

Patsy McGlone (SDLP), Chair for the Committee for Enterprise, Trade & Investment

Patsy McGlone's the name, MLA for Mid-Ulster, SDLP, and I'm Chair of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee. The range of things that we cover would be everything from consumer rights at one side, right through to tourism, right through to energy, right through to ultimately, of course, job creation and investment. There's a wide range and a host of stuff, very important stuff, but that's what we cover and scrutinise.

Education and skills for the economy

It's very important that we have our schools, and our FE colleges, and, indeed, our universities, turning out students who are catered for the particular market and are available for jobs and have the appropriate skills. Time and time again, we're hearing from industry, we're hearing from businesses, that they can't find the people with the skills for the jobs that they have available. So, therefore, big link-in needed between government departments, between schools, between FE colleges, between universities and, indeed, the business sector, to make sure that it all works and the jobs which are available can be filled by local, well-skilled employees.

Improving infrastructure – Telecommunications

Crucial to the development of the economy too, is the provision of a proper, well-functioning mobile phone network, because increasingly people now are using the mobile phone network, not just to make calls, but as we know, to send documentation, to receive documentation, to have the appropriate working for the likes of their iPads and that to make sure that's all working as they're out and about doing business. And some of our areas across the North are abysmally bad for that. And, indeed, we will-- Tomorrow, we will have the main operatives from the mobile phone companies in front of us asking about their proposals for the development of the respective network.

So, those are very important things. They're very important to all of us, but they are particularly important for those that are seeking to increase and develop their businesses, and indeed help bring new businesses here.

Improving energy provision

The final bit of the jigsaw which is required-- And it's also, I suppose, an integral part of our infrastructural provision, but it's something that all of us take for granted and that's power energy, usually and mainly from electricity.

We've conducted a recent inquiry into that too, and to provision of energy. And what we find is that, particularly west of the Bann, the network-- that's the grid, those overhead power cables that you see, is especially weak. And it has come more to the fore whenever people have sought to provide and invest in the renewable sector, especially in those mountainous areas where, of course, you get the high-level, the intensity of the wind, the grid in those areas is particularly weak.

And that is an important issue for those renewable sectors and causes delays and requires additional investment in the grid. But equally, if not more importantly, for those businesses that are hoping to expand, they too require a good grid which is reliable, which is dependable, and which isn't knocking off or isn't at capacity enough to allow them to develop and expand.