



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Assembly and Executive Review Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

6 October 2021

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Jim Allister QC MLA
Robbie Butler MLA
George Robinson MBE MLA

Present:

Peter Weir MLA (Chairperson)
Maoliosa McHugh MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Kellie Armstrong MLA
Paul Frew MLA
Gerry Kelly MLA
Colin McGrath MLA

Apologies:

No Apologies



Northern Ireland
Assembly

In Attendance: Mr Shane McAteer (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Marie Austin (Senior Assistant Clerk)
Ms Karen Barry (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Alison Ferguson (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 12.51pm in open session.

1. Apologies

As noted above.

2. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared by Members.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2021.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

4. Matters Arising

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

5. Report on the Review of Opposition Entitlements: Consideration of Written Responses

The Committee considered written responses received on Mr Trevor Reaney's independent report on the Review of the Statement of Entitlements for an Official Opposition.

Noted: The Committee noted the written responses received from the Committee on Procedures, the Assembly Commission and Sinn Féin.

Members considered a working draft of the Committee's report to the Assembly on the outcome of Mr Reaney's review exercise.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the working draft Committee report will be updated to reflect the Committee's discussion of Mr Reaney's review recommendations and that it will be considered for formal agreement at the next meeting on 20 October 2021.

Noted: The Committee noted that, if the Committee report is not agreed formally at the meeting on 20 October, a further Committee meeting will need to be scheduled for this purpose, in order to meet the Committee's timetable for reporting to the Assembly.

6. Designations and the Appointment of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

The Committee noted that four submissions had been received from expert witnesses in response to its request for evidence on its first priority work topic: Designations and the Appointment of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should approach RaISe in relation to identifying further expert witnesses.

Agreed: Committee Members agreed to forward details of possible expert witnesses to the Clerk.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the four submissions, and evidence previously submitted in relation to inclusive voting procedures, to all political parties and Independent Members to request their views/comments on the two specific areas being considered under the topic:

1. 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).
2. 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.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to give consideration at a later date to scheduling oral evidence sessions.

The Committee considered a motion listed on the Provisional Order Paper for 19 October 2021:

'Stability of Institutions and Referral to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee

That this Assembly affirms the importance of the stability of these institutions in order to deliver for the people of Northern Ireland; refers to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee under Standing Order 59(3)(b) consideration of the matter of replacing the current cross-community voting system, which is based on community designations, with a weighted majority system free from designations, to be used in place of cross-community voting in the circumstances specified in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 or when a reformed Petition of Concern is invoked; and agrees that the Committee should report on the outcome of this consideration to the Assembly before the end of this mandate.'



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: It was agreed that the Chairperson should speak to the motion reflecting the Committee's agreed position that, given the limited time remaining in this mandate, scoping work would be carried out on the topic, resulting in a body of preliminary research/evidence and possible review Terms of Reference for the next Assembly and Executive Review Committee to progress.

7. Update on other Strategic Priorities

The Chairperson reminded Members that it was previously agreed that the Committee's secondary priority work topic: Committee effectiveness and collaboration, would be progressed when the Chairpersons' Liaison Group had reported on its review on Strengthening Committee Scrutiny, which is due to conclude in the autumn.

In relation to its secondary priority work topic: Gender and diversity imbalances in the Assembly and the Executive, the Committee noted the stocktake of the wide range of work being undertaken throughout the Assembly to address gender and diversity imbalances.

The Committee noted a response from the Ulster Unionist Party to its request to political parties for a progress report in respect of the recommendations on addressing gender imbalance within political parties contained in the 2015 Assembly and Executive Review Committee 'Report on Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a further reminder to those political parties who had not yet responded.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission comparative research on a range of issues relating to the work topic.

8. Correspondence

There was no correspondence to consider.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

9. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on Wednesday 20 October 2021, at 12.40pm in Room 29.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.36pm.

Maoliosa McHugh MLA
Deputy Chairperson
Assembly and Executive Review Committee