



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 10 June 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Diana Armstrong MLA
Mr David Honeyford MLA
Mr Declan Kearney MLA

Present via video conferencing:

Ms Diane Forsythe (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA
Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)
Sarah Dowd (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in open session at 10:01am.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Good Jobs Charter

The Chairperson advised Members that, in the Department's tabled business plan update, it was reported that a co-design consultation is underway for the development of a Good Jobs Charter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a briefing from the Department on the Good Jobs Charter when it is designed.

3.2 Domestic Abuse Safe Leave

The Chairperson advised Members that in the Department's tabled business plan update, it was indicated that regulations relating to domestic abuse safe will be laid before the end of the mandate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the timeline for the laying of the domestic abuse safe leave regulations.

3.3 NRC Accounts

The Chairperson advised Members that the Permanent Secretary had written to the Economy Committee in respect of exchanges with the Comptroller & Auditor General relating to the DfE group accounts for 2025-26 and the previous accounts for Northern Regional College.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the timeline for the production of the Northern Regional College 2023-24 and 2024-25 accounts and an explanation of the delay.

3.4 ETA Report

The Chairperson advised Members that in response to AQW 47180, the Minister indicated that an interim report on the impact of the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) system on tourism has been undertaken by the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre and a final report will be produced this summer.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking sight of the final report.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 3 June 2026.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Hydrogen Policy – Department for the Economy

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:04am:

- Jimmy Graham, Director of Business Decarbonisation, Gas, Minerals and Renewable Electricity, DfE;
- Michael Bradley, Head of Gas Team, Department for the Economy; and
- Jonathan McAfee, Gas Team, Department for the Economy

Declan Kearney joined the meeting at 10:04am.

Key issues discussed included: green hydrogen generation; electricity storage policy; use of dispatch down to generate green hydrogen; the Utility Regulator as the hydrogen regulator and the need for related legislation; the staff resources in the Department's Gas Group; the UK Government's refreshed Hydrogen Strategy; Hydrogen Allocation Round, Shared Island funding for hydrogen and the Net Zero Hydrogen Fund; the Hydrogen Training Academy; and hydrogen for home heating.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

The officials left the meeting at 10:31am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on the consideration that has been given to using the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill as a vehicle to revise the powers of the Utility Regulator to include the regulation of hydrogen; and indicating the Committee's support for such a measure.

The Committee revised the order of its agenda.

7. Go Succeed - Written Briefing

The Committee considered a written briefing from district councils involved in the delivery of Go Succeed.

Agreed: The Committee noted the written briefing paper and agreed to defer the oral evidence session to a later date, when further clarity around the continued delivery of the programme can be provided.

Noted: The Committee noted with thanks the Minister's efforts to secure additional support for the Go Succeed programme.

8. SL1 - Student Support Regulations

David Honeyford declared an interest in respect of his daughter studying at university.

Noted: The Committee noted the proposed statutory rule: The Education (Student Support.) (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a call for views on Citizen Space and to publish the proposed rule and related papers on the Committee's delegated legislation webpage.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to shorten the timeframe for the call for views to allow consideration of the proposed rule on 24 June 2026.

9. Correspondence

9.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

9.2 DfE Staffing Vacancies

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of Department for the Economy staffing vacancies, with comparative figures from other departments.

9.3 Commercial Payments Bill LCM

Noted: The Committee noted a Legislative Consent Memorandum which is to be laid in respect of the Commercial Payments Bill, pending a Departmental briefing.

9.4 Tourism Vision: 10-Year Action Plan

Noted: The Committee noted the Departmental progress report for the Tourism Vision: 10-Year Action Plan.

9.5 Artificial Intelligence

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of Artificial Intelligence.

9.6 Energy Strategy Action Plan and Targets

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

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Department for the Economy to the Public Accounts Committee in respect of the Energy Strategy Action Plan and Energy Strategy targets and a tabled update from the Department in respect of Energy Strategy targets.

9.7 Grid Connection Developer Costs

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of grid connection developer costs.

