



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Bill Paper

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24 April 2026

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# Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill: key considerations

**NIAR 282-25**

This Bill Paper aims to support Northern Ireland Assembly scrutiny of the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill – as introduced into the Assembly by the Minister for the Economy on 20 April 2026. The Paper outlines essential context-setting information, along with key policy and “public purse” considerations, if the Bill is enacted as introduced.

Paper 34-26

24 April 2026

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## Key Points

- The Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill (the Bill) was introduced into the Northern Ireland Assembly (the Assembly) by the Minister for the Economy on 20 April 2026. This Bill Paper aims to support Assembly scrutiny of that Bill, including scrutiny undertaken by the Committee for the Economy.
- If enacted as introduced, the Bill would amend existing legislation to extend the Utility Regulator’s (UR) current functions, broadening them to include the provision of decarbonisation-related “advice, information or assistance” to the Department for the Economy (DfE), to inform the Department’s transposition and implementation of its obligations under the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 (2022 Act) through its proposals, plans, policies and strategies. However, the new power would be exercised **when** the DfE would make a reasonable request **and** the UR “as far as [would be] reasonably practicable” would provide such advice, information or assistance. (Note, this new “qualified” UR power would **not** include within its scope the other Northern Ireland Executive departments.)
- The Bill contains one substantive clause, specifying three provisions: 1(1) provides the UR “may” provide such advice; 1(2) requires the UR to comply with DfE requests “as far as reasonably practicable”; and, 1(3) defines key terms (including a broad definition of the “energy sector”).
- DfE states the new power is needed to help develop low-carbon energy policies required to meet statutory and policy commitments, including sectoral plans and targets under the 2022 Act.
- DfE’s consultation on the draft Bill received 50 responses; 76% supported the proposals, 16% did not support, and 8% did not answer the relevant question.
- Potential scrutiny issues include: under what circumstance would the UR be able to refuse a request for advice from the DfE; how UR advice may interact with advice from other bodies (including a future Just Transition

Commission and the Consumer Council); and how potentially conflicting advice would be handled.

- The DfE views the Bill as a first step, with further legislation on UR powers planned, but not in this mandate.
- Public purse implications are expected to be limited, if costs are recovered through electricity and gas licence fees. However, as the EFM notes, it is reasonably foreseeable that “alternative funding mechanisms” could be required if the UR’s advice would fall outside functions that would be funded through licence fees.

## Executive Summary

This Bill Paper sets out key considerations for Northern Ireland Assembly scrutiny of the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill (the Bill), including that undertaken by the Committee for the Economy. The Bill was introduced in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 20 April 2026. It is narrowly focused, containing one substantive clause – Clause 1 – which extends the Utility Regulator’s (UR) current functions, broadening them to include the provision of decarbonisation-related “advice, information or assistance” to the Department for the Economy (DfE), to inform the Department’s transposition and implementation of its obligations under the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 (2022 Act) through its proposals, plans, policies and strategies.

The Bill’s underlying policy objective, as stated by DfE, is to establish this new (additional) UR function, in order to support essential DfE low-carbon energy policy development to meet its statutory and policy commitments, including carbon budgets and sectoral plans under the 2022 Act, including both the net zero target for 2050 and the renewable sources electricity consumption target of achieving 80% by 2030. It is within this context that the Economy Minister brings this Bill, marking DfE’s first step, alongside the intention to bring forward further legislation in future years that would underpin additional regulatory or governance arrangements associated with the transition to low-carbon energy, including, for example, offshore renewables, hydrogen regulation, smart metering and evolving licensing arrangements.

If enacted as introduced, the Bill would empower the UR to provide the DfE with “advice, information or assistance” for the purposes of, or in connection with, DfE’s development of proposals, plans, policies or strategies required by or which DfE considers appropriate under the 2022 Act. The new power would be exercised **when** the DfE would make a reasonable request **and** the UR “as far as [would be] reasonably practicable” would provide such advice, information or assistance. (Note, this new “qualified” UR power would **not** include within its scope the other Northern Ireland Executive departments.) When scrutinising the Bill, a question therefore arises about the Clause’s specified “qualified” power,

how would it operate in practice. For example, if the UR received such a request from the DfE, but the UR did not think it was reasonably practicable to provide the DfE with its advice, information or assistance, or if UR's advice conflicted/contradicted the DfE's position, then how would that be managed in practice?

The scope of the advice that could be sought is potentially broad. The 2022 Act places obligations on DfE that include: developing and publishing sectoral plans for the energy sector (including electricity and heat) and the industrial process sector; contributing proposals and policies to carbon budget-setting; progressing net zero and renewable electricity targets; and, having due regard to matters including cross-jurisdictional coordination, social and economic impacts, rural impacts, and the Just Transition Principle. DfE's consultation report also indicates that advice may be sought on high-priority issues and emerging technologies (including, for example, offshore renewables, hydrogen, heat, system services and other evolving technologies).

The DfE consulted on the draft Bill between June and August 2024 and received 50 responses. A majority of respondents (76%) supported the proposals. Supportive views commonly emphasised the urgency of enabling progress on decarbonisation and the importance of energy transition to wider climate targets. In contrast, those not in support raised a range of concerns, including the Bill's ambitions; that existing statutory duties may already provide a basis for the UR to consider environmental sustainability; and that the proposals risk drawing an independent economic regulator into policy development, which is ordinarily the DfE's responsibility.

The 2022 Act provides for the establishment of a Just Transition Commission, which would have advisory functions relating to how departments comply with the Just Transition Principle. In addition, the Consumer Council has a statutory role in providing advice and information in relation to energy policy impacts on consumers. If the UR's advice to the DfE would extend into matters such as Just Transition considerations, there may be areas of overlap with those bodies. Members may wish to explore how DfE envisages the respective roles operating in practice, and how potentially conflicting or contradictory advice would be managed.

The Bill is DfE-specific. Other Northern Ireland departments would not have the same power to request advice from the UR under the Bill as introduced. The DfE has stated that it would share information obtained from the UR with other departments to inform related policy development. the DfE's stated aim would be to maintain governance, avoid duplication of requests and retain ministerial responsibility for overall energy policy.

