



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 15 May 2024

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Mr Philip McGuigan MLA

Mr Mike Nesbitt MLA

Ms SORCHA Eastwood MLA

Apologies:

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Present via video-conferencing:

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Anthea Matthews (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Craig Mealey (Clerical Supervisor)

Michael Doran (Clerical Officer)

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to adopt a revised order of agenda items.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson reminded the Committee that on Thursday 9 May 2024, Deirdre Hargey MLA became the Minister for the Economy for the period of Conor Murphy MLA's ill health.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should write to the Minister welcoming her to her post.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed that the Chairperson should write to Baroness Foster to congratulate her on her recent appointment as chairperson of Intertrade UK.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting of 8 May 2024.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Tourism Strategy - Department for the Economy, Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland – oral evidence

Officials joined the meeting at 10:03am.

The Committee received oral and written evidence from:

Jeremy Gardner, Director of Tourism, Telecoms and Air Connectivity, Department for the Economy;

Stuart Matthews, Head of Tourism Policy, Department for the Economy;

John McGrillen, Chief Executive, Tourism NI; and

Shane Clarke, Director of Corporate Services, Policy and NI, Tourism Ireland.

Mr Jonathan Buckley joined the meeting at 10:05am

Ms Sorchá Eastwood joined the meeting at 10:31am

Mr Jonathan Buckley left the meeting at 11:14am

Mr Philip McGuigan declared an interest as a member of Cycling Ireland.

Key issues discussed included: The Tourism Partnership Board; the absence of a 10-year plan; support for events including the Foyle Cup, Tour de France and a new Events Framework; branding issues including in respect of the North West; air connectivity; the Electronic Travel Authorisation scheme; tourism budget allocations; optimising visitor spending; developing the tourism skills offering.

Officials left the meeting at 11:31am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a further briefing from the Department on the Tourism Vision/Strategy and the 10 year action plan when these have been produced. The Committee also agreed to seek sight of the terms of reference for the Tourism Partnership Board;

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department indicating its support for an increased budget for events which promote tourism and welcoming the useful clarifications on the events grant application process provided to the organisers of the Foyle Cup.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking:

- sight of the consultation responses which supported the changes to the strategy to enhance support for the all-island brand;
- clarity as to why the Ebrington site was not considered to be suitable for support as a music venue;
- its plans for the development and promotion for tourism in the North West;
- sight of the new Events Framework;
- a breakdown of the projected £650k expenditure to support events; and
- further information on average spending per inbound visitor to Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed to write to Tourism NI seeking clarity as to the changes required to the legislation which sets out its remit in order for it to better support events and activities which might reasonably generate significant Advertising Equivalent Value for Northern Ireland.

7. Motor Insurance - Association of British Insurers (ABI) – oral evidence

Witnesses joined the meeting at 11:35am.

The Committee received oral and written evidence from:

Alastair Ross, Assistant Director, Head of Policy (Scotland, Wales and NI), ABI; and
Jonathan Fong, Manager, General Insurance Policy, ABI.

Key issues discussed included: competition restrictions on sharing jurisdictional differentials in respect of premium costs; differential between premiums paid and quotations; the Personal Injury Discount Rate; premium cost transparency; and the cost of compensation claims in NI.

Ms SORCHA Eastwood left the meeting at 12:09pm.

Witnesses left the meeting at 12:33pm.

Mr Philip McGuigan left the meeting at 12:33pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Competition and Markets Authority and Financial Conduct Authority seeking clarity as to the competition law restrictions on sharing insurance premium cost jurisdictional differentials and also seeking sight of the relevant differentials information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to ABI and invite it to provide clarity as to the competition law restrictions on sharing insurance premium cost jurisdictional differentials and also seeking sight of the relevant differentials information. The Committee also agreed to invite ABI to an informal meeting with North West MLAs to discuss the differentials between BT47 and BT48 insurance premiums.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the ABI briefing papers with the Committee for Justice and the Committee for Infrastructure.

