



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 25 February 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Ms Diane Forsythe (Deputy Chairperson)

Ms Diana Armstrong MLA

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Present via video conferencing:

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Miss Jemma Dolan MLA

Apologies:

None

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Claire Milliken (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Sarah Dowd (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in open session at 10:06am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a revised tabled agenda.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule a briefing on the impact of Reval 2026 on hospitality and tourism sectors to 4 March 2026.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Committee Membership

The Chairperson recorded the Committee's thanks to Jemma Dolan MLA for her service to the Committee for the Economy.

The Chairperson welcomed Diane Forsythe MLA as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy.

3.2 Departmental evidence sessions

The Chairperson referred Members to a tabled response from the Permanent Secretary in respect of the unsatisfactory Departmental evidence sessions on 18 February 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Permanent Secretary to give oral evidence on these matters.

Kate Nicholl joined the meeting at 10:10am

3.3 Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill

The Chairperson referred Members to a tabled Ministerial response on the timing of the introduction of the Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill and setting out the apparent revised scope of the Bill.

Sinead McLaughlin highlighted recent lobbying by trade unions and business representatives seeking clarity on the contents of the Bill and the timing of its introduction.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister seeking clarity on the trade union recognition measures which were referenced in the Good Jobs Employment Bill Way Forward document.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 18 February 2026.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. RHI (Closure of Non-Domestic Scheme) Bill – Agreement of Report

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of the development of Departmental plans for unspent Annual Managed Expenditure (AME) which would become available following the agreement of closure arrangements for the Non-Domestic RHI Scheme.

The Committee considered a draft of the RHI (Closure of Non-Domestic Scheme) Bill Committee Stage report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Background section, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Committee Approach section, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Consideration of the Bill section, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Clause by Clause Scrutiny section, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Appendices, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Executive Summary section, as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the report to be published as its 6th report of the mandate.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to include an extract from the minutes of 25 February 2026 in the report.

7. Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland– extension of marketing brands to NI – oral and written evidence

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:15am:

- Eimear Callaghan, Interim Head of Marketing, Tourism NI;
- David Roberts, Director of Strategic Development, Tourism NI; and
- Michael Wickham Moriarty, Director of Business Operations, Tourism Ireland.

David Honeyford joined the meeting at 10:38am

Diane Forsythe declared an interest in respect of her father being a councillor of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Key issues discussed included: Destination Stewardship plans; the Electronic Travel Authorisation system; Failte Ireland brand extension - Hidden Heartlands, Ireland's Ancient East and Wild Atlantic Way; Shared Island coast to coast and shared destination projects; VAT differentials; skills issues; community event tourism, the Peace Tourism steering group, the promotion of the 12th July and other major events; Mourne Mountains promotions including Carlingford Ferry and the Mourne Gateway project; City and Growth Deal projects; the Discover NI website and linkage to district council promotion; TI/TNI budget breakdown; capital grants, infrastructure and marketing support; social media spending; AI generative marketing; screen tourism; Visit Derry review; and Halloween promotion.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

The witnesses left the meeting at 12:02pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Tourism Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland seeking:

- information on and a breakdown of its budget for the last 5 years;
- a breakdown of its social media spending including spending on social media influencers and information on the promotional packages provided to influencers over the last 5 years;
- clarity on policy in respect of the provision of promotional packages for social media influencers and how this sits with public sector value for money procurement rules; and
- clarity on the metrics, benefits and impact of social media spending.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Tourism Northern Ireland seeking sight of the Major Events Framework and an explanation of the criteria required, and why certain events are supported and others are not.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Tourism Northern Ireland seeking:

- information on how it is to better integrate its offering with the tourism marketing already undertaken by district councils;
- information on its recent engagement to promote Carlingford Ferry;
- an update on the review of Visit Derry; and
- an update on the development of Destination Stewardship packages.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Tourism Northern Ireland seeking information on its engagement with the Migrant Advisory Committee in order to address skills shortages in hospitality.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Fáilte Ireland:

- expressing disappointment that oral evidence was not provided and inviting Fáilte Ireland to appear before the Committee;
- seeking clarity on its plans to extend the Ireland's Ancient East brand to Northern Ireland;
- seeking clarity on its reasoning for not extending the Wild Atlantic Way brand to Northern Ireland; and
- seeking an explanation as to how it works with TI/TNI and the North South Ministerial Council order to provide a joined-up tourism offering.