On 26 March 2025, the UR highlighted in evidence to the Committee for the Economy (the Committee) that Northern Ireland's energy regulatory framework has not kept pace with other regulators; contrasting this with updates to Ofgem's statutory framework. DfE's Consultation Report presented the Bill as a first step, with the intention to bring forward further legislation to support additional low-carbon regulatory arrangements, including offshore renewables, hydrogen, smart metering and updated licensing. On 22 April 2026, DfE Officials indicated to the Committee that further legislation was not expected during the current Assembly mandate.

The Bill's financial implications are expected to be limited if associated UR costs are recovered through electricity and gas licence fees, which are paid by licence holders and are ultimately recovered from consumers through regulated price controls and energy bills. The UR has estimated that it would require additional staffing capacity following implementation. The Bill's EFM indicates four additional full-time equivalent staff at an estimated cost of £328,000 in year one. The EFM also notes that where DfE requires advice, information or assistance outside electricity and gas functions that cannot be funded by licence fees, "alternative funding mechanisms" may need to be considered. Members may wish to seek clarity on the circumstances in which that could occur, and the potential scale of such an impact on the public purse.

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## Introduction

The [Utility Regulator \(Support for Decarbonisation Preparation\) Bill](#) (the Bill) was introduced into the Northern Ireland Assembly (the Assembly) by the Minister for the Economy on 20 April 2026. If enacted as introduced, the Bill would amend existing legislation to extend the Utility Regulator’s (UR) current functions, broadening them to include the provision of decarbonisation-related “advice, information or assistance” to the Department for the Economy (DfE), to inform the Department’s transposition and implementation of its obligations under the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 (2022 Act) through its proposals, plans, policies and strategies.

The new power would be exercised **when** the DfE would make a reasonable request **and** the UR “as far as [would be] reasonably practicable” would provide such advice, information or assistance

This Bill Paper - prepared by the Finance and Economics Team in the Research and Information Service (RaISe) - aims to support Assembly Members’ scrutiny of the Bill, including that undertaken by Members in the Committee for the Economy (the Committee). It outlines key potential policy and “public purse” considerations.

The Paper draws on the Bill’s accompanying [Explanatory and Financial Memorandum](#) (EFM) and other available information sources at time of writing. **Note**, this Paper was prepared prior to the Bill’s Second Stage Debate under Assembly Standing Orders and therefore cannot consider those Assembly proceedings.<sup>1</sup>

The Paper is structured as follows, with potential scrutiny points stated throughout:

1. [Background](#)
2. [Introduced Bill – policy changes](#)

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<sup>1</sup> [Standing Orders as amended 01 July 2025](#). Note, for this limited basis, RaISe and the Committee for Economy Clerk agreed earlier compilation of this Paper, to accommodate Committee’s work plans.

3. [Commentary on Clause 1 as introduced](#)
4. [Key potential “public purse” considerations](#)
5. [Key takeaways](#)

## 1 Background

Below provides an overview of the context in which this Bill was introduced. First, it sets out rationale for Bill as stated in the accompanying EFM; and second, a high-level summary of the UR’s current functions with regard to energy.

### 1.1 Stated rationale for Bill

According to the Bill’s EFM, Article 3 of the [Energy \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2003](#) established the Utility Regulator (UR) as the “economic regulator for electricity and gas in Northern Ireland” (see sub-section 1.2 of this Paper for further details). The Bill, if enacted as introduced, would amend the UR’s powers to “empower” it to provide the DfE with “advice, information and assistance” relating to net-zero transition. Specifically, the EFM highlights statutory commitments made under the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 and policy commitments made through the Northern Ireland Energy Strategy : “Path to Net Zero Energy” (2021) as areas where this new power is required.<sup>2</sup>

In this regard, the EFM states the legislation is intended:

*...to facilitate the development of low carbon energy policies essential to fulfilling the first Climate Budget (2023-2027), and to empower the UR in its role of providing technical option to inform development of energy policy...<sup>3</sup>*

Moreover, in evidence to the Committee on 22 April 2026, DfE Officials noted that the Bill was requested by the UR to clarify its legal duties and to provide

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<sup>2</sup> [EFM - As Introduced](#)

<sup>3</sup> [EFM - As Introduced](#)

assurance on its statutory powers. Officials added that UR was involved in the Bill's design and that it had agreed with the Bill.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 Current functions of the UR

The UR was established by the [Energy Order \(Northern Ireland\) 2003](#) and its powers are set out in the following five pieces of legislation:

1. [The Electricity \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1992](#)
2. [The Gas \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1996](#)
3. [The Energy \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2003](#)
4. [The Electricity \(Single Wholesale Market\) \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2007](#)
5. [The Energy Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2011](#)

Table 1, below, provides a high-level summary of the UR's powers as provided for in each legislative instrument.

**Table 1: UR's statutory powers as of April 2026**

Legislation	Statutory powers
<a href="#">The Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992</a>	Sets out the UR's role as granting, modifying and enforcing licences for the generation, supply, transmission, distribution of electricity in Northern Ireland.
<a href="#">The Gas (Northern Ireland) Order 1996</a>	Sets out the UR's role as granting, modifying and enforcing licences for the conveying, storage and supply of natural gas in Northern Ireland.
<a href="#">The Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003</a>	Sets out, amongst other things, the UR's principle objective in relation to electricity and gas, which is to "protect the interest of consumers of electricity supplied by authorised" by "promoting effective competition". Of potential relevance in the context of the Bill, Article 5(c) of the Order requires the UR to carry out its electricity functions in such ways as to "secure a diverse, viable and environmentally sustainable long-term energy supply".

<sup>4</sup> [Committee for the Economy Meeting, Wednesday 22 April 2026 - Northern Ireland Assembly TV](#)

Legislation	Statutory powers
<a href="#">The Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003</a> (continued)	The UR's principle objective with regard to gas is to "promote the development of an efficient, economic and co-ordinated gas industry in Northern Ireland", having regard to the "protection of the interests of consumers of gas".
<a href="#">The Electricity (Single Wholesale Market) (Northern Ireland) Order 2007</a>	Sets out the UR granting, modifying and enforcing licences for Single Electricity Market (SEM) operators. It established a Committee of the UR to known as the SEM Committee. The Order also sets out the UR's principle objective with regard to the SEM – "to protect the interest of consumers of electricity in Northern Ireland and Ireland", by promoting effective competition through the SEM.
<a href="#">The Energy Act (Northern Ireland) 2011</a>	Provides the UR with a discretionary power to make regulations prescribing, and carrying out research into, standards of performance for gas suppliers and conveyors. Such regulation required the consent of the DfE. The Act also provided the UR with the power to determine overall standards of performance for gas suppliers and conveyors.

