



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for the Economy

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Wednesday 30 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 Declan Kearney MLA
- Mr Peter Martin MLA
- Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA
- Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

**Present by video-conferencing:**

- Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA
- Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

**Apologies:** None

**In Attendance:**

- Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
- Michael Greig (Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Sarah Dowd (Clerical Officer)

Angela Kelly (Examiner of Statutory Rules) - item 9 only

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

## **1. Apologies**

Apologies were as indicated above.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **3. Chairperson's Business**

### **3.1 KESS**

The Chairperson advised Members that he had been invited to give the opening remarks as Chairperson of the Economy Committee at two Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS) events. The first in respect of: Resilient Workforces in Northern Ireland and the second in respect of: Small Scale Renewable Energy in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to contribute as requested to both events, diary permitting.

## **4. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 23 September 2026.

## **5. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **6. NICVA - Local Growth Fund - Impact on the community and voluntary sector**

Pádraig Delargy joined the meeting at 10:02am

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 10:02am:

- Jenny Potter - Director of Policy and Insight, NICVA;
- Kathy Maguire - Policy and Public Affairs Manager, NICVA; and
- Georgia Stanley - Policy Officer, NICVA.

Key issues discussed included: the Local Growth Fund and the split between capital and resource funding; the transition from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund; demand exceeding the supply for economic inactivity services; regional variations and associated barriers; the funding cliff edge and the potential loss of staff; the change of emphasis from skills to employment; the need for an overarching tertiary education provision and the linkage with Further Education colleges etc; disability pathways; tracking of economic inactivity impacts; the need for budget decisions and a top-up of the Local Growth Fund resource.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

The witnesses left the meeting at 10:46am.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for the Economy highlighting the NICVA data and the need for overarching tertiary education and training provision which addresses economic inactivity consistently across Northern Ireland and in particular the needs of NEETs and excluded groups; and indicating support for a longer-term funding solution for the sector.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Communities highlighting the NICVA data and the need for overarching tertiary education and training provision which addresses economic inactivity consistently across Northern Ireland and in particular the needs of NEETs and excluded groups; and indicating support for a longer-term funding solution for the sector and encouraging the Department for Communities to share the NICVA data which demonstrates the effectiveness of provision with the Milburn review into young people and work.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education highlighting the NICVA data and the need for overarching tertiary education and training provision which addresses economic inactivity consistently across Northern Ireland and in particular the needs of NEETs and excluded groups; and indicating support for a longer-term funding solution for the sector and encouraging the Department of Education to ensure schools are aware of the valuable economic inactivity services supported by NICVA member organisations.

## **7. LCM Commercial Payments Bill**

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:48am:

- Colin Jack, Director, Business and Employment Regulation Division, DfE; and
- Michael Bradford, Employment Relations Work Life Balance and EU Exit, DfE

Proceedings were recorded by the Official Report.

Key issues discussed included: the Legislative Consent Memorandum and the anticipated approval by the Minister; the role of the Office for the Small Business Commissioner; thresholds for investigation and recuperation in respect of late payments; construction retention payments and related Department of Finance legislation; small business protections; and the Common Framework for related matters.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department indicating support for the LCM and seeking;

- detail on existing and anticipated thresholds for investigation and recuperation; and
- an update briefing from the Office for the Small Business Commissioner on her role and work in Northern Ireland.

## **8. LCM Sporting Events Bill**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of the Westminster Sporting Events Bill and the associated Legislative Consent Memorandum laid by the Department.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it is content to consider a draft report in respect of the LCM on 7 October 2026.

Proceedings continued in closed session from 11:10am.

## **9. Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill Delegated Powers**

Angela Kelly, the Examiner of Statutory Rules (ESR), joined the meeting at 11:10am.

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report and the Henry VIII delegated powers in the Bill and the associated Assembly controls.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that amendments to the Bill in this regard were not required.

The Chairperson thanked the ESR for her briefing.

The ESR left the meeting at 11:15am.

Proceedings were suspended at 11:16am.  
Proceedings resumed at 11:21am.

## **10. Petroleum Licensing Bill – formal Clause by Clause Scrutiny**

Proceedings were recorded by the Official Report.

The following officials joined the meeting at 11:21am:

- Jimmy Graham, Director – Business Decarbonisation, Gas, Minerals and Renewable Electricity, DfE;
- Chris Nesbitt, Head of Minerals and Petroleum Branch, DfE; and
- John McManus, Minerals and Petroleum Branch, DfE

Peter Martin joined the meeting at 11:21am.

The Department provided assurances to the Committee in respect of the matters referenced in correspondence from Letterbreen and Mullaghduin Partnership (LAMP) – in respect of vesting, explicit prohibitions, the Windsor Framework and cross-border matters - and which had already been addressed at the meeting of 23 September 2026.

