



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 9 September 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Diane Forsythe MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr David Honeyford MLA
Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA
Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Present by video-conferencing:

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA
Mr Declan Kearney MLA
Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Apologies: Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Michael Greig (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced in open session at 10:00am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Committee Membership

The Chairperson welcomed Mr Mike Nesbit MLA back to the Committee for the Economy.

3.2 Informal Meeting - Hospitality Ulster & UK Hospitality

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee attended an informal meeting with Hospitality Ulster and the CEO of UK Hospitality on Tuesday 8 September 2026.

Noted: The Committee noted the Clerk's summary note of the informal meeting.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 1 September 2026.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. CMA - Home Heating Oil Market Review Report

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 10:01am:

- Juliette Enser, Executive Director for Competition Enforcement and Markets, CMA;
- Geoff Steadman, Senior Director, Markets, CMA; and
- Louise Close, NI Representative, CMA

Kate Nicholl, Pádraig Delargy and Declan Kearney joined the meeting at 10:01am.

Key issues discussed included: the role of the Utility Regulator; dependence on fossil fuels; the regulation of home heating oil, price caps, minimum ordering restrictions; the impact on vulnerable customers; cost base issues for distributors, wholesale and suppliers; the modelling of a price cap; oil buying groups; promotion and targeting by distributors; breach of contract issues and compensation.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11:04am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on CMA's recommendations including the proposed limited regulation regime and the identification of home heating oil consumers.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Competition and Markets Authority seeking further information on:

- the impact of oil buying groups on pricing and distributor behaviour;
- the Northern Ireland Housing Executive oil buying scheme;
- how vulnerable home heating oil customers may be identified;
- the methodology and data used in determining the benefit/disbenefit of applying a price cap; and
- breach of contract support payments and how NI consumers might avail of these.

Proceedings were suspended at 11:04am

Proceedings resumed at 11:12am

7. Letterbreen and Mullaghduin Partnership (LAMP) – Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill

The following witnesses joined the meeting via video-conferencing at 11:12am:

- Trevor Armstrong, Chairman, LAMP;
- Eddie Mitchell, Member, LAMP;
- Frankie McMurray, Member, LAMP; and
- Dianne Little, Member, LAMP

Kate Nicholl declared an interest as a relative lives in Mullaghduin.

Proceedings were reported by Hansard.

Key issues discussed included: the vesting of oil development rights; the role of the Westminster parliament; and options to amend the Bill.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11:51am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking commentary on the presentation made by LAMP and a limited Keeling schedule for Section 1 of the Petroleum (Production) Act (NI) 1964.

8. Regional Balance Bill – Extension of Committee Stage

Diane Forsythe recorded her congratulations for the Bill Sponsor and indicated support for the principle of regional balance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to put down the following motion for debate in plenary:

“That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 8 January 2027, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Regional Balance Bill”

9. Renewable Electricity Generation Bill – Extension of Committee Stage

Agreed: The Committee agreed to put down the following motion for debate in plenary:

“That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 29 January 2027, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Renewable Electricity Generation Bill.”

10. Correspondence

10.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

10.2 QUB Irish Language Issues / Magee Expansion

Noted: The Committee noted a response from Queen’s University Belfast in respect of Irish language issues and support for the Magee Expansion Taskforce.

Padraig Delargy recorded his disappointment at what was described as a lack of sincere engagement by Queen’s University Belfast with an Cumann Gaelach and called for prompt action on the issue of Irish language signage.

10.3 Harmonised Rules on AI

Noted: The Committee noted a Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee report on harmonised rules on Artificial Intelligence (Digital Omnibus on AI).

10.4 Youth Assembly Update

Noted: The Committee noted the Youth Assembly monthly update for July and August 2026.

10.5 Pivotal Tracker Report

Noted: The Committee noted a Pivotal tracker report, entitled: Running out of time - the performance of the Northern Ireland Executive in 2026 so far.

10.6 CCBC Research Seminar

Noted: The Committee noted an invitation to attend the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation's Research Priorities Seminar on Wednesday 23 September 2026.

10.7 Pica Awareness Day

Noted: The Committee noted a request for support for Pica Awareness Day which was on 2 September 2026.

10.8 Home Heating Oil Costs

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned individual to the Utility Regulator and First Minister in respect of home heating oil costs.

10.9 Offshore Renewable Legislation

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Department confirming that the Offshore Renewable Energy Installations Bill will not be introduced in this mandate.

10.10 Student Mobility

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Department inviting Members to attend the launch of the research document "Student mobility into and out of Northern Ireland; What Brain Drain?" in Adelaide House, at 11.30am on Wednesday 23 September 2026.

11. Any other business

There was no other business.

12. Draft Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold an additional meeting on Tuesday 20 October 2026 in order to receive Departmental evidence in respect of the budget.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a Ministerial briefing before Christmas recess on budget, legislation and policy issues.

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

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next scheduled Economy Committee meeting will begin on Wednesday 16 September 2026 at 10:30am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 12:05pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

16 September 2026