Source: Compiled by RaiSe (2026), relying on links to source material in Table

## 2 Introduced Bill – policy changes

The Bill seeks to expand the range of functions of the UR to enable it to "assist the Department for the Economy in developing plans for the decarbonisation of the energy sector". It is a short bill, consisting of just one substantive clause at Clause 1, which if the Bill is enacted as introduced, would have the effect summarised in Table 2, below.

**Table 2: Effect of Clause 1 if enacted as introduced<sup>5</sup>**

Clause and paragraph	Effect of Clause if enacted as introduced
Clause 1(1)	Clause 1(1) would provide that the UR “ <i>may</i> ” provide “advice, information or assistance” to the DfE “for the purposes of or in connection with” the development of proposals, plans, policies or strategies that the DfE is required to by, or which it deems appropriate, under the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.
Clause 1(2)	Clause 1(2) would require the UR to comply “as far as reasonably practicable” with requests to provide advice to the DfE as set out in Clause 1(1).
Clause 1(3)	<p>Clause 1(3) is definitional, it defines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The 2022 Act” as the Climate Act (Northern Ireland) 2022</li> <li>• “The Department” as the DfE</li> <li>• “The energy sector” as anything to with production, supply or consumption of energy (of any kind)</li> <li>• - “The Utility Regulator” as the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulator</li> </ul>

Source: [The Bill - As Introduced](#) (2026)

To further understand the Bill’s specified functions, as conferred on the UR, it is essential to understand the statutory requirements, including obligations, placed on the DfE under the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (the 2022 Act). Table 3, below, summarises those key requirements.

<sup>5</sup> [Bill - As Introduced](#)

**Table 3: Requirements placed on DfE by the 2022 Act**

Article of 2022 Act	Requirements placed on the DfE
<a href="#">Article 14</a>	<p>Requires the DfE to develop and publish sectoral plans for the energy sector setting out how the sector will contribute to the Act's targets, including the Act's central net zero emission by 2050 target as well as any interim targets.</p> <p>Such plans "must include proposals and policies for energy production and the supply of private and public heating and cooling systems".</p>
<a href="#">Article 15</a>	<p>Requires the DfE to ensure that "at least 80% of electricity consumption is from renewable sources by 2030".</p>
<a href="#">Article 16</a>	<p>Requires the DfE to develop and publish sectoral plans for the "industrial process sector" setting out how the sector will contribute to the Act's targets, including the Act's central net zero emission by 2050 target as well as any interim targets.</p>
<a href="#">Article 24</a>	<p>Ensures, alongside other Northern Ireland departments that net Northern Ireland emissions to not exceed those set out in each carbon budget.</p>
<a href="#">Article 29</a>	<p>Contributes to the setting of carbon budget by providing proposals and policies for each budget period.</p>
<a href="#">Article 30</a>	<p>Have due regard, with deciding policies and proposals for the following, amongst other things, in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The desirability of coordinating policies with other parts of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland or elsewhere.</li> <li>•The financial, social, economic and rural impact of the policies.</li> <li>•The "Just Transition Principle" as defined in Section 30(3)</li> </ul>

Article of 2022 Act	Requirements placed on the DfE
<a href="#">Article 38</a>	Requires each department to report to the DAERA with information on progress made in its areas of responsibility.
<a href="#">Article 42</a>	Requires each department, where its targets are unmet, to provide an explanation to the DAERA.

Source: [The 2022 Act](#) (2022)

### 3 Commentary on Clause 1 as introduced

The following sub-sections discuss the changes that would be introduced should Clause 1 of the Bill be enacted as introduced. They draw on the responses to the DfE [consultation](#) on the Bill's proposals that took place between 19 June and 16 August 2024, and other sources where appropriate.

#### 3.1 Consultation responses

The consultation carried out by the DfE on the draft Bill received 50 responses, of which 76% (38 responses) supported the draft Bill. Of the remainder 16% (7 respondents) were not in favour, and the remaining 8% (4 respondents) did not answer the specific question.

Table 4, below, provides a summary of the reasons given by respondents who supported and did not support the intention of the draft Bill – that is, to provide the UR with the power to provide advice to the DfE in relation to the DfE's obligations under the 2022 Act.

**Table 4: Summary of responses to DfE Bill Consultation, 2024<sup>6</sup>**

View expressed by supportive respondents	View expressed by unsupportive respondents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was an urgent need to make amendment proposed.</li> <li>• Progress on the decarbonisation of energy was important to Northern Ireland’s wider climate targets.</li> <li>• The Bill should be prioritised to ensure solutions to support climate targets could be put in place as quickly as possible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some respondents argued that Article 12(5)(c) of the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, which requires the UR to carry out its functions in such a way as to “secure a diverse, viable and environmentally sustainable long-term energy supply” provided the UR with sufficient cover to provide the advice to the DfE.</li> <li>• The Bill is not sufficiently ambitious.</li> <li>• The UR should not be involved in policy development, which is the DfE’s responsibility.</li> </ul>

### 3.2 Meaning of “reasonably practicable” and “reasonable request” within the context of the Bill

As outlined in Table 4 above, Clause 1(1) states that the UR *may* provide advice to the DfE on its obligations under the 2022 Act. Clause 1(2) states that the UR *must* comply with any “reasonable request” by the DfE to exercise the power that would be provided under Clause 1(1) “as far as reasonably practicable”.

The EFM describes this combination of discretionary power and obligation as a “qualified duty”. The EFM further clarifies that:

<sup>6</sup> [Utility Regulator \(Support for Decarbonisation Preparation\) Bill: Public Consultation Summary](#)

*This is to allow for times when the UR may be unable to meet a request from the Department, for example when it considers that it has insufficient resource to practically meet a request.<sup>7</sup>*

The Committee may wish to explore this further with the DfE. In particular, the Committee may wish to seek further clarification on how this “qualified duty” would operate in practice and on the definition of “reasonably practicable” and “reasonable request”.

