



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee on Procedures

## Minutes of Proceedings

17 February 2021

**Meeting Location:** Virtual Meeting (Room 29)

**Present by Video-Conference:**

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Thomas Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mrs Rosemary Barton MLA

Mr Maurice Bradley MLA

Ms Sinéad Bradley MLA

Ms Nicola Brogan MLA

Mr Gerry Carroll MLA

Ms Linda Dillon MLA

**Apologies:** Mr Gary Middleton MLA

**In Attendance by Video-Conference:**

Emer Boyle (Committee Clerk)

Paul Gill (Clerk Assistant)

Stewart Kennedy (Assistant Clerk)

Alyn Hicks (Legal Advisor) (Item 8 only)



## Northern Ireland Assembly

The meeting commenced at 2.32pm in open session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move to closed session at the end of the meeting to receive a briefing from Legal Services on the 9.30am deadline to nominate a proxy vote and to review its strategic planning.

### 1. Apologies

As above.

### 2. Draft Minutes

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 3 February 2021.

### 3. Matters Arising

The Committee noted an update from Ms Susie Brown, Head of Communications, on the procurement of equipment to introduce remote proceedings in the chamber.

The Committee noted a response from HR on the definition of “long-term illness” which was requested as part of its ongoing examination of SO 27(11).

### 4. Correspondence

There were no items of correspondence.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

### **5. Forward Work Programme**

The Chairperson advised the Committee that it would consider which options it wishes to take forward at the strategic planning session at the end of the meeting. This would then inform the Committee's work programme.

### **6. Chairperson's Business**

There was no Chairperson's business.

### **7. Any Other Business**

Ms Sinéad Bradley MLA asked if there was an update on the testing programme for implementing hybrid proceedings in the chamber.

Mr Paul Gill, Clerk Assistant, joined the meeting at 2.37pm.

Mr Gill, provided the Committee with an update on the ongoing testing programme underway in preparation for the implementation of the hybrid proceedings.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairperson thanked Mr Gill and Ms Brown for their updates.

The Committee moved to closed session at 2.40pm

### **8. Standing Order 112(8) – Briefing by Legal Services**

The Chairperson reminded Members that, due to an unintended consequence to the proposed amendment in relation to the 9.30am deadline to nominate a proxy vote, the Committee agreed (at its last meeting) to defer this agenda item so an updated amendment and advice could be considered.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

Mr Alyn Hicks, Legal Advisor, joined the meeting at 2.41pm. The Chairperson welcomed Mr Hicks to the meeting.

The Committee noted the following items: a briefing note from the Clerk; updated legal advice from Legal Services; and a draft motion to amend Standing Orders.

Mr Hicks briefed the Committee on the legal advice which was followed by a question and answer session.

During discussions, the Committee queried whether the amendment would provide for an unforeseen circumstance. For example, if a Member had to leave Parliament Buildings at short notice or could not attend their work due to a family emergency.

Mr Gill reminded the Committee that the amendment was in relation to the temporary provisions only and specific to the current arrangements implemented since Covid-19 and that the Committee was already undertaking a review of Proxy Voting which would consider changes to the procedures for Proxy Voting on a more permanent basis. Therefore, the Committee was content to consider the issue of unforeseen circumstances as part of its review of Proxy Voting.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the draft motion to amend Standing Order 112(8).

The Chairperson thanked Mr Hicks for his briefing.

Mr Hicks left the meeting at 2.56pm.

### **9. Strategic Planning**

The Committee considered a paper from the Clerk on the work areas which could be included in the Committee's plans for the rest of the mandate, and also providing detail of potential timescales and priorities.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to continue its inquiry into LCMs and Proxy Voting.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

The Committee Clerk and Mr Gill briefed the Committee on the potential areas of work the Committee might want to consider in its plans for the rest of the mandate.

During discussions, the Committee were cognisant of what could be achieved in the remainder of the mandate and noted that a review of Private Members Bills was next on the Committee's priority list. However, the Committee queried whether legislation could potentially be brought forward from the Executive which might impact on any decision the Committee might make in relation to planning its work for the remainder of the mandate.

The Committee also discussed progressing e-petitions in its forward work plan. There was a consensus that, as long as the current provisions for petitioning remained during the pandemic, the Committee were content to return to this item of work at a later date.

In addition, the Committee discussed Speaking Rights and asked the Clerk to remind them whether or not this topic was agreed by consensus or not. It was agreed to further discuss this item work at its next meeting.

The Committee also considered the potential work flowing from the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA). In particular, the commitment to amend Standing Orders to allow any person to conduct their business before the Assembly or an Assembly Committee through Irish or Ulster Scots.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee wrote to the Executive in February 2020 and again in September 2020 seeking an update on its legislative timetable and on its work relating to NDNA which may have an impact on the current Standing Orders of the Assembly. The Committee noted that, to date, it had not received a written update.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write again to the Executive Office to request a written update on the potential work flowing from NDNA and its plans to bring forward legislation which may have an impact on the current Standing Orders of the Assembly, including timescales.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Speaker informing him of its decision to write to the Executive for an update on bringing forward legislation in relation to NDNA commitments. The Committee also agreed to give notification to the Speaker of the potential of it moving forward with the development of draft



## Northern Ireland Assembly

Standing Orders as there may be resource implications for the Assembly Commission should the Committee agree to amend Standing Orders to enable any person to conduct their business before the Assembly or an Assembly Committee in Irish or Ulster Scots.

The Committee acknowledged that NDNA commits the Secretary of State to amend legislation in relation to the Petition of Concern and the Timing of the Formation of the Executive.

**Agreed:** In addition to writing a letter to the Executive, the Committee also agreed to write to the Secretary of State to seek clarification regarding the timeframe for bringing forward legislation in relation to these NDNA commitments in order for the Committee to plan the work for the remainder of the mandate.

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

**Agreed:** It was agreed that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Wednesday 3 March 2021 at 2.30pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.19pm.

**Carál Ní Chuilín MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee on Procedures**  
**24 March 2021**