Diana Armstrong left the meeting at 12:12pm

Proceedings were suspended at 12:12pm

Proceedings resumed at 12:19pm

8. SL1 - The Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 – DfE - oral evidence

The following officials joined the meeting at 12:20pm:

- Zoe Crowe, Head of Onshore Renewable Electricity, DfE; and
- Colm Mc Cullagh, Deputy Principal, Onshore Renewable Electricity, DfE.

The session was recorded by the Official Report.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

The officials left the meeting at 12:24pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content for the Department to make the proposed rule.

9. SR 2026/17 Disqualified Directors Order

The Committee considered the statutory rule: SR 2026/17 The Disqualified Directors Compensation Orders (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the following motion:

“That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2026/17 The Disqualified Directors Compensation Orders (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.”

10. SL1 - Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay (Miscarriage) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Chairperson welcomed the relevant provisions and recorded his thanks to the Minister and the Department.

The Committee considered the draft statutory rule: SR XXX/2026 The Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay (Miscarriage) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the following motion:

“That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR XXX/2026 The Parental Bereavement Leave and Pay (Miscarriage) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.”

11. Correspondence

11.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence

11.2 Cantor Fitzgerald meeting

Noted: The Committee noted a Ministerial response contending that the Committee had not formally sought the minutes of the Cantor Fitzgerald meeting.

The Chairperson recorded his view that the Minister’s letter was factually incorrect and the minutes in question had indeed been sought.

Jonathan Buckley agreed with the Chairperson and indicated that he had been obliged to bring forward a series of Fols in order to get to the bottom of this issue.

Diane Forsythe agreed with the Chairperson that the Committee should be given its place and the failure to provide information in a timely manner was regrettable and should not be politicised.

Padraig Delargy recorded his view that the Chairperson's remarks were disrespectful to the Minister and wrongly accused her of misleading the Committee. He felt that the tone of the remarks was inappropriate. He asked the Chairperson to withdraw his remarks. Mr Delargy argued that the exchanges at the Committee set a bad precedent whereby potential investors would be discouraged, owing to the politicisation of non-political, economic investment decisions.

11.3 Clustering Strategy

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of the Clustering Strategy.

11.4 CAERA to DfE - Trade Information with USA

The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to the Department for the Economy in respect of trade information with USA.

Noted: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking a full breakdown of all of the NI economic sectors affected by the reduction in trade with the USA.

11.5 5 year Sustainability Plans

The Committee considered confirmation from the Department of Finance that departments are required to produce 5 year sustainability plans.

Agreed: The agreed to write to the Department seeking sight of its 5 year sustainability plan.

11.6 SR Energy Bill Relief Scheme

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the SR 2026/23 The Energy Bill Relief Scheme and Energy Bill Discount Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

11.7 Belfast Works Connect

The Committee considered correspondence from Belfast Works Connect, providing information on place-based economic inactivity support during the Local Growth Fund (LGF) transitional year including a request for £1.7m of funding.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for comment.

11.8 Fermanagh Chamber of Commerce

The Committee considered correspondence from a number of Fermanagh based businesses to request the Committee's support for the establishment of a Fermanagh Chamber of Commerce.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for comment.

11.9 Caleb's Cause – Turning 18 Checklist

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from Caleb's Cause, including post school SEN 'Turning 18 Checklist'.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education in respect of qualification equivalencies and seeking details of his engagement with the relevant Minister in the Republic of Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from NUS-USI on these matters.

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

13. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 4 March 2026 at 10:00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 12:46pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

10 March 2026