#### **Potential Scrutiny Points**

1. How does the DfE envisage the “qualified duty” that the Bill would place on the UR to work in practice?
2. What is the DfE’s understanding of the meaning of “reasonably practicable” within the context of the Bill?
3. What is the DfE’s understanding of the meaning of “reasonable request” within the context of the Bill?

### 3.3 Potential interaction of advice to provided by the UR with advice provided by other organisations

The DfE’s [Consultation Response](#) document states that the advice sought from the UR by the Department would include “high priority issues” including “Offshore Renewables, Hydrogen, Heat and System Service, and new and evolving technologies”.<sup>8</sup>

As noted in Section 2, above, Clause 1 of the Bill would, if enacted as introduced, enable the UR to provide advice, information or assistance to the DfE on policies, plans, or strategy required by, or which the DfE deems appropriate, under the 2022 Act. Table 3, also above, noted that DfE requirements under the 2022 Act include:

- Sectoral plans for both the energy (both electricity and heat) and industrial sectors.

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<sup>7</sup> [EFM - As Introduced](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Utility Regulator \(Support for Decarbonisation Preparation\) Bill: Public Consultation Summary](#)

- Meeting net zero and renewable electricity targets.
- Contributing to carbon budgets.
- The interaction between policy in Northern Ireland and other jurisdictions, the social, economic and rural impact of policy, and the interaction of policy with the Just Transition Principle.

In addition to setting out the key responsibilities of the Northern Ireland Departments in relation to climate change, the 2022 Act also makes provision for the creation of a Just Transition Commission (JTC). That body would, once established, have two functions:

1. Oversee the implementation of the Just Transition elements of the 2022 Act.
2. Provide advice to Northern Ireland departments on how to ensure that proposals, policies, strategies and plans required under the 2022 act comply with the Just Transition Principle.

Should the Bill be enacted as introduced, there could be overlap in the roles of the UR and the JTC, with both tasked with providing advice how proposals, policies, plans, etc. comply with the Just Transition Principle (JTP). The JTP is defined as “taking action to reduce Northern Ireland emissions and increase Northern Ireland removals” in a way that achieves the 11 objectives outlined in Table 5.<sup>9</sup>

Note, at the time of writing, the JTC has not been established; although the process to establish it had commenced. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs carried out a consultation on the establishment of a JTC between November 2024 and January 2025.<sup>10</sup> On 27 March 2026, the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs laid the draft Climate Change (Just Transition Commission) Regulations in the Assembly. Those regulations are to be subject to Affirmative Resolution on Assembly Standing Orders. At the time of writing, those regulations had not been considered by the

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<sup>9</sup> [Climate Change Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Consultation on the establishment of a Just Transition Commission | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

relevant Committee, nor had Plenary debate and vote on the regulation taken place in the Assembly.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 5: Just Transition Principles Objectives as set out in 2022 Act<sup>12</sup>**

	JTP Objective
1	Supporting jobs and the growth of jobs that are climate resilient and environmentally friendly.
2	Supporting the agriculture sector and other sectors of the economy in Northern Ireland that are likely to be most affected by action to reduce those emissions and increase those removals.
3	Supporting low-carbon investment and infrastructure.
4	Developing and maintaining consensus through engagement with (among others) workers, trade unions, communities, non-governmental organisations and representatives of the interests of business and industry.
5	Creating decent, fair and high-value work in a way which does not negatively affect the current workforce.
6	Contributing to a resource-efficient and sustainable economy.
7	Supporting persons who are most affected by climate change, particularly those who may have done the least to cause it or maybe the least equipped to adapt to its effects.
8	Reducing, with a view to eliminating, poverty, inequality and social deprivation.
9	Eliminating gender inequality and advancing equality of opportunity between men and women.
10	Supporting the social and economic needs of people in rural areas
11	Taking into account the future generations.

Source: [The 2022 Act](#) (2022)

If the Bill be enacted as introduced, it is unclear which organisation's advice would have priority, should each body provide conflicting or contradictory advice.

<sup>11</sup> [Statutory Rules](#) (accessed 24 April 2026)

<sup>12</sup> [Climate Change Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#)

Also relevant here is that, the Consumer Council Northern Ireland has a statutory role to provide and publish advice and information in relation to the impact of energy policy on consumers in Northern Ireland. Hence, there is a reasonably foreseeable potential overlap of the Consumer Council role in protecting consumers and the JTP objectives, particularly Objective eight: “reducing, with a view to eliminating, poverty, inequality and social deprivation”. Again, should the Bill be enacted as introduced and the UR functions be expanded to including the provision of advice on JTP matters, it is uncertain which organisation’s advice would have priority should each body provide conflicting or contradictory advice.

In its Consultation Report, the DfE stated that:

*The relationship between the Department and the CCNI [Consumer Council] is unchanged by this Bill.<sup>13</sup>*

The Consultation Report added that the DfE recognised:

*...the need for a holistic view of how bodies operate in the energy sector, including consumer projection. This will be considered as part of the development process for future legislation.<sup>14</sup>*

#### **Potential Scrutiny Point(s)**

4. Does the DfE envisage the role of the UR advice to extend to matters concerning Just Transition?
5. If so, how would the DfE prioritise advice from potentially three separate bodies, particularly on occasion where that advice would be conflicting or contradictory?
6. How would the DfE plan to consider “a holistic view of how bodies operate in the energy sector” in future legislation?
7. When will such legislation be introduced to the Assembly?

<sup>13</sup> [Utility Regulator \(Support for Decarbonisation Preparation\) Bill: Public Consultation Summary](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Utility Regulator \(Support for Decarbonisation Preparation\) Bill: Public Consultation Summary](#)

### 3.4 Scope of the advice provided by the UR

As noted in sub-section 2, above, Clause 1 of the Bill would, if enacted as introduced, allow the DfE to seek advice from the UR, and for the UR to provide that advice in areas relating to the 2022 Act. The Bill does not seek to provide this power to any other Northern Ireland department.

