



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 17 September 2025

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

Present by video-conferencing:

Ms Diana Armstrong MLA

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Apologies:

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Kyle Lawlor (Clerical Officer)

Nathan Mullholland (Research Office) – item 7 only

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:14am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

Kate Nicholl declared an interest in that her husband had received training from the Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre (AICC).

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Resignation of Kieran Kennedy

The Chairperson noted press reports in respect of the resignation of Mr Kieran Kennedy from the board of Invest NI.

Members recorded their concerns that an able advocate for economic development both for the North West and the rest of NI had departed from an important economic development role in unfortunate circumstances and the Economy Committee had not been informed. Members noted also concerns that had been raised about the culture of Invest NI and its commitment to regional balance and the absence of outputs from the Local Economic Partnerships and the absence of progress in respect of addressing the sub-regional productivity gap.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Mr Kennedy thanking him for his service to Invest NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Invest NI seeking: an explanation for Mr Kennedy's departure; clarity on the Invest NI regional office strategy; and the costs and timeline for the new North West Invest NI office.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister seeking: clarity on the next steps for supporting sub-regional economic development and assurance that important Invest NI and other Arms Length Body board appointments will be reflective of the key sub-regions of NI including the North-West and the South-West.

4. Draft Minutes

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

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the NI Economy – CSTA and AICC - oral and written evidence

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 10:21am:

- Professor Helen McCarthy, Chief Scientific and Technology Adviser (CSTA) to the NI Executive;
- David Crozier CBE, Director, Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre (AICC);
- Professor Michaela Black – Principal Investigator, AICC; and
- Patrick McGirr – Deputy Director for Business Engagement, AICC

Key issues discussed included: promotion of a science and innovation culture in the NICS; AI access to Departmental data currently in content manager including non-personal data; development of an AI legal framework; NICS Co-pilot trial; citizen education and supporting AI understanding in schools through an education framework; the need for an AI skills pipeline; the regulatory environment and data protection/ethical guardrails; the possible need for supports owing to AI's impact on the labour market; the Transformer Programme; the Integrate to Innovate Strategy; drawing down additional R&D support; opportunities for AI development in the life and health sciences; exemplar AI jurisdictions; DfE promotion of the UKG's AI Growth Zones; and the development of data centres to support the use of AI.

Diana Armstrong left the meeting at 11:21am

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their briefing.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11:39am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further information on: the innovation projects it is to take forward; its science and AI champions and its support for AI Growth Zones.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister seeking clarity as to how she is working with the Department for Science Innovation and Technology to improve NI's share of UKG R&D grant support.

7. Assembly Research Briefing – Social Enterprises

Nathan Mulholland joined the meeting at 11:40am.

Key issues discussed included: the variation by District Council of basic information on social enterprises and the absence of a public procurement framework for these organisations.

The Chairperson thanked Nathan for his briefing.

Nathan left the meeting at 11:57am.

8. Correspondence

8.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 Chairperson of Northern Regional College

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of the Minister electing not to appoint the chairperson of the Northern Regional College for a second term and the appointment of an emergency chairperson for 12 months.

8.3 Law Society NI - Insolvency (Amendment) Bill

The Committee considered Ministerial correspondence in respect of the Law Society NI comments on the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill regarding a Statement of Affairs from a bankrupt and the use of a preliminary examination questionnaire.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an oral evidence session with the Law Society NI and the Association of Insolvency Practitioners

8.4 Keeling Schedule etc. - Insolvency (Amendment) Bill

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill, which included: the Keeling Schedule, the screening document and the delegated powers memorandum.

8.5 Electricity Consumption and Renewable Generation Statistics

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of a statistical user engagement exercise on data and measurement for reporting electricity consumption and renewable generation statistics.

8.6 Allied Customs Services - Customs Duty Waiver Scheme

The Committee considered correspondence - forwarded by the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee - from Allied Customs Services in respect of the customs duty waiver scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Chief Secretary of the Treasury in respect of the operation of the customs duty waiver scheme.

8.7 UK-India Free Trade Agreement

Noted: The Committee noted a call for evidence from the House of Lords International Agreements Committee in respect of the UK-India Free Trade Agreement.

8.8 Pivotal PfG tracker report

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the Pivotal PfG tracker report.

Members recorded support for external data and analysis in order to inform scrutiny but differed in respect of the value of the Pivotal PfG tracker.

8.9 NITA Annual Conference Invitation

The Committee considered an invitation to attend the NITA Annual Conference, “Tourism in a Shifting World,” on Tuesday 30 September 2025 at Larchfield Estate, Lisburn.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond indicating that owing to plenary business on this date Members would be unlikely to attend.

8.10 Power NI - Price Increases

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

8.11 Energy Summit Event

The Committee considered an invitation to the energy summit event on 24 September 2025 at the ICC Belfast.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond indicating that, owing to the scheduled Committee meeting, Members would be unable to attend.

8.12 EU Scrutiny Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward recent relevant responses to the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee from: the SoS NI on car registrations; the Office for the Internal Market in respect of the FSB NI report; and the FSB NI on its report on the Windsor Framework.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its visit to Belfast Stories.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek oral and written evidence from Lord Murphy on his report on the Windsor Framework.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to seek oral and written evidence from the Road Haulage Association on its concerns in respect of customs controls.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek oral and written evidence from the Department on how it has updated its economic sectoral action plans.

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

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 24 September 2025 at 10:00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 12:06pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

24 September 2025