Proceedings were suspended at 12:35pm and resumed in public session at 12:43pm.

Mr Philip McGuigan rejoined the meeting at 12:43pm.

8. Carer's Leave - Carers NI

Witnesses joined the meeting at 12:43pm.

The Committee received oral and written evidence from:

Craig Harrison, Public Affairs Manager, Carers NI; and

Angela Phillips, Senior Policy and Engagement Officer, Carers NI

Key issues discussed included: costs in respect of paid carers leave; different models of carers leave; gender employment issues; flexible working rights; and the need for legislative change.

Witnesses left the meeting 1:11pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the content and timescale for the anticipated Employment Bill.

9. Delegated Legislation – Working Time Regulations

The Committee considered a draft statutory rule: SR 2024/0000 The Working Time (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2024/0000 The Working Time (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, recommended that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

10. Correspondence

10.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

10.2 DfE reviews

The Committee considered correspondence in respect of Departmental reviews of: childcare support for those undertaking training; and the provision of training for individuals who wish to work in the childcare sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification as to whether its consideration of training for the childcare sector will include appropriate alignment with the Department of Education and the Skills Strategy so as to ensure a consistent training offer which meets the needs of the childcare sector and provides opportunities for learners to gain valuable qualifications.

10.3 Return on Investment for ALBs

The Committee considered a Departmental response in respect of the return on investment for Arms Length Bodies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to the Department asking it to provide information on the value for money provided by the relevant ALBs in terms of economy, effectiveness and efficiency.

10.4 Mineral Development and Petroleum Production Accounts 2022/23

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the Mineral Development and Petroleum Production Accounts 2022-23.

10.5 Non-Domestic RHI Tariff Business Case

Noted: The Committee noted a response to Committee queries in respect of the non-domestic RHI tariff business case from the Department of Finance indicating that an Executive decision is awaited.

10.6 Budget 2024-25

The Committee considered a memo from the Committee for Finance seeking sight of 2024-25 budget submissions from the Department which will be published in that Committee's report on the budget.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to approve the submission of relevant budget papers to the Committee for Finance.

10.7 12th report from the ESR

Noted: The Committee noted the 12th report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

10.8 Construction Employers Federation

Noted: The Committee noted a response from the Construction Employers Federation providing the Promulgation Notice for 2024 setting out hourly rates and weekly wages for construction new starts and apprentices.

10.9 Investment Transmission Ltd

The Committee considered correspondence from Investment Transmission Ltd commenting on the cap and floor mechanism for controlling interconnection costs and calling for the setting up of a joint NI-GB forum to discuss intra-UK electricity interconnection.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Utility Regulator seeking an explanation of the cap and floor mechanism and the relevant considerations in respect of interconnection issues.

10.10 Ofcom - Online Safety Act

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from Ofcom on a consultation in respect of the Online Safety Act and the protection of children.

10.11 UCAS

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from UCAS advising that it is to waive the HE application fee for students in receipt of free school meals and that students applying for HE courses will be able to see historic grade entry requirements and compare these with the current requirements.

10.12 Carbon Border Adjustment

Noted: The Committee noted further correspondence from the Treasury indicating that there is no confirmation that the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism will apply to electricity consumed in NI.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft of its Forward Work Programme.

Noted: The Committee noted that there was no facility for remote attendance at the upcoming joint concurrent meeting of 29 May 2024 and that Members would be obliged to attend in person.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to amend its Forward Work Programme in order to include oral and written evidence from: UU Economic Policy Centre on tourism and from Dr Lisa Wilson on “good jobs”.

12. Any Other Business

Agreed: Owing to the increasing length of Committee sessions, the Committee agreed to revise its refreshment arrangements and to keep these under review.

There was no other business.

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for the Economy will be at 10.00am on Wednesday 22 May 2024 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:18pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

22 May 2024