This aspect of the Bill was raised by respondents to the DfE June 2024 consultation on the draft Bill, who commented:

*...that the Bill should be widened to include other Departments to support delivery of their objectives under the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.*

The DfE's response noted that it had worked:

*...collaboratively with UR, DSO [Departmental Solicitors Office] and OLC [Office of the Legislative Counsel] over a two-year period to produce the draft Bill".*

That collaboration included the consideration of the legal framework to assess:

*...whether there was a gap in its ability to support the Department with low carbon energy policies, essential to the Department fulfilling its obligations under the CCA [2022 Act] and the NI Executive's Energy Strategy.<sup>15</sup>*

The DfE response added:

*Extending the legislation to include other Departments would require a similar assessment by those Departments of their legal framework in relation to CCA, how this interacts with the policies that they want to bring forward, and the role the UR plays in advising them on those policies.*

Recognising that the 2022 Act placed requirements on all departments and that cross-departmental work was necessary to achieve its objectives, the DfE concluded its commentary on this point, stating:

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<sup>15</sup> [Utility Regulator \(Support for Decarbonisation Preparation\) Bill: Public Consultation Summary](#)

*The Department for Economy can share information obtained from the UR to other Departments, to inform development of their policies that are linked to energy. This central role maintains governance that aligns with existing Departmental functions, avoids risk of duplication of requests being made to regulator, and ensures that the responsibility for overall development of energy policy remains with the Minister for the Economy.<sup>16</sup>*

### 3.5 Scope of the Bill

On 26 March 2025, the UR briefed the Committee on gaps in its current powers. It noted that the [Energy Order \(Northern Ireland\) 2003](#) had not been updated to reflect changes in energy policy and did not factor in “things unforeseen” when it was brought through. This, the UR argued, contrasted with the legislative framework for Ofgem which had undergone a series of updates.<sup>17</sup> The UR highlighted that “at least twelve primary legislative acts” had amended Ofgem’s statutory and that this includes legislation on:

- reduction of greenhouse gasses
- contributions to sustainable development
- development of social and environmental guidance
- microgeneration
- information gathering powers
- promotion of reduction in carbon emissions
- promotion of reduction in home heating costs;
- extending time limits for financial penalties;
- consumer Redress;
- complaints handling;
- Ombudsman Schemes;
- impact assessment;
- power to direct Network Code Modifications;
- energy supply special administration; and

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<sup>16</sup> [Utility Regulator \(Support for Decarbonisation Preparation\) Bill: Public Consultation Summary](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Committee for the Economy Meeting, Wednesday 26 March 2025 - Northern Ireland Assembly TV](#)

- offshore generation<sup>18</sup>

More recently, in evidence to the Committee on 18 March 2026, the UR reiterated in desire to see energy legislation in Northern Ireland brought into line with the legislation that applied to Ofgem in Great Britain and to the Commission for Regulation of Utilities in the Republic of Ireland.<sup>19</sup>

Whilst the Bill does not provide all the legislative amendments the UR would like to see, the consultation on the draft Bill stated that it was a “first step” and noted that the DfE has intentions to introduce further legislation to “provide the UR with additional powers in areas dealing with low carbon solutions” in “future years”. During consultation 70% of respondents were in favour of such legislation, with 16% not in favour, and a further 14% choosing not to answer the question.

In response, the DfE reiterated the need for future legislation and stated that this be based on collaboration with working groups and public consultation. The Department added that following areas would require a “legislative underpinning” in relation to:<sup>20</sup>

- Offshore Renewables in Northern Ireland Waters
- Revised licensing and regulatory arrangements for new technologies such as aggregators and demand response solutions.
- Roll-out of smart electricity meters.
- Developing biomethane production.<sup>21</sup>

In evidence to the Committee on 22 April 2026, DfE Officials noted that the Bill would allow the UR to assist in the formulation of such legislation. During the same evidence session, the Officials stated that additional legislation would not be introduced during this mandate.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Written evidence to the Committee for the Economy 26 March 2025

<sup>19</sup> [Committee for the Economy Meeting, Wednesday 18 March 2026 - Northern Ireland Assembly TV](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Utility Regulator \(Support for Decarbonisation Preparation\) Bill: Public Consultation Summary](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Utility Regulator \(Support for Decarbonisation Preparation\) Bill: Public Consultation Summary](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Committee for the Economy Meeting, Wednesday 22 April 2026 - Northern Ireland Assembly TV](#)

**Potential Scrutiny Points:**

8. When will the DfE introduce further legislation to amend the UR powers?
9. Why has the DfE chosen to adopt this phased approach to amending the legislation?
10. What has prevented the DfE from introducing additional powers at this stage?

## 4 Key potential “public purse” considerations

This section considers key potential financial implications for the “public purse” arising from the Bill, if enacted as introduced. Before examining those implications directly, it first addresses the budgetary context at both central and devolved government levels for 2025/26 and beyond – the context in which the Assembly, including the Committee for the Economy, considers the introduced Bill. Thereafter, it examines key public purse considerations about the Bill. Included throughout are potential scrutiny points in blue boxes, which Members, including those in the Committee for Economy, may wish to draw on.

### 4.1 Financial and budgetary context for Northern Ireland

Below provides some essential context-setting: initially, the term “public purse” is defined in **Insights Box 1**, followed by an overview summarising the challenging budgetary environment within which the DE is currently operating:

**Insights Box 1: Definition of the “public purse”**

The term public purse refers to taxpayers’ money raised through taxation and other sources of government revenue. Government departments in Northern Ireland are custodians of the public purse and designated Accounting Officers are required to ensure that Minister(s) and their departments appreciate “the need for efficiency, economy, effectiveness and prudence in the administration of public resources, to secure value for public money”<sup>23</sup> in accordance with public financial management principles<sup>24</sup>.

In Northern Ireland, the public purse encompasses the Northern Ireland Block Grant from His Majesty’s (HM) Treasury; revenues raised regionally; and other funding sources. The Northern Ireland Executive is responsible for allocating those monies through the Executive Budget, which it is to do so in line with the financial arrangements under current devolution, including requirements specified in the [Budget Sustainability Plan](#) and the accompanying [Budget Improvement Plan Roadmap](#), which aim to improve Northern Ireland’s public finances, while seeking to balance numerous competing priorities and demands for limited available funding.

If the Bill would be enacted as introduced and receive Royal Assent, then the DE would be responsible for covering costs arising when implementing the Bill, including the specified statutory duties. At the given time, the DE would do so using its budget and/or seeking additional monies from the Executive.

The central and devolved budgetary contexts remain challenging across the United Kingdom, due to a number of contributory factors that are relevant to Members, including the Committee’s consideration of this Bill, which are detailed in Appendix 1 to this Paper.

