



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

Tuesday 14 April 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
Ms Lisa McElherron, 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 Stewart Dickson MLA

4. CPA CONFERENCES/SEMINARS/WEBINARS

55th British Islands and Mediterranean Region Conference - 17-19 June 2026

The Chair advised that an invitation had been received from the Parliament of Gibraltar to attend the 55th British Islands and Mediterranean Region Conference taking place on 17-19 June 2026. The invitation is for four delegates and a delegation secretary to attend.

He stated that, due to the registration deadline, an email was issued to all CPA Members requesting applications to attend the conference. Three applications were received from the Chair, Dr Aiken and Mr Frew. The applicants, along with Miss McIlveen, make a full delegation and will attend the conference along with Nicola Crawford, from the Participation and Outreach.

Members were content with this.

69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, Cape Town, 13–18 September 2026

The Chair advised that an invitation had been received from CPA HQ for the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference taking place in Cape Town from 13–18 September 2026. The invitation is for one delegate and a delegation secretary to attend.

Members were content for the Branch to attend the conference and issue a request for applications to attend to CPA Members.

Dr Aiken stated that Digital Transformation work would be presented at the conference and that he would be applying to attend. The Chair suggested that if there is more than one application that Dr Aiken may be able to attend

through CPA HQ due to his involvement with the Digital Transformation Working Group.

CPA UK and UNESCO Caribbean AI Workshop, Anguilla, Sunday 21 June to Wednesday 24 June 2026

The Chair advised that an invitation had been received to attend the CPA UK and UNESCO Caribbean AI Workshop being hosted by Anguilla House of Assembly. This workshop will convene legislators from across the Caribbean and UK to explore how Parliaments can effectively navigate the evolving landscape of artificial intelligence. Through interactive sessions shaped by the recent consultation, the programme will address topics including the growing threats of cyberattacks and disinformation, and the frameworks needed to support responsible and ethical adoption of AI in both parliamentary environments and public services.

The Chair asked Members if they would like to send someone to the workshop and the Members agreed that, due to the costs, they would not be participating in the workshop.

CPA Parliamentary Academy Residency Programme for Members (Professional Development & Skills-Building), Northern Territory, Australia, June 2026

The Chair advised that an invitation had been received to attend the CPA Parliamentary Academy's Residency Programme for Members of Parliament (Professional Development & Skills-Building) that is scheduled to take place in Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia from 22 to 26 June 2026 (21 to 27 June 2026 inclusive of travel dates). The Advanced Professional Development Residency Course is a five-day programme designed to enable Members of Parliament to be better performing legislators, representatives and scrutineers.

Members discussed the associated costs of sending someone on the programme and they agreed that, due to the location and significant travel costs, that they would not, on this occasion, participate in the programme.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(i) CPwD Steering Group

The Chair advised that it had been agreed at the last meeting that an email would be issued to CPA Members requesting nominations for the role of CPwD Steering Group representative.

One nomination was received from Andy Allen MLA and he will now represent the Branch on the Steering Group.

(ii) CPA BIMR Digital Transformation

The Chair asked Dr Aiken for an update on the Digital Transformation for Members.

Dr Aiken advised that the guidelines and training are nearly finished and will be issued to Branches once approved. He stated that the work will be signed off at the BIMR Conference in Gibraltar and then presented at the CPC.

Members were content with this update.

(iii) BIMR CWP Mentoring Scheme

The Chair stated that following the launch of the BIMR CWP's mentor scheme at the CWP Conference in Belfast last month, the CWP is now seeking potential mentors for female parliamentarians.

The CWP would like each BIMR CWP Steering Committee member to act as Ambassadors for the Scheme and to identify those who you think would be a good mentor. There are no gender restrictions and they are hoping for one or two applications per branch. They will share further guidance on the matching process and how the scheme will work in due course. They will launch the scheme for mentees at the BIMR Conference in Gibraltar in June.

The Chair then asked Miss McIlveen, as the Branch's CWP Steering Committee Member, if she was content to take the programme forward.

Miss McIlveen stated that she was happy to take it forward and be a mentor herself but she wanted to wait for the next CWP Steering Committee meeting for further information before approaching other MLAs.

(iv) CPA Committee Research

The Chair stated that the CPA Headquarters Secretariat has been approached for research by a CPA Branch who are looking at how to improve monitoring, evaluation and learning around the work of Committees. The CPA Secretariat has agreed to assist with this undertaking through the CPA's Commonwealth Parliamentary Research Service (CPRS). For this research, they have sent through core questions, pertaining to subject select/standing committees, for Branches to answer.

The Chair advised that the Branch will obtain the requested information and pass it on to the CPA.

(v) CPA Approvals via E-Mail

The Chair stated that given the time-sensitive nature of recent CPA correspondence, Executive Committee Members have been providing approvals via email to ensure responses are issued promptly to Branch Members .

The Chair then asked, to speed up this process, if Members were content that approval from the Chair, plus two other Members would be sufficient to issue the correspondence to all CPA Members?

Members were content with this.

(vi) New Branch Secretary

The Chair advised Members that the meeting marked the last for Stephanie Mallon as Secretary of the CPA as her duties as Clerk Assistant draw to a close in the next few weeks. He stated that Members would continue to see her even more regularly as she is resuming her role as Bill Clerk and so will be much in demand.

The Chair thanked Ms Mallon for all her hard work and for everything she had done for the Branch.

Ms Mallon thanked all the Members for their support and work and stated that she was most proud of the Branch hosting the CWP Conference this year.

The Chair then introduced Ms Lisa McElherron advising Members that Ms McElherron had taken up her new role as Clerk Assistant and that she will now serve as the Secretary of the CPA.

Members were content with Ms McElherron's appointment.

6. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Chair suggested that the next meeting should take place in the Assembly's marquee at the Balmoral Show and Members were content.

The next meeting will therefore take place on Thursday 14 May at 3:00pm at the Balmoral Show.

The Chair adjourned the meeting.