### **Clause 1: Principal Set of Repeals**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed it was content with Clause 1, as drafted.

### **Clause 2: Transitional Provision**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed it was content with Clause 2, as drafted.

### **Clause 3: Consequential Provision**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed it was content with Clause 3, as drafted.

### **Clause 4: Ancillary Regulations**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed it was content with Clause 4, as drafted.

### **Clause 5: Commencement**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed it was content with Clause 5, as drafted.

### **Clause 6: Short Title**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed it was content with the Short Title, as drafted.

### **Long Title**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed it was content with the Long Title, as drafted.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.  
The officials left the meeting at 11:27am.

Declan Kearney joined the meeting at 11:27am.

## **11. UK Internal Market Act 2020 - Glass Container Drinks in Wales**

The Committee considered a Departmental written briefing in respect of regulations to amend Schedule 1 of the UK Internal Market Act, which will create an exclusion from the market access principles for glass container drinks subject to the Welsh Deposit Return Scheme.

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Statutory Instrument.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the regulations to amend Schedule 1 of the UK Internal Market Act, in respect of the exclusion from the market access principles for glass container drinks subject to the Welsh Deposit Return Scheme.

## **12. Correspondence**

### **12.1 Index**

**Noted:** The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

### **12.2 Legislative Consent Motions**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Ministerial response in respect of the sharing of information relating to Legislative Consent Motions.

### **12.3 Home Heating Oil Regulation**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Ministerial response in respect of the regulation of the home heating oil market.

### **12.4 NI Skills Council Review**

The Committee considered Departmental correspondence, including a report on the review of the NI Skills Council carried out in response to NIAO recommendation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the NI Skills Council and seek its view on the review and the refreshed model.

### **12.5 PAC - NRC Disclaimed Accounts**

David Honeyford and Mike Nesbitt declared an interest in respect of being Members of the Public Accounts Committee.

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee, providing an update on the Northern Regional College disclaimed accounts oral evidence session.

### **12.6 CAERA - CMA Heating Oil Report**

The Committee considered a memo from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, seeking feedback on the Competition and Markets Authority report on the review of the domestic heating oil market.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to provide the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs with a summary of the relevant session and a copy of the CMA presentation

### **12.7 CfF - Ribbon Display Ceremony**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a memo from the Committee for Finance, extending an invitation to a Ribbon Display Ceremony on Monday 12 October 2026.

### **12.8 CfJ - Employment Tribunal Complaints**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Justice to the Minister for the Economy in respect of employment tribunal complaints.

### **12.9 CfF - August Budget Outturn**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a memo from the Committee for Finance, providing August budget outturn information.

### **12.10 Electricity Prices**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Utility Regulator to a concerned individual regarding wholesale electricity prices and the operation of the Single Electricity Market (SEM).

### **12.11 GBE Renewable Energy Programme**

The Committee considered correspondence from Derry City and Strabane District Council regarding the Great British Energy renewable energy programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward previous response from GBE (considered 10 June 2026) to Derry City and Strabane District Council.

### **12.12 Energy Cloud**

The Committee considered a request to brief the Committee on Energy Cloud in respect the use of renewable electricity to help households experiencing fuel poverty.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing.

### **12.13 Social Housing Barrier to Entrepreneurship**

The Committee considered correspondence from concerned individuals in respect of social housing practices creating a barrier to entrepreneurship and economic participation in NI, where part of activity is connected with their home.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking its commentary.

## **13. Draft Forward Work Programme**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule evidence sessions with the Wastewater Infrastructure Group and QUB ARINS on 21 October 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to hold two additional meetings on 16 December 2026 and 6 January 2027 to facilitate further scrutiny of legislation.

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

#### **14. Any other business**

There was no other business.

#### **15. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next scheduled Economy Committee meeting will begin on Wednesday 7 October 2026 at 10:00am in AMIC, Newtownabbey.

Proceedings continued in closed session from 11:33am.

#### **16. Regional Balance Bill Forward Work Programme**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed its programme of oral evidence-taking in respect of the Committee Stage of the Regional Balance Bill, and agreed to seek evidence from the following stakeholders:

- Rural Community Network and the Centre for Cross Border Studies;
- Glenshane Community Development Ltd and Community Foundation NI;
- NILGA, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council;
- Belfast City Council and the Belfast Region City and Growth Deals PMO;
- Social Enterprise NI and Development Trusts NI; and
- NI Productivity Forum.

**Agreed:** Members also agreed to advise the Clerk on any further stakeholders that they may wish to hear from.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 11:42am.

**Phillip Brett MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for the Economy**

**7 October 2026**