## 4.2 Key public purse considerations relating to the introduced Bill

The UR’s expenditure is largely offset by revenue raised through annual licence fees “on the issue of electricity, gas and water and sewerage licences”. In each case, the fees paid are calculated annually on the basis of a determination made by the UR.<sup>25</sup> Those fees are paid by the licence holder, but are often recovered from consumers through their energy bills - for example, electricity licence fees are :

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<sup>23</sup> Department of Finance (2023). *Managing Public Money Northern Ireland*, paragraph 2.4.2, page 20.

<sup>24</sup> The standards expected of Accounting Officer’s organisations and wider ministerial and departmental responsibilities and duties expected in relation to the management of public funds are outlined in the *Managing Public Money Northern Ireland* policy, published by the Department of Finance in November 2023. The Accounting Officer, acting within the authority of the Minister(s) to whom they are responsible, must ensure the organisation meets the standards set out in this policy.

<sup>25</sup> Utility Regulator [Annual Report and Accounts 2024-2025.pdf](#)

*... ultimately recovered from electricity customers through an operating cost allowance in the price controls of regulated businesses.<sup>26</sup>*

In the financial year 2024/25 UR income from licence fees total £15.8 million (up from £11.2 million in 2023/24). comprising:

- £10.5 million from electricity licence fees (£7.3 million in 2023/24)
- £4.2 million from gas licence fees (£3.4 million in 2023/24)
- £1.1 million in water licence fees (£0.5 million in 2023/24)<sup>27</sup>

Additional income is also raised from the Northern Ireland Renewable Obligation (NIRO) Buy-Out Fund. That Fund is funded by electricity suppliers that chose to meet their NIRO obligation “by presenting ROCs, paying a buy-out fee or a combination of both”. That money is used by the UR to fund the administration of the NIRO. In 2024/25, the UR received £2.3 million from the NIRO fund (£1.8 million in 2023/24).<sup>28</sup>

The combination of the above means that the majority of UR expenditure is covered by those revenue streams, rather than the public purse. The UR, however, does receive money from the public purse. Table 6, below, provides a breakdown of the organisation’s Total Managed Expenditure (TME) into Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) and Annual Managed Expenditure (AME) for the financial year 2024/25.

**Table 6: UR Total Managed Expenditure 2024/25<sup>29</sup>**

	<b>Estimate 2024/25 £000</b>	<b>Provisional outrun 2024/25 £000</b>	<b>Underspend/ (overspend) £000</b>
<b>Resource DEL</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>14</b>
Including non-ring-fenced	182	170	12
Ring-Fenced	208	206	2
<b>Capital DEL</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>-</b>
Including general capital	70	70	-

<sup>26</sup> Utility Regulator [Annual Report and Accounts 2024-2025.pdf](#)

<sup>27</sup> Utility Regulator [Annual Report and Accounts 2024-2025.pdf](#)

<sup>28</sup> Utility Regulator [Annual Report and Accounts 2024-2025.pdf](#)

<sup>29</sup> Utility Regulator [Annual Report and Accounts 2024-2025.pdf](#)

	Estimate 2024/25 £000	Provisional outturn 2024/25 £000	Underspend/ (overspend) £000
Total DEL	460	446	14
<b>AME</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>1</b>
AME Resource	1	-	1
AME Capital	500	500	-
<b>TME</b>	<b>961</b>	<b>946</b>	<b>15</b>

Source: UR ([2025](#))

The DfE's 2025 response to the draft Bill consultation recognised that the proposed Bill would have financial implications if enacted. Specifically, the response stated:

*The UR has advised the Department that the Bill will result in an additional five FTE staff members in the first year following implementation. It is difficult to forecast additional resource requirements beyond this, as this will be dependent on the nature of advice, information and assistance needed to develop further policies.<sup>30</sup>*

The consultation response document also stated that:

*The UR has confirmed that their intention is to recover the costs associated with the Bill through licence fees which are then borne by the licence holders.<sup>31</sup>*

Given the UR's intention stated above, the Bill is unlikely to have limited public purse implications as its implementation would be funded by licence fee revenue rather than money allocated through the Northern Ireland Executive Budget. The Bill's EFM provides further detail of the potential implications of the Bill. It states that UR has estimated it will require four additional full-time equivalent staff in the first year, at a cost of £328,000. This is one staff member fewer than was anticipated by the DfE in their consultation response (see quote above).

<sup>30</sup> [Utility Regulator \(Support for Decarbonisation Preparation\) Bill: Public Consultation Summary](#)

<sup>31</sup> [Utility Regulator \(Support for Decarbonisation Preparation\) Bill: Public Consultation Summary](#)

**Potential Scrutiny Point:**

11. What changed between the DfE's consultation report and the writing of the Bill's EFM, to result in the stated change of estimated staff need?

The EFM reiterates that:

*It is the intention of the UR that electricity and gas licence holder fees will be used to fund work associated with the Bill that falls within the UR functions under electricity and gas legislation.<sup>32</sup>*

The EFM adds an important caveat to this, stating:

*Should the Department require advice, information or assistance to support policy development outside electricity and gas functions that cannot be funded by licence fees, consideration will be given to alternative funding mechanisms.<sup>33</sup>*

Furthermore, the EFM notes that Article 3(3) of the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003:

*...provides that the expenses of the UR are to be defrayed out of money appropriated for that purpose by Act of the Assembly – i.e. through the annual Budget Act process.<sup>34</sup>*

The Committee may wish to seek further clarification on the circumstances when “alternative funding mechanisms” could be required, and any estimates of the cost to public purse of utilising such funding mechanisms.

**Potential Scrutiny Points:**

12. What circumstances does the DfE envisage that the advice provided by the UR to require “alternative funding mechanisms” would be needed, rather than funding through licence fees?

