



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 11 March 2026

Meeting Location: Timber Quay, Magee, University of Ulster.

Present: Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Apologies: Ms Diane Forsythe (Deputy Chairperson)

Ms Diana Armstrong MLA

Mr Declan Kearney MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced in open session at 10:13am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

Padraig Delargy and Sinead McLaughlin declared an interest in respect of representing the Foyle constituency.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Energy Savings AME Allocation

The Chairperson advised Members of a Barnett consequential of £81m of Annually Managed Expenditure (AME) resource over 3 years which is to be provided in order to address domestic energy costs.

Members expressed some surprise that details of this were not provided by the Permanent Secretary at the budget evidence session on 10 March 2026.

Members indicated support for a targeted measure for householders struggling to meet rising home heating costs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an urgent Ministerial evidence session – preferably on Monday 16 March 2026 in respect of the Department's plans for a targeted payment for domestic energy users in response to increasing heating fuel costs and making best use of the £81m AME resource allocation.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 4 March 2026.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 Draft Budget Departmental Briefing

The Chairperson reminded Members of the evidence session on Tuesday 10 March 2026 in respect of the Departmental draft budget for 2026 - 29/30.

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking:
- details of its Shared Island and Peace Plus funded projects;
 - information on the development of the business case for a domestic energy cost reduction programme which would make use of the Barnett consequential of £81m resource AME;
 - information on the overall savings to be generated from office consolidation and the anticipated savings from greater Departmental efficiency and reducing “machinery of government” wastage and duplication; and
 - details of the benefit to cost ratios for: DfE; Invest NI; Tourism NI; Tourism Ireland; NI Screen; and Intertrade Ireland over recent years.

6. Magee Expansion Taskforce – One Year Update

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 10:19am:

- Stephen Kelly, CEO of Manufacturing NI, Chairperson Magee Expansion Taskforce;
- Steven Lindsay, President of Londonderry Chamber;
- Mary MacIntyre, Chartered Town Planner;
- Alison Wallace, Strategy Manager Waterside Neighbourhood Partnership; and
- Linda McGuinness, Director, Magee Expansion Taskforce, DfE

Key issues discussed included: Departmental staffing resource for Magee expansion; Magee expansion budget confidence issues; Social Licence, community engagement, housing, parking and other infrastructure challenges and widening HE participation; the development of a Purpose Built Student Accommodation roadmap; regional balance, skills pipeline and co-operation between HE, FE and business, links to the Local Economic Partnership and cross-border co-operation and the duplication of provision; HE financial sustainability; contingency planning and Ministerial decisions.

Padraig Delargy left the meeting at 11:56am – the Committee lost its decision-making quorum.

Padraig Delargy rejoined the meeting at 11:59am – the Committee regained its decision-making quorum.

David Honeyford left the meeting at 11:59am – the Committee lost its decision-making quorum.

David Honeyford rejoined the meeting at 12:02pm – the Committee regained its decision-making quorum.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

The witnesses left the meeting at 12:13pm.

The Committee adopted a revised order for the agenda.

7. SR - The Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee considered the draft statutory rule: The Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the following motion:

“That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2026 The Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026, and recommends that it be affirmed by the Assembly.”

8. SL1 - The Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee considered the proposed statutory rule: The Education (Student Support, etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

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

9. Departmental written evidence – Enhanced Investment Zone

The Committee considered a Departmental written briefing in respect of the Enhanced Investment Zone.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an oral briefing from the Department on the Enhanced Investment Zone.

10. Correspondence

10.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

10.2 Postgraduate Tuition Fee Loans

Noted: The Committee noted a Ministerial Press Release, a covering letter, and a summary of consultation responses, in respect of changes to postgraduate tuition fee loans.

10.3 Higher Education Financial Needs Assessment

Noted: The Committee noted Departmental correspondence, in respect of the Higher Education Financial Needs Assessment and the wider review of HE funding.

10.4 Cyber and Software FDI Proposition

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response setting out the cyber and software Foreign Direct Investment proposition for NI.

10.5 Agri-Foods Sustainability Body

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response on the industry-led Agri-Foods Sustainability Body.

10.6 CCNI Energy Information

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of Consumer Council NI guidance on energy price issues.

10.7 Spring Statement

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the Finance Minister's oral statement regarding the Chancellor's Spring Statement and Executive 'Open Book' exercise.

10.8 Car Registration Issues in NI

Noted: The Committee noted a response from the Windsor Framework Independent Monitoring Panel in respect of car registration issues.

10.9 Ecodesign Requirements for External Power Supplies

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee in respect of ecodesign requirements for external power supplies etc.

10.10 EU Transfers of Defence-related Products

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee to the Department for Business and Trade in respect of the simplification of intra EU transfers of defence-related products and security and defence procurement.

10.11 Youth Assembly Update

Noted: The Committee noted the Youth Assembly monthly update for February 2026.

10.12 Insolvency Practitioner Issue

The Committee considered restricted correspondence from Paul Givan MLA in respect of an Insolvency Practitioner; and an Individual Voluntary Arrangement considered by NIPSO, asking that the Committee investigates.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to decline the request, indicating that as the matter has been investigated by NIPSO and owing to its busy forward work programme, it would be unlikely that the Economy Committee could shed any further light on this matter.

10.13 Qualification Equivalency

The Committee considered tabled correspondence from RoI Minister Lawless in respect of A-Level and Leaving Certificate equivalency and the co-ordination of examination results days.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Minister Lawless seeking further clarification on related matters from the State Examination Commission (SEC). The Committee also agreed to write in similar terms to Minister Givan seeking further clarification on these matters from the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) with a view to securing a SEC and JCQ joint evidence session.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

The Committee considered a request from the Department for the evidence session on the HE Financial Needs Assessment to be taken in closed session in order to protect the commercial interests of the universities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further clarity from the Department as to the commercial interests in question.

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

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next scheduled Economy Committee meeting will begin on Wednesday 18 March 2026 at 10:00am in Room 30 Parliament Buildings.

The Committee may undertake an additional meeting on Monday 16 March 2026 in Room 30 Parliament Buildings at a time to be determined.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 12.17pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

18 March 2026