9.8 Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill

The Committee considered a Departmental response in respect of the Convention Rights Memorandum for the Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Assembly Legal Services seeking its commentary.

9.9 Call for Evidence

Noted: The Committee noted nil responses from the Committee for Communities in respect of the Petroleum Licensing Bill and Utility Regulator Bill calls for evidence.

9.10 Treasury Open Book Review Report

Noted: The Committee noted a Committee for Finance memo and copy of HM Treasury Open Book Review Report on the Northern Ireland Executive Budget.

9.11 Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Education in respect of the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department, seeking clarity as to how it is working with Initial Teacher Education providers to ensure an appropriate Irish Medium teaching workforce and with professional qualification providers to ensure an appropriate level of classroom assistant provision etc. is also available for the sector.

9.12 Great British Energy: Transitional Fund

Noted: The Committee noted a response from Great British Energy setting out a breakdown of the spending of the transitional fund across the devolved governments and confirming that GBE will provide guidance with grant application forms.

9.13 Transmission Investment Ltd

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from Transmission Investment Ltd, confirming that it has written to the Department seeking further engagement.

9.14 NICVA: Request to brief

The Committee considered correspondence from NICVA requesting to brief the Committee on the impact of Local Growth Fund cuts on the voluntary and community sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from NICVA after summer recess.

9.15 CEF Manifesto

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Construction Employers' Federation in respect of its manifesto for 2027.

9.16 Investing Activity Report

Noted: The Committee noted the Departmental Investing Activity Report for May 2026.

9.17 HoL NISC: Decarbonisation

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 acceleration of industrial capacity and decarbonisation in strategic sectors.

9.18 HoL NISC: Digital Omnibus AI

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the HoL NI Scrutiny Committee to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology in respect of implementation of harmonised rules on artificial intelligence (Digital Omnibus on AI).

9.19 HoL NISC: Safety of toys - cobalt

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the HoL NI Scrutiny Committee to the Department for Business and Trade in respect of safety of toys, as regards cobalt.

9.20 HoL NISC: Cyber Resilience

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the HoL NI Scrutiny Committee to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, in respect of the EU's Cyber Resilience Act which may be added to the Windsor Framework.

9.21 DfE Spending

Noted: The Committee noted a tabled response from the Department on its spending in 2025-26 and for 2026-27 to-date, and noted clarification that the spending profile differences were owing to the inclusion of Annual Managed Expenditure in the 2026-27 Vote on Account figures.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule Departmental briefings in respect of the RHI regulations and Tourism consultation on 17 June 2026, followed by a joint concurrent meeting with the Committee for Education.

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from Sinead McLaughlin MLA in respect of the Regional Balance Bill on 24 June 2026, pending confirmation of the timing of 2nd stage for the Bill.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an additional meeting on 30 June 2026 to receive a briefing from the Competition and Markets Authority in respect of its report into the domestic heating oil market.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from Queen's University Belfast in respect of budget issues on 1 July 2026.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule Departmental briefings in respect of LCMs on the Sporting Events Bill and Commercial Payments Bill on 26 August 2026.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed its forward work programme, as amended.

Proceedings were suspended at 10:47am.
Proceedings resumed in public session at 10:55am.

11. Decoupling of SEM – Utility Regulator

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:55am:

- John French, Chief Executive, UR;
- Colin Broomfield, Director of Markets, UR;
- Jean-Pierre Mura, Head of Monitoring and Analysis, UR; and
- Marie-Therese Campbell, Head of Market Operations, UR.

The evidence session was recorded by the Official Report.

Key issues discussed included: recoupling of the Single Electricity Market (SEM) and GB electricity market; the impact of Brexit and ongoing related UK/EU negotiations; modelling the impact of recoupling; the absence of recoupling implementation costs; and interconnection issues and the draft determination for LirIC.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.
The officials left the meeting at 11:32am.

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for the Constitution and European Union Relations; the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Taoiseach, indicating unanimous support for the recoupling of the SEM with the GB electricity market in order to secure benefits for electricity consumers.

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 17 June 2026 at 9:30am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 11:33am.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

17 June 2026