



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Assembly and Executive Review Committee

## Minutes of Proceedings

12 May 2021

**Meeting Location:** Room 29, Parliament Buildings

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Mervyn Storey MLA (Chairperson)  
Maoliosa McHugh MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Kellie Armstrong MLA  
Jonathan Buckley MLA  
Robbie Butler MLA  
Alex Easton MLA  
Colin McGrath MLA

**Present:**

Jim Allister MLA

**Apologies:**

Gerry Kelly MLA

**In Attendance:**

Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)  
Ms Marie Austin (Senior Assistant Clerk)  
Mr David McClure (Assistant Clerk)



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Ms Alison Ferguson (Clerical Officer)

**In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:**

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

The Committee agreed to commence the meeting at 12.38pm in closed session.

The Deputy Chairperson took the Chair in the Chairperson's absence.

**1. Review of Opposition Entitlements – Procurement Evaluation Report**

Members received a briefing from the Committee Secretariat on this agenda item.

Members noted that, arising from the open tendering exercise, Mr Trevor Reaney, former Clerk to the Northern Ireland Assembly, had been appointed as the 'independent person' to undertake the Review of the Statement of Entitlement for an Official Opposition.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Assembly Procurement Office to thank its staff for the advice and support provided during the procurement phase of the Review of the Statement of Entitlement for an Official Opposition.

**Noted:** The Committee noted the procurement evaluation report and the follow up information as outlined in the Secretariat briefing.

The Committee agreed to move the meeting into open session.



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## 2. Apologies

As noted above.

## 3. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared by Members.

## 4. Draft Minutes

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2020.

Alex Easton left the meeting at 12:57 and returned at 12:59.

## 5. Matters Arising

Members were advised that any matters arising would be covered elsewhere on the agenda.

Robbie Butler joined the meeting at 13:02.

## 6. Additional Review Topics

Members received a briefing from the Committee Secretariat on this agenda item.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the draft note of the informal strategic planning meeting held on 24 March 2021.



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Members were reminded that, at the informal strategic planning meeting on 24 March 2021, they considered a list of proposed work topics for the Committee to take forward during the remainder of this mandate. Three topic groups were selected for further consideration and prioritisation. It was envisaged that progression of the topic groups would result in a body of preliminary research/evidence and possible review Terms of Reference for the next AERC to progress. These topics include:

### Topics 10 and 12 - Committee effectiveness and collaboration

- 10. The effectiveness of the Committee system including the policy development role.
- 12. Collaboration between Committees, and between the Committees and the Executive, balancing the accountability and support roles to the benefit of the community while fully respecting the role of Committees in holding the Executive to account.

### Topics 26 and 27 - Designations and the appointment of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

- 26. Scoping the removal of the designations requirement (to be replaced with a requirement for weighted majorities on defined key votes or in situations where a reformed Petition of Concern has been invoked).
- 27. Consideration of the method of appointing the First and deputy First Ministers as well as the titles, to reflect the joint and equal nature of the office and the principle of partnership.

### Topics 22, 23 and 24 - Gender and diversity imbalances in the Assembly and the Executive

- 22. Measures to address the under-representation of women and minority groups in the political institutions.
- 23. Following on from previous Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) legacy report, review actions and research on introduction of legislation on gender quotas.
- 24. Given diversity imbalances across the Assembly as a whole, and the particular imbalances in some committees, the Committee may want to



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give consideration to how it might support and improve diversity amongst members.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Chairpersons' Liaison Group on the current StarLeaf capacity for committee meetings and details of any plans to increase the capacity.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to the stakeholder list for the review topic on designations and the appointment for the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek clarity from the group developing the Assembly Good Relations Plan on whether MLAs will be consulted on the draft Plan.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the abovementioned topic group 26 and 27 will be the first priority for the remainder of the mandate (in addition to the ongoing Review of the Statement of Entitlements for an Official Opposition), with topic group 10 and 12 and topic group 22, 23 and 24 being secondary priorities.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the following next steps:

- to seek clarity from Executive Ministers on what is meant by the reference in their proposed topic 24 to 'diversity' in the context of 'diversity imbalance across the Assembly';
- to commission an issues paper/draft questions for submission to the Assembly' Good Relations group to help gather evidence to support AERC's consideration of the issues in relation to topic group 22, 23 and 24;
- to conduct a stocktake of the work being carried out on this issues arising from topic group 22, 23 and 24 by the Good Relations group, Assembly Commission, Committee on Procedures and other internal stakeholders; and
- when the stocktake has been completed, to commission comparative research on what is happening in political institutions in other jurisdictions to address such issues.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the draft letters of response to those who submitted suggested topics for the Committee work programme.



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Mervyn Storey joined the meeting at 13:20 and took the Chair.

### **7. Progress Report on the Review of Opposition Entitlements – briefing by Trevor Reaney**

Members received a briefing from Trevor Reaney on the progress of the Review of the Statement of Entitlements for an Official Opposition.

Members noted that Mr Reaney is scheduled to give a further oral briefing to the Committee on Wednesday 23 June 2021, when it will consider the final report on the Review of the Statement of Entitlements for an Official Opposition.

### **8. Correspondence**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office regarding correspondence on committee scrutiny of common frameworks.

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Chairpersons' Liaison Group regarding Assembly committee consideration of legislation.

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee and Member Support office regarding advice to committees.

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from The Executive Office regarding the AERC forward work programme, which related to agenda item 6.

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker regarding an independent review of the adequacy and effectiveness of the Statement of Entitlements for an Official Opposition.

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from Pat McCartan regarding the Review of the Statement of Entitlements for an Official Opposition.

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.



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**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from de Borda Institute regarding voting procedures.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add the de Borda Institute as a stakeholder for the abovementioned topic group 26 and 27 and to ask it for a written submission on this topic.

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from a member of the public regarding the 2011 Caravan Act.

#### **9. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

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

The next meeting of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee will take place on Wednesday 23 June 2021.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.32pm.

**Mervyn Storey MLA**  
**Chairperson**  
**Assembly and Executive Review Committee**