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<sup>32</sup> [EFM - As Introduced](#)

<sup>33</sup> [EFM - As Introduced](#)

<sup>34</sup> [EFM - As Introduced](#)

13. What is the DfE's estimate of the cost to the public purse of using such "alternative funding mechanisms"?

Respondents to the consultation also raised concerns and made comments about the funding of the new powers. Those concerns and comments covered areas such as consumer protection and alternative funding models. They were summarised in the consultation response document as follows:

- Strong justification was needed should the Bill result in increased energy tariffs.
- Costs resulting from the Bill should not be paid by licence holders rather, as they relate to the climate agenda, funding should be supplied from government budgets.
- Other respondents held the opposite view and felt it was important that taxpayers' funds were not used to fund costs associated with the Bill.
- An increase in advice, information and assistance requests from the Department should not be considered to automatically lead to additional staffing.
- An increase in UR staffing may lead to additional resourcing needs by licence holders to furnish information requests.
- That considerations of costs must recognise the importance of "balance between consumer needs now and consumer needs in the future". The DfE should focus on long-term value.
- Consideration should be given to socialising costs across the consumer base.
- Difficult to estimate costs until the scope of the Bill is completely understood, but it is reasonable to assume that they will be offset by the longer-term financial benefits of the net zero economy.
- A suggestion was made that if the green economy is developed and taxed appropriately, that receipts from tax revenues could be used to mitigate costs to government and its agents.<sup>35</sup>

Based on responses received, the DfE stated that:

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<sup>35</sup> [Utility Regulator \(Support for Decarbonisation Preparation\) Bill: Public Consultation Summary](#)

*... additional advice has been sought from Departmental Solicitors Office. This legal advice will be considered to assess whether further amendments are needed to the draft bill.<sup>36</sup>*

### Potential Scrutiny Points

14. What was the nature of the advice received from the Departmental Solicitors Office?
15. How has that advice influenced DfE's decisions in relation to the funding arrangements set out in the introduced Bill?
16. What consideration has the DfE given to the alternative funding models raised by consultation respondents – such as funding it through the public purse, or through a tax on the green economy, or other?

## 5 Key takeaways

The Bill, which was introduced on 20 April 2026, is narrowly focused. It has one substantive clause, but that clause – Clause 1 – which would expand the Utility Regulator's (UR) role by enabling it to provide the DfE with advice, information and assistance linked to decarbonisation proposals, plans, policies and strategies under the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022.

Clause 1 provides that the new power would be exercised **when** the DfE would make a reasonable request **and** the UR "as far as [would be] reasonably practicable" would provide such advice, information or assistance. (Note, this new "qualified" UR power would **not** include within its scope the other Northern Ireland Executive departments.)

DfE's stated policy rationale is that the power is needed to develop low-carbon energy policies to meet statutory targets, including: carbon budgets, sectoral plans, net zero by 2050, and the 80% renewable electricity consumption target by 2030.

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<sup>36</sup> [Utility Regulator \(Support for Decarbonisation Preparation\) Bill: Public Consultation Summary](#)

Consultation responses were largely supportive (76%), but other respondents views highlighted concerns about regulator independence, whether existing statutory duties already enable such advice, and whether the Bill is either insufficiently ambitious or inappropriately framed.

Should the Bill be enacted as introduced, the UR would be empowered to provide advice to the DfE on the delivery of the Department's obligations under the Climate Change (Northern Ireland) Act 2022. Those obligations include: developing sectoral plans for the energy (both electricity and heat) and industrial sectors; meeting net zero and renewable electricity targets; contributing to carbon budgets; and the interaction of the Department's policies and the with the Just Transition Principle.

A key scrutiny point raised in this Bill Paper concerns how overlapping or potentially conflicting advice would be handled across bodies which already or would provide advice in similar areas, such as the Just Transition Commission and the Consumer Council, under the Bill, if enacted as introduced.

The Bill's scope is DfE-specific: other departments would not have the power to request UR advice directly. DfE suggests it could share UR-derived information with other departments to avoid duplication.

The UR highlighted in evidence to the Committee for the Economy on 26 March 2025 that Northern Ireland's energy regulatory framework has not kept pace with other regulators, contrasting this with updates to Ofgem's statutory framework. DfE's Consultation Report presented the Bill as a first step, with the intention to bring forward further legislation to support additional low-carbon regulatory arrangements, including offshore renewables, hydrogen, smart metering and updated licensing. On 22 April 2026, DfE Officials indicated to the Committee for the Economy that further legislation was not expected during the current Assembly mandate.

Public purse impacts are expected to be limited if costs are recovered through electricity and gas licence fees, if the Bill is enacted as introduced. In such cases, cost would ultimately borne by consumers. The UR has estimated that it would need four additional full-time equivalent staff in the first year, at a cost of £328,000 in that year. Whilst it is expected that those costs would be recovered

from licence fees, the EFM notes that “alternative funding mechanisms” could be needed where advice falls outside functions fundable via licence fees – that is, beyond electricity and gas.

## Appendix 1:

### Challenging public finance context for Northern Ireland at central and devolved levels Table 1 below

summarises the most significant developments from February 2024 to the time of writing:

**Table 1: Challenging budgetary context - Contributory factors dating from February 2024 to present**

Date	Contributory factor
February 2024 to present	Ongoing work across Northern Ireland Departments to implement the December 2023 political agreement and the related February 2024 funding package, including the <a href="#">Interim Fiscal Framework</a> (May 2024), the <a href="#">Budget Sustainability Plan</a> (October 2024) and the accompanying <a href="#">Budget Improvement Plan Roadmap</a> (December 2024), alongside establishment of the <a href="#">Interim Transformation Board</a> (March 2025). All have aimed to improve Northern Ireland public finances while seeking to balance numerous competing priorities and demands for limited available funding.
August 2024	The Department of Finance (DoF) undertook a 2025-28 Budget Information Gathering Exercise, requesting returns from all Northern Ireland Executive Departments, marking the start of the planning stage in the 2025/26 Northern Ireland Executive Budget cycle. The DoF found that “Departments identified a reported £767 million of unfunded pressures”, as reported to the Assembly on 23 September 2024 <sup>37</sup> .
October 2024	The Chancellor’s Autumn Budget 2024 set out some of the multi-year competing pressures facing the United Kingdom Government, potentially adversely impacting the Government’s spending power in certain areas, along with other decisions relating to social security. See <a href="#">RaISe Briefing Paper NIAR-167-2024</a> , prepared by the Public Finance Scrutiny Unit (PFSU) for further detailed discussion <sup>38</sup> .
December 2024	Northern Ireland Departmental bids for 2025/26 resource and capital expenditure exceeded the Northern Ireland Budget allocated by the United Kingdom Government to the Executive <sup>39</sup> .  Later that month, the <a href="#">2025/26 Draft Executive Budget</a> and accompanying <a href="#">Written Statement</a> by the Minister for Finance

<sup>37</sup> The full discussion is contained in the [Official Report](#) of Monday 23 September 2024.

