



**COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION
NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY BRANCH – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Tuesday 10 March 2026

Present:

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA, Chair
Dr Steve Aiken MLA
Mr Keith Buchanan MLA
Mr Stewart Dickson MLA
Mr Paul Frew MLA
Miss Michelle McIlveen MLA

Apologies:

Mr Trevor Clarke MLA

Also In attendance:

Mrs Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive
Ms Stephanie Mallon, Clerk Assistant
Mrs Clare Maguire, Public Engagement Manager
Mrs Caroline Moore, Participation & Outreach Manager
Mrs Nicola Crawford, Parliamentary Engagement Co-ordinator (minutes)

1. WELCOME

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA, Chair, welcomed Executive Committee Members of the CPA NI Assembly Branch to the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from the following:

- Mr Trevor Clarke MLA

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes were agreed.

Proposed by: Dr Steve Aiken MLA

Seconded by: Mr Paul Frew MLA

4. CPA CONFERENCES/SEMINARS/WEBINARS

16th Canadian Parliamentary Seminar, 25-28 May 2026, Ottawa.

The Chair advised that an invitation was received from the Parliament of Canada to apply for selection to participate in the 16th Canadian Parliamentary Seminar, to be held in Ottawa, Canada, from 25 to 28 May 2026.

He stated that the Branch has registered interest in attending and has now received an official invitation to attend the Seminar. The invitation is for one delegate, who must be either a newly elected member or a backbench parliamentarian.

The Chair advised that because of the need to confirm attendance and delegate by 20 March, an email was issued to all CPA Members asking for applications to attend. He confirmed that two applications were received from Mr John Stewart MLA and Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA.

Given he had submitted an application, the Chair excused himself from the selection discussion.

Members discussed the applications and Mr Paul Frew proposed that Mr Jonathan Buckley, as Branch Chair, should attend the seminar and Mr Keith Buchanan seconded the proposal.

CPA Forum for Parliamentarians with Disabilities, 26-28 May, Cape Town

The Chair noted that, following selection at the previous meeting, Mr Allen's nomination form had been completed, and the team are waiting for further information.

5. COMMONWEALTH DAY 2026

The Chair advised Members that the theme of Commonwealth Day 2026 is 'unlocking opportunities together for a prosperous Commonwealth'.

The Chair stated that, to mark the occasion, the Branch will host a lunch for Ms Kei-Retta Farrell, the UK Representative for the Government of Montserrat, on Wednesday 18 March in the Private Dining Room and encouraged Members to attend where possible.

Dr Aiken stated that he was hosting an event at Queen's University Belfast on the evening of 18 March for Representative Farrell and that other Members had been invited to attend.

6. MEETINGS WITH UK & BRITISH ISLES CPA BRANCHES

The Chair stated that, as discussed at the last meeting, a request for a virtual meeting has been sent to each of the UK and British Isles Branch Chairs but as several Branches have elections in the next couple of months, we have now been asked to wait until after the elections and their CPA Branches have been re-established for the meeting to take place.

The Chair stated that we should keep pushing for this engagement and encouraged Members to speak to their UK counterparts about any opportunities for engagement. He suggested that Commonwealth Day events would be an opportunity for such engagement.

Members were content with this.

7. PARTNER COUNTRY

The Chair advised that the Speaker has had positive feedback from Speaker Skelly about her visit and the welcome she received. She is now reflecting on how a relationship could be taken forward. The Ontario legislature is in recess until later in March so it is likely that there will have to be conversations when their Members return.

Members were content to note this.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(i) Members' Survey Results

The Chair advised that it was agreed at the last meeting that, due to the low number of responses, the survey would be re-issued along with a letter from the Chair and this has now been done. The closing date for completion of the survey is Friday 20th March.

(ii) CPA Strategic Plan 2026-2029

The Chair stated that the CPA Strategic Plan 2026-2029 was launched on 26 February, and an email was sent to all Members with the information and link to the strategy. A copy of the strategy can be downloaded from the CPA HQ website.

(iii) CPwD Steering Group

The Chair advised that a CPwD Steering Group has been established, and CPA UK have advised that the Branch may wish to put forward a representative to join the group.

Mrs Hogg stated that at the recent CPwD Forum in Edinburgh Mr Stephen Twigg had advised her about the Steering Group and that the Branch should join it. Mrs Hogg advised that it was a very valuable group and it would be useful for us to participate in it.

The Chair then asked, as the next meeting of the group is in April, if Members were content for us to seek a representative from within our membership to participate in the CPwD steering group and Members were content.

ACTION: A representative for the CPwD Steering Group to be sought from the CPA Membership.

(iv) CPA Annual Conference – Themes & Topics

The Chair advised that CPA Branches have been asked to submit any suggested conference theme and workshop topics for the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC), which will take place in Cape Town, South Africa, from 13 to 18 September 2026.

He then asked Members if they had any suggestions that they would like the Branch to submit. Dr Aiken suggested AI in Democracy as a workshop topic and Members agreed.

ACTION: Email to be issued to Executive Committee Members to ask for any further suggestions.

10. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 14th April at 1:15pm (plenary business permitting) in the Private Dining Room.

The Chair adjourned the meeting.