



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

**TUESDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2014, ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS,  
BALLYMISCAW, STORMONT**

Present: Mr Stephen Moutray (Chairperson)  
Mr Gregory Campbell  
Mr Paul Givan  
Mr Raymond McCartney  
Mr Seán Rogers  
Ms Caitríona Ruane  
Mr Pat Sheehan

Apologies: Mr Alex Attwood  
Mr Roy Beggs

In Attendance: Mr John Simmons (Assembly Clerk)  
Ms Ursula McCanny (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Joseph Westland (Clerical Supervisor)  
  
Mr Raymond McCaffrey (Research Officer)

*The meeting opened at 10.40am in public session.*

**1. Apologies**

Apologies as detailed above.

**2. Minutes of the last meeting**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013.

**3. Matters Arising**

*Agreed:* The Committee noted the information on the number of Committee meetings to date and the number of Reports produced, which had been requested at the Committee's 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013 meeting.

There were no further matters arising.

#### **4. Review of Petitions of Concern**

The Chairperson advised Members that the purpose of this agenda item was to continue the Committee's discussion on the Review of Petitions of Concern.

The Chairperson referred Members to the Assembly Research Briefing Paper '*Standing Committees that examine conformity with human rights and equality issues in legislatures in the UK and Ireland*' and invited the Research Officer from Assembly Research and Information Service to join the meeting.

*The Assembly Research Officer joined the meeting at 10.41am.*

The Assembly Research Officer briefed the Committee on the Research Paper.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Assembly Research Officer for his briefing and for attending the meeting.

*The Assembly Research Officer left the meeting at 10.51am.*

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request further research on the processes that currently exist in the Northern Ireland Assembly and Northern Ireland Executive for proofing Bills in respect of conformity with human rights and equality requirements.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that they had the option of moving into closed session for part of the discussion on the draft Terms of Reference for the Review of Petitions of Concern.

*Agreed:* To move into closed session.

*The Committee moved into closed session at 10.52am.*

The Committee discussed the redrafted Terms of Reference.

*The Committee moved into open session at 10.57am.*

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that, given that there was no indication of dissent from the Members present and that issues raised in the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013 Committee meeting had been addressed in the redrafted Terms of Reference, it was content with the following Terms of Reference for the Review of Petitions of Concern:

*The Assembly and Executive Review Committee will review Petitions of Concern, taking into account how the Petition of Concern has been used to date and the fact that the mechanism was designed as part of the safeguards to ensure that all sections of the community are protected and can participate and work together successfully in the operation of these institutions. The Committee will:*

1. *Examine provisions for an Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements in relation to Petitions of Concern, including alternative procedures, e.g. the Westminster Joint Committee on Human Rights.*
2. *Examine the possibility of restricting the use of Petitions of Concern to certain key areas, and consider mechanisms that might facilitate this.*
3. *Consider whether the current threshold of 30 signatures required for a Petition of Concern should be adjusted.*
4. *Consider whether the Petitions of Concern mechanism should be replaced with an alternative mechanism, such as a weighted-majority vote.*

The Chairperson advised the Members that they had the option of returning to closed session to continue the discussion on the Review of Petitions of Concern.

*Agreed:* To move into closed session.

*The Committee moved into closed session at 10.58am.*

*Ms Caitríona Ruane joined the meeting at 11.03am.*

The Committee discussed three papers on different elements of its Review of Petitions of Concern, as set out in the agreed Terms of Reference.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that the Secretariat should draft updated papers for further discussion at its next meeting.

*The Committee moved into open session at 11.20am.*

## **5. Forward Work Programme**

The Chairperson advised Members that the purpose of this agenda item was for Members to consider the meetings scheduled for the Committee's current Review.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Forward Work Programme as drafted.

## **6. Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

## **7. Date, Time and Place of next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee will be held on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2014 at 10.30am in room 21.

*The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11.21am.*

**Mr Pat Sheehan, Deputy Chairperson  
Assembly and Executive Review Committee**