



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for the Economy

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Wednesday 14 January 2026**

**Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings**

**Present:** Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

**Present by video-conferencing:**

Ms Diana Armstrong MLA

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Miss Jemma Dolan MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

**Apologies:** Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

**In Attendance:** Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Claire Milliken (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk) – items 1 to 9 only

The meeting commenced in closed session at 10:02am.

## **1. Committee Strategic Plan**

Kate Nicholl joined the meeting at 10:02am

Diana Armstrong joined the meeting at 10:05am

The Committee considered its revised strategic plan for the remainder of the mandate.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Clerk should generate a timeline for the Department's predictions on the delivery of its legislative programme.

Proceedings continued in public session from 10:23am.

## **2. Apologies**

Apologies were as indicated above.

## **3. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **4. Chairperson's Business**

### **4.1 Committee visit**

The Chairperson reminded Members that, as previously agreed, he attended the Economic Investment Showcase Event 2025, on 10 December 2025, in London, which was organised by Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council expressing the Committee's thanks for the invitation.

Padraig Delargy joined the meeting at 10:24am

### **4.2 Delegated Legislation**

**Noted:** The Committee noted that a new Assembly process was now in place for delegated legislation whereby draft rules and related information would be published and views sought via Citizen Space in order to inform Committee scrutiny.

## **5. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 10 December 2025.

## **6. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising

## **7. December Monitoring Round – Department for the Economy**

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:24am

- Niamh McGarvey, Deputy Finance Director, DfE; and
- Conor McStravick, Head of In Year Budgeting, DfE.

The Chairperson placed on record his condolences for Johanna Park, DfE.

Key issues discussed included: FTC bids; City and Growth Deal spending; easements and early declarations; Energy Group costs; and remaining over-commitments.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

The officials left the meeting at 10:33am.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an updated summary table with the inclusion of December monitoring allocations and the outworking of the January technical exercise.

**Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking further information on spending in the Department's Energy Group.

## **8. RHI Closure Regulations – Department for the Economy**

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:34am:

- Sarah Brady, Director, Energy Operations, DfE;
- Alan Smith, RHI Project Manager, DfE; and
- Catriona Harkin, Deputy Director, Energy Operations, DfE.

Jonathan Buckley joined the meeting at 10:35am.

Key issues discussed included: responses to the DfE consultation on the closure regulations; compliance controls including inspections and/or audits; record-keeping and risk-based criteria; banding; the use of data from the 2017-2019 boiler use period; metering; the appeals process and a participant's right to review; the development of a portal by the Department; change of ownership and location; and closure administrative costs.

Jemma Dolan left the meeting at 11:13am

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 sight of the closure regulations and confirmation of Executive approval;
  - seeking information on the financial impact of potential changes to the 2017-2019 boiler use period;
  - seeking a breakdown of the administrative costs associated with the closure regulations;
  - seeking a timeline for the development of the portal for participants; and
  - suggesting that the Department's guidance to users should indicate that they may include metering information (where available and reliable) along with biomass purchase records.

Proceedings were suspended at 11:20am

Proceedings resumed at 11:26am

## **9. SL1 – Chemicals/GMOs**

The Committee considered the proposed statutory rule: The Chemicals (Health and Safety) and Genetically Modified Organism (Contained Use) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations (NI) 2026.

The Committee divided on the following motion:

“That the Committee was not content for the Department to make the Rule”

Ayes: Phillip Brett; Jonathan Buckley; Diana Armstrong

Noes: Pdraig Delargy; David Honeyford; Kate Nicholl; Sinead McLaughlin

The motion was therefore negatived.

The Committee divided on the following motion:

“That the Committee was content for the Department to make the Rule”

Ayes: Pdraig Delargy; David Honeyford; Kate Nicholl; Sinead McLaughlin

Noes: Phillip Brett; Jonathan Buckley; Diana Armstrong

The motion was therefore passed.

## **10. SR 2026/XXX Energy Bill Relief and Discount Scheme**

The Committee considered the draft statutory rule: The Energy Bill Relief Scheme and Energy Bills Discount Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the following motion:

“That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2026/XXX The Energy Bill Relief Scheme and Energy Bills Discount Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026, and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.”

## **11. SR 2026/3 The Further Education (Amendment) Order**

The Committee considered the statutory rule: The Further Education (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the following motion:

“That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2026/3 The Further Education (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026, and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule.”

## **12. Correspondence**

### **12.1 Index**

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

### **12.2 Energy Strategy**

The Committee considered Departmental correspondence in respect of the mid-term review of the Energy Strategy.

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

Jemma Dolan rejoined the meeting at 11:34am.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a Departmental briefing on the mid-term review of the Energy Strategy.

### **12.3 Indexation of Feed in Tariffs etc.**

The Committee considered a Departmental response in respect of the Renewables Obligation (RO) and Feed In Tariff (FIT) Schemes and a UKG consultation on changes to related indexation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and Next Energy Capital.

### **12.4 Kilroot / Coolkeeragh**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a response from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency on Kilroot's running hours and ongoing legal action.

**Noted:** The Committee also noted correspondence from the Department indicating that the main combined cycle gas turbine at Coolkeeragh has been available for dispatch since 22 December 2025.

### **12.5 Project Gigabit**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence advising that the Project Gigabit tender has been awarded.

### **12.6 DfE Regional Balance**

The Committee considered a Departmental response on business investment and job creation.

Sinead McLaughlin recorded considerable concerns regarding: the absence of regional balance in respect of jobs and investment; the accuracy of the information provided by the Department; the treatment of remote workers as being always outside of the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMAP); and what appeared to be an attempt to provide misleading data to the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek a briefing on regional balance from the Department and the difficulties Invest NI may be experiencing in locating investment outside of BMAP.

