Other Business

12.1 Car Registration Windsor Framework

Agreed The Committee agreed to share recent correspondence on car registration issues and the Windsor Framework with the Assembly EU Affairs Team.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 15 October 2025 at 9:30am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 12:50pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

15 October 2025