



## **Assembly and Executive Review Committee**

**(AERC)**

### **End of Session Report**

**1 September 2014 to 31 August 2015**

#### **Powers**

The Assembly and Executive Review Committee is a Standing Committee established in accordance with Section 29A and 29B of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Standing Order 59 which states:

“(1) There shall be a standing committee of the Assembly to be known as the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

(2) The committee may -

- (a) exercise the power in section 44(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998;
- (b) report from time to time to the Assembly and the Executive Committee.

(3) The committee shall consider -

- (a) such matters relating to the operation of the provisions of Parts 3 and 4 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 as enable it to make the report referred to in section 29A(3) of that Act; and
- (b) such other matters relating to the functioning of the Assembly or the Executive Committee as may be referred to it by the Assembly.”

#### **Membership**

The Committee has eleven members including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson with a quorum of five. The membership of the Committee is as follows:

Stephen Moutray (Chairperson)

Pat Sheehan (Deputy Chairperson)

Alex Attwood<sup>1</sup>

Paula Bradley<sup>2</sup>

Gregory Campbell

Trevor Lunn<sup>3</sup>

Raymond McCartney

Seán Rogers<sup>4 5 6</sup>

Alastair Ross<sup>7 8</sup>

Caitríona Ruane<sup>9 10</sup>

Robin Swann<sup>11</sup>

## **Key Activities**

### **Review – Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly**

- The Committee continued work on its Review of Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The terms of reference for this work had been agreed by the Committee on 24 June 2014. As part of this Review, in September 2015, the Committee visited Iceland which has been ranked first for the past 5 years in the Global Gender Index Gap with 40% of parliamentary seats held by women. This followed an earlier visit by the Committee to the Welsh Assembly from 2-4 June 2015. The Committee also heard oral evidence from women's groups, a senior academic from Queen's University Belfast and the former Deputy Speaker to the Assembly.

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<sup>1</sup> With effect from 4 September 2013 Mr Conall McDevitt resigned as a Member; with effect from 7 October 2013 Mr Alex Attwood replaced Mr Conall McDevitt

<sup>2</sup> With effect from 3 February 2014 Ms Paula Bradley replaced Mr Simon Hamilton

<sup>3</sup> With effect from 1 October 2013 Mr Trevor Lunn replaced Mr Stewart Dickson

<sup>4</sup> With effect from 26 September 2011 Mrs Sandra Overend replaced Mr Mike Nesbitt

<sup>5</sup> With effect from 23 April 2011 Mr John McCallister replaced Mrs Sandra Overend

<sup>6</sup> With effect from 04 March 2013 Mr Seán Rogers filled the vacancy created by the departure of Mr John McCallister from the Committee

<sup>7</sup> With effect from 1 December 2014 Mr Sammy Douglas replaced Mr Paul Givan

<sup>8</sup> With effect from 8 December 2014 Mr Alastair Ross Replaced Mr Sammy Douglas

<sup>9</sup> With effect from 12 September 2011 Mr Pat Doherty replaced Mr Paul Maskey

<sup>10</sup> With effect from 10 September 2012 Ms Caitríona Ruane filled the vacancy created by the resignation of Mr Pat Doherty from the Assembly

<sup>11</sup> With effect from 8 February 2015 Mr Robin Swann replaced Mr Roy Beggs

- The Committee commissioned and considered a series of research papers from Assembly Research and Information Services on a number of issues to assist Members in their deliberations.
- Finally the Committee held an Inquiry Stakeholder event on 23 October 2014 in Parliament Buildings. The event was attended by Members of the Committee, the Chair of the OFMDFM Committee, the two Junior Ministers from OFMDFM and sixty stakeholders from bodies representing women and young people, equality organisations, academics, and trade unions.
- The Review and the Report continued to form part of the work of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee until it was ordered to print on 17 February 2015.

### **Report on the Operation of the Provisions of parts 3 and 4 of the NI Act 1998**

- The Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006 inserted section 29A into the NI Act 1998 to require the Assembly to establish a Committee to review the functioning of the Assembly and the Executive Committee. Part (3) of section 29A required the Committee to make a report on the operation of the provisions of Parts 3 and 4 of this Act — (a) to the Secretary of State;(b) to the Assembly; and (c) to the Executive by no later than 1 May 2015.
- In order to inform its consideration of such matters relating to the operation of the provisions of Parts 3 and 4 of the NI Act 1998, the Committee wrote to political party leaders and MLAs on a number of occasions. The Committee sought and considered legal advice in respect of Committee’s statutory obligation to make a report on the operation of the provisions of Parts 3 and 4 of the NI Act 1998. The Committee then wrote again, on 9 December 2014 and 27 January 2015 to political parties and independent MLAs to request that they submit their priorities in respect of the provisions of Parts 3 and 4 of the NI Act 1998.
- Finally, the Committee agreed to commission a research paper to provide details of judicial reviews or challenges which have been made under Parts 3 and 4 of the NI Act 1998 since 2007 and details of any work undertaken by Assembly groups or committees and independent statutory bodies on the provisions under Parts 3 and 4 of the NI Act 1998.
- The Committee agreed that in order to complete its Report on the Operation of the Provisions of Parts 3 and 4 of the NI Act, it would undertake a broad overview of the sixty sections provided for under Parts 3 and 4 of the NI Act 1998. This work was completed during February and March 2015.

