



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 1 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 Pádraig Delargy MLA

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

Present by video-conferencing:

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Apologies:

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Kyle Lawlor (Clerical Officer)

Aiden Stennett (Research Officer) – item 7 only

The meeting commenced in public session at 9:32am.

Emma Sherrin and Padraig Delargy joined the meeting at 9:33am.

The Committee agreed to revise the order of its agenda.

1. Spending Review – Departmental oral and written evidence

The following officials joined the meeting at 9.33am

- Johanna Park, Director of Financial Management, DfE;
- Mark Lee, Director of Higher Education Division, DfE; and
- Ian Snowden, Permanent Secretary, DE

The evidence session was reported by Hansard

David Honeyford joined the meeting at 9:37am.

Sinead McLaughlin joined the meeting at 9:41am.

David Honeyford declared an interest in respect of being a Member of the Public Accounts Committee.

Padraig Delargy and Gary Middleton declared interests in respect of being MLAs representing the Foyle constituency.

Key issues discussed included: energy security issues and related irregular Executive meetings; reported inclusion issues at the UU Magee campus; Higher Education funding pressures including UU multi-campus issues and university college sustainability, MaSN cap and RoI students and the HE review expert panel; post-school SEN; NEETs and the youth training guarantee; Palestinian students; the Employment Bill costs including carers leave and other arrangements; the Regional Economy Fund and the Invest NI land portfolio; Local Economic Partnership allocations; Invest NI support for investment; a Bank of America jobs and investment announcement; DfE Annual Report and Accounts and issues relating to Northern Regional College; community energy schemes; the energy efficiency capital scheme; the aviation strategy; productivity and value for money metrics; interaction with the Irish Language Commissioner; the night movers service; and the NI Screen budget.

Padraig Delargy left the meeting at 10.45am

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

The officials left the meeting at 10:47am.

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking:
- an update on the reported inclusion issues at UU Magee campus;
 - clarity on the RoI student impact on the MaSN cap;
 - an update on the UU multi-campus bid;
 - information on the DfE/Invest NI support for the Evri Euro hub investment at Mallusk;
 - clarity on Local Economic Partnership revised allocations;
 - clarity on the Energy Efficiency Capital Grant Scheme; and
 - clarity on the budget support for aviation route and policy development.

Padraig Delargy rejoined the meeting at 10:49am

- Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to write to Ulster University seeking clarity on the £18m budget bid in respect of multi-campus costs.

2. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

3. Declarations of Interest

Padraig Delargy declared an interest in respect of being a Member of the Public Accounts Committee.

4. Chairperson's Business

4.1 Cross-Departmental Working

The Chairperson advised that during the recent debate on skills gaps, the Minister referred to cross-departmental working with the Department of Education. The Department for the Economy had previously advised that a cross-departmental

Ministerial group was to be established which was to oversee 3 cross-cutting thematic groups on; careers; curriculum and qualifications; and post-16. The group was to produce delivery plans.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking the delivery plans or a timeline for their production for these thematic groups.

5. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 24 September 2025.

6. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

7. Assembly Research Briefing – Renewable Electricity in NI

Aidan Stennett joined the meeting at 10:56am

Key issues discussed included: barriers to renewable energy development and the need for policy clarity.

The Chairperson thanked Aidan for his briefing.

Aidan left the meeting at 11:10am.

8. Sustainable Aviation Fuel Bill – Committee Report

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of its report on legislative consent for the Sustainable Aviation Fuel Bill.

9. Correspondence

9.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 RHI (Closure of the Non-Domestic Scheme) Bill

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the RHI (Closure of the Non-Domestic Scheme) Bill and a copy of the consultation document on the Scheme closure pending a Departmental briefing on 8 October 2025.

9.3 Strategic Priorities for Great British Energy

Noted: The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence including a statement of Strategic Priorities for Great British Energy indicating among other things that a local power plan for NI is to be published in November 2025.

9.4 Mineral Prospecting

Noted: The Committee noted a Ministerial written statement advising of a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment in respect of mineral prospecting.

9.5 Childcare Report.

The Committee considered correspondence including a copy of the Childcare Providers Targeted Business Support Research Report.

Agreed The Committee agreed to invite Employers for Childcare to provide oral and written evidence.

9.6 Post-School SEN

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence providing further information on the background to decision-making in respect of Post-School SEN.

9.7 Hydrogen Policy

The Committee considered Departmental correspondence in respect of a consultation on Hydrogen policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a briefing from the Department on the feedback to the consultation.

9.8 Circular Economy Strategy

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response on the Circular Economy Strategy.

9.9 Social Enterprises Research

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of recent social enterprise research.

9.10 DoF Public Procurement

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Finance in respect of the publication of public procurement statistics in December 2025.

9.11 ALB reviews

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence including ALB reviews of the Consumer Council and the Construction Industry Training Board.

9.12 Postgraduate Researcher delivery model

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of the revisions to the Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) delivery model and T&Cs for studentships from AY 2026-27.

9.13 Energy Efficiency Capital Grant Scheme

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence advising that the review of the Energy Efficiency Capital Grant Scheme has not concluded.

9.14 Raw Sheet Aluminium EU customs duty

Noted: The Committee noted a forwarded copy of correspondence from the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee, from HMRC in respect of EU customs duty on raw sheet aluminium.

9.15 Car Registrations

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the National Franchised Dealers Association in respect of car registration issues.

9.16 Concerned Individual

Noted: The Committee noted forwarded correspondence from a concerned individual in respect of the MA in Interpreting at Queen's University Belfast.

9.17 Derry City and Strabane District Council

Padraig Delargy and Gary Middleton again declared interests in respect of being MLAs representing the Foyle constituency.

Noted: The Committee noted a response from the Derry City and Strabane District Council in respect of funding for CoDA.

9.18 Financial Outturns/Forecasts

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing copies of Departmental outturn and forecast outturns for June, July, August 2025.

9.19 Tree-Cutting

Noted: The Committee noted a response from NIE networks Ltd in respect of its tree-cutting programme.

9.20 HoI International Agreements Committee

Noted: The Committee noted a thank you letter from the House of Lords International Agreements Committee following the informal meeting.

9.21 Consumer Council NI

The Committee considered a report from the Consumer Council NI on student poverty including recommendations for retailers and universities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the report to the universities for comment on relevant recommendations.

9.22 Extreme Weather

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer a request to brief from Unite the Union in respect of extreme weather protections for workers, pending the introduction of the Employment Bill.

9.23 Concerned Individual

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned individual in respect of Freedom of Information requests.

9.24 Concerned Individual

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned individual calling for Committee scrutiny on mineral prospecting licences.

9.25 Concerned Individual

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned individual in respect of Power NI price increases.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to continue proceedings in closed session at 11:20am.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme including timings for: legislative scrutiny; a Ministerial budget session; and evidence on the Apprenticeships Action Plan.

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 the next meeting

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 8 October 2025 at 10:00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 11:30am.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

8 October 2025