Jonathan Buckley recorded concerns around the dual market access stakeholder forum.

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

- seeking clarity as to who made the decision to establish the forum and which stakeholders would be represented within it and why Intertrade UK was not included;
- seeking sight of the minutes from the forum's meetings to date; and
- seeking a further breakdown of manufacturing investments data in line with NISRA categories.

David Honeyford noted that the Invest NI website had been refreshed and that more up-to-date data had been published.

### **12.7 Regional Balance Investments**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Ministerial response in respect of regional balance investments and the provision of real-time investment data.

### **12.8 Growth Mission Fund**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence explaining that the Growth Mission Fund (GMF) is a component of the Local Growth Fund and will have an annual Capital only allocation of £2.5m (out of the GMF £45.5m).

### **12.9 Arms Length Bodies**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Ministerial response to the Committee for Finance in respect of the review of Arms Length Bodies.

### **12.10 AI Advisory Panel**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Departmental response advising that the Department's AI Advisory panel Terms of Reference and membership is to be determined.

### **12.11 Southern Regional College ARA**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Southern Regional College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31 July 2025.

### **12.12 FE Colleges ARA**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Annual Reports and Financial Statements, year ended 31 July 2025 for the following FE Colleges: Belfast Metropolitan College; South Eastern Regional College; and North West Regional College.

### **12.13 Research bulletins**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Departmental correspondence providing research bulletins in respect of: the Role of the Consumer in the Northern Ireland Economy; Level 2 and 3 Qualifications; Management and Expectations Survey; and HE applications in NI from England

### **12.14 High Street Taskforce**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office advising that there is no further update in respect of Supporting the Hospitality Sector: High Street Taskforce.

### **12.15 Broadcasting Related Matters**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister for the Economy and the Minister for Communities advising of the roles of their Departments in respect of local broadcasting related matters.

### **12.16 Insolvency (Amendment) Bill**

The Committee considered a response from the Lady Chief Justice's Office in respect of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add the response to the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill Committee Stage Report.

#### **12.17 Rol Students MaSN Cap**

**Noted:** The Committee noted responses from Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University in respect of Rol students and the MaSN cap.

#### **12.18 Windsor Framework**

The Committee considered a response from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Minister for the Cabinet Office in respect of evidence from the Road Haulage Association (RHA) on the Windsor Framework.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee.

#### **12.19 GB/EU Vehicle Type Approvals**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and Minister for the Cabinet Office in respect of vehicle type approval in GB and EU.

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

**Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to write to the Department for Transport indicating its support for legislation to mandate that vehicles placed on the market in Great Britain must hold dual GB and EU type approvals and markings, in order to enable their sale in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland and seeking a timeline for his legislation.

#### **12.20 HoL NI Scrutiny Committee**

**Noted:** The Committee correspondence from the HoL NI Scrutiny Committee (NISC) providing a copy of correspondence from NISC to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in respect of vehicle type approval issues.

#### **12.21 Customs Duty Waiver Scheme**

The Committee considered a response from the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury in respect of the operation of the Customs Duty Waiver Scheme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to Allied Customs Service and the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee.

#### **12.22 Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**

The Committee considered a copy of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's response to the NI Scrutiny Committee in respect of the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee.

#### **12.23 Construction Employers Federation (CEF)**



**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Construction Employers Federation (CEF) providing a copy of their press release, and calling for agreement by the NI Executive of the multi-year budget.

#### **12.24 Pivotal Briefing**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Pivotal briefing: 'Northern Ireland's multi-year budget; challenges and opportunities'.

#### **12.25 Association of British Insurers (ABI)**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Association of British Insurers (ABI) providing commentary and a copy of the UKG motor insurance taskforce report.

#### **12.26 SONI Invitation**

The Committee considered an invitation from SONI for a lunchtime meeting and tour on Wednesday 4 February 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule the visit for Wednesday 4 February 2025.

#### **12.27 Offshore Wind Farm Development Invitation**

**Noted:** The Committee noted an invitation to the event 'Offshore Wind Farm Development: Securing the Benefits for NI, supported by Ocean Winds and RenewableNI' in Parliament Buildings.

#### **12.28 Balmoral Show Invitation**

The Committee considered an invitation from the Assembly's Engagement Team, to join Assembly events at the Balmoral Show 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to attend the Balmoral Show in May 2026 and, as in 2025, to undertake a joint informal event with CAERA.

#### **12.29 Translink**

The Committee considered correspondence from Translink providing its press release in respect of the positive impact of festive season services.

The Chairperson recorded the Committee's approval of the increased use of the Nightmovers' services and encouraged its continued use.

### **13. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its revised forward work programme including the cancellation of the expected briefing on the Department's 5 Year Sustainability Plan; the amended timing for the Ministerial briefing on the budget on 21 January 2026; and the update on the DfE Business Plan.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed: to seek to schedule a Departmental briefing in respect of the mid-term review of the Energy Strategy; to undertake a

visit to SONI on 4 February 2026; to schedule a briefing from the Utility Regulator on 11 March 2026; and to schedule a briefing from the Department and Invest NI in respect of trade and investments on 22 April 2026.

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

#### **14. Any Other Business**

##### **14.1 EECG Scheme**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department / Invest NI again seeking an update on the Energy Efficiency Capital Grant (EECG) Scheme.

#### **15. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 21 January 2026 at 10:15am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 11:54am.

**Phillip Brett MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for the Economy**

**21 January 2026**