### **Key Outputs**

#### **Review – Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly**

- The Report contained 29 recommendations for the Assembly, political parties and the Executive. The recommendations were aimed at strengthening the Assembly and the

political parties' engagement with women, particularly young women and supporting and encouraging more women to enter and stay in politics in Northern Ireland.

- The Report recognised that under-representation of women in politics in Northern Ireland must be addressed as a matter of urgency and recommended a series of measures both political parties and the Assembly could take to address some of the key barriers facing women seeking to enter and remain in political life.
- The report also recognised that the Executive's strategies and policies if designed, delivered and appropriately funded can enable women at all levels of society to balance their caring responsibilities with a career in politics.
- Finally, the report recognised the contribution which the media, civil society and the education sector can make to enhance the role of existing politicians and to encourage more women to consider a career in politics.
- The Report was debated in the Assembly on 9 March 2015, the day after International Women's Day.

## **Key Outputs**

### **Report on the Operation of the Provisions of Parts 3 and 4 of the NI Act 1998**

- The Report on the Operation of the Provisions of Parts 3 and 4 of the NI Act 1998, was published on 27 April 2015. The Report set out the Committee's conclusions including recognising that the work undertaken by the AERC in each of the ten reports produced from 2007-2015 helped inform the outcomes reached on institutional reform during the Stormont House negotiations.
- In the Report, the Committee agreed that it would return to consider a number of provisions under Parts 3 and 4 of the NI Act following the publication of the Committee Report in May 2015. These included the nomenclature and method of election of the First and deputy First Minister (sections 16A to 16C); the Ministerial Code (Section 28A); and strategies relating to Irish Language and Ulster Scots language (section 28d).
- The Committee agreed in its Report, that going forward, the Chair and Deputy Chair should meet with the First Minister and deputy First Minister to discuss the impact of the Stormont House Agreement on the future of the work of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.
- The Committee recognised the pledge by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to work with the political parties in the Assembly to put into effect the commitment in the Stormont House Agreement, and in particular those relating to the provision of Parts 3 and 4 of the NI Act 1998.

## **Key Achievements – Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly**



Members of the AERC with Eygló Hardardóttir, Minister of Social Affairs & Housing, Iceland. The Committee visited Iceland from 24-26 September 2014. In addition to meeting the Minister, the AERC Members also met with the Chairperson and Members of the Committee with responsibility for overseeing the delivery of the gender equality programme and representatives from the women's sector and academia.



The Committee held an Inquiry Stakeholder Event on 23 October 2014 in the Long Gallery. The event was opened by the two Junior Ministers from OFMDFM and four guest speakers were invited to present and set the context for the roundtable discussions which followed. The event was closed by testimonies from female representatives from each of the five Executive parties.

The event was attended by over sixty representatives from the women and youth sector, academia, trade unions, ethnic minorities, local councils and training providers.





### **Committee Information**

Number of Committee Meetings Held: 15

Number of Meetings held in Public: 9

Number of meetings held in closed / part closed: 6

### **Reason for closed / part closed meetings:**

The 6 meetings were held in part closed and the reason was for the Committee to informally deliberate on the final draft of the Review and Report before agreeing.

## EXPENDITURE

### Assembly and Executive Review Committee

Expenditure for the period of 1 September 2014 – 31 August 2015

Budget Area	Details	Expenditure
<b>Committee Travel</b> – Committee members and staff travel and subsistence in relation to visits and meetings outside Parliament Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Includes visit to Iceland</li></ul>	<b>9,508.50</b>
<b>Printing of Committee Reports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Women in Politics and the NI Assembly</li><li>• Report on the Operation of the Provisions of parts 3 and 4 of the NI Act 1998</li></ul>	<b>1,812.86</b>
<b>Advertising</b> – the cost of public notices relating to Committee inquiries, the Committee stage of Bills and meetings held outside Parliament Buildings		<b>NIL</b>
<b>Consultancy support</b> – the cost of specialist advisers appointed by the Committee and commissioned research		<b>NIL</b>
<b>General expenses</b>	Cost of refreshments for Committee meetings, working lunches, seminars, room hire, witness expenses and conference fees for members <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Includes Women in Politics in the NI Assembly stakeholder event</li></ul>	<b>835.95</b>