<sup>38</sup> PFSU (2024). “Chancellor’s Autumn Budget 2024: initial considerations for Northern Ireland”, [RaISe Briefing Paper NIAR-167-2024](#), 26 November.

<sup>39</sup> This was reported by the Minister of Finance in a [Written Statement](#) on 19 December 2024, and explained in the [Final Budget 2025-26 Factsheet](#).

	highlighted ongoing “pay and inflationary pressures” and “growing demands” on public services.
March 2025	The Chancellor’s <a href="#">Spring Statement 2025</a> updated the House of Commons on the United Kingdom economy and public finances. The Statement was accompanied by forecasts in an <a href="#">Economic and Fiscal Outlook</a> from the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). It also announced a number of policy decisions, which included reforms to the welfare system, increased defence spending and a £3.25 billion Transformation Fund to reform public services <sup>40</sup> .
1 April 2025	DoF officials thereafter explained during a meeting of the Assembly Finance Committee that:  <i>...on the allocations out of that fund, it will depend on which Whitehall departments get allocations from it so if we don’t get it on the £3.35 billion we’ll get it on the allocations.</i> <sup>41</sup>
3 April 2025	The Executive agreed the 2025/26 Executive Budget, which the Minister for Finance described as “setting out a direction of travel” which “clearly prioritises Programme for Government priorities” <sup>42</sup> .
4 April 2025	The context significantly changed when the President of the United States of America (USA) announced substantial trade tariffs, which were followed by: plummeting stock markets across the globe; a collapsing American bond market; the subsequent 9 April 90-day pause on some new USA tariffs; other countries similar pause and further consideration of retaliatory tariff introduction; and, an international trade war arising between the USA and China.
8 May 2025	A non-binding trade deal was agreed between the USA and United Kingdom Governments. The general terms of the new trade deal were subsequently published in the <a href="#">UK-US Economic Prosperity Deal</a> (EPD). The EPD is non-binding, meaning that further negotiations to work through the details of the deal are on-going.
24 June 2025	The DoF published its <a href="#">2025/26 Budget Factsheet</a> , setting out the Executive’s spending plans for the one-year period from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.
3 October 2025	The Minister of Finance provided a <a href="#">Written Statement</a> detailing HM Treasury Funding Available 2026-2029/30.
26 November 2025	The Chancellor’s <a href="#">Autumn Budget 2025</a> detailed the United Kingdom Government’s resource spending plans up to 2028/29 and capital plans up to 2029/30.

<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that this represents a central government development, as the Northern Ireland Executive Budget is a sub-cycle within the United Kingdom Government’s Budget cycle. Further details of the Transformation Fund can be found in the Chancellor’s [Spring Statement 2025](#).

<sup>41</sup> Further details of the discussion are available in the [Official Report: Minutes of Evidence](#) from the Committee for Finance meeting on Tuesday, 1 April 2025.

<sup>42</sup> Contained within the Minister of Finance’s [Written Statement](#) to the Assembly concerning Public Expenditure Final Budget 2025-26 on Thursday, 3 April 2025.

6 January 2026	<p>The Minister of Finance published the <a href="#">Draft Budget 2026-2029/30</a> (not Executive agreed) and announced an eight-week consultation on the draft.</p> <p>The Minister for Education responded to the Draft Budget 2026-2029/30<sup>43</sup>, stating:</p> <p><i>While I acknowledge the significant challenges involved in setting a budget, it is important to be clear: even if I was prepared to accept the devastating cuts implicit in this draft, as a practical matter, such a budget would be undeliverable. A budget must be more than figures on paper; it must be deliverable in reality.</i></p> <p>The Minister continued:</p> <p><i>Under the proposed allocations, my Department would be required to make savings of approximately £826 million in 2026-27, £1.01 billion in 2027-28, and £1.15 billion in 2028-29. These levels of reduction are simply not achievable.</i></p>
11 February 2026	<p>HM Treasury agreed a reserve claim for the Northern Ireland Executive, to provide £400 million for 2025/26, which is to be repaid over three years<sup>44</sup>.</p> <p>On the same day, the Minister of Finance confirmed that the £400 million would be allocated as follows (as agreed by the Executive)<sup>45</sup>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Education (DE): £214.6 million</li> <li>• Department of Health (DoH): £185.4 million</li> </ul>
3 March 2026	<p>The Chancellor delivered the <a href="#">Spring Forecast 2026</a>.</p> <p>Later that day, in an Oral Statement to the Assembly, the Minister of Finance confirmed additional £390 million Barnett consequentials across Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL) over the next three-year period, comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource DEL: £380 million</li> <li>• Capital DEL: £9 million</li> </ul>
16 April 2026	<p>The Northern Ireland Executive announced that they wish to meet with the Prime Minister. First Minister, Michelle O'Neill stated that the wider budget picture was "stark" and that things were "very much at breaking point". The First Minister continued:</p> <p><i>We, as an Executive today, decided that we want to meet with Keir Starmer. We're making a direct appeal to the British Prime Minister to meet with us in a cross-party delegation, because the budget realities that we face are so challenging and so dire and so difficult that he needs to listen to the concerns that all of us are expressing on behalf of the people that we collectively serve.</i></p>

<sup>43</sup> These quotes are taken from the response in the form of a [Written Statement](#) to the Assembly by the DE on 6 January 2025.

<sup>44</sup> [Statement by the DoF](#), "£400 million reserve claim allocation agreed", 11 February 2026.

<sup>45</sup> [Written Statement](#) from the Minister of Finance to the Assembly, 11 February 2026.

	<p>The Finance Minister added:</p> <p><i>To achieve the ambition of the Budget, it's going to take an injection of investment from the British Government...The challenges [we] face cannot be met with what the Executive has available to it</i><sup>46</sup>.</p>
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**Source: RaiSe-PFSU (April 2026), drawing on publicly available budget documents and Assembly records.**

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<sup>46</sup> Quotes taken from [reporting of the press conference](#) held by the Northern Ireland Executive on Thursday 16 April 2026.