



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Chairpersons' Liaison Group

Minutes of Proceedings

8 April 2025

Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Deborah Erskine (Chairperson)
Kellie Armstrong MLA
Paula Bradshaw MLA
Phillip Brett MLA
Joanne Bunting MLA
Nick Mathison MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Apologies: Jonathan Buckley MLA
Alan Chambers MLA
Robbie Butler MLA
Colm Gildernew MLA
Ciara Ferguson MLA
Daniel McCrossan MLA
Philip McGuigan MLA
Matthew O'Toole MLA
Cathy Mason MLA

In Attendance: Stephanie Mallon (Clerk Assistant/Acting Clerk)
Mary Kerr (Senior Assistant Clerk)
Charmaine McBride (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Sarah Wright (Clerical Supervisor)

Lesley Hogg (Chief Executive/Clerk to the Assembly)
Frank Geddis (Clerk Assistant)
Paul Gill (Clerk Assistant)

The meeting commenced at 1:13pm in closed session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Chairpersons' Business

Members noted the template that has been agreed by Clerk Assistants for Clerks to use to record meetings between the Committee Chair/Deputy Chair and external individuals or organisations.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Agreed: Chairpersons agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2025.

Paul Gill joined the meeting at 1:16pm

4. Matters Arising

Parliamentary Excellence Programme (PEP) – Effective Questioning Update

Members noted the update on the Effective Questioning sessions which took place on Wednesday 5 and Thursday 6 February 2025 with John Sturrock KC of Core Solutions and which provided an opportunity for Chairpersons to reinforce learning gained from the Effective Questioning committee sessions. These sessions were attended by 5

Chairpersons and those Members present who had attended, reflected that they were very useful.

Draft Forward Work Programme

Members noted that the course entitled 'Utilising Evidence in Decision Making' does not clearly meet the identified needs of the Members and is therefore no longer being pursued. It was also noted that the topic does, however, align with the objectives of the Member Development strand of the Parliamentary Excellence Programme (PEP) and that a course on the topic of using evidence in decision making could therefore effectively be delivered via this platform.

Agreed: Members agreed that the Clerking and Member Support Office (CAMS) should liaise with Pamela Carson, Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk to PEP to request that this topic is included in the PEP forward work programme.

Building Personal Resilience Course

Members noted that the 'Building Personal Resilience' Course was held on 7 and 26 February 2025

Agreed: Members agreed that a bespoke session for Chairs was not required.

5. Appointment of Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson

Members noted that, as per the rules and procedures agreed on 19 March 2024, a new Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson should be appointed with effect from April 2025.

Joanne Bunting proposed that Deborah Erskine be appointed as Chairperson of the Chairpersons' Liaison Group with effect from April 2025. Seconded by Phillip Brett.

Agreed: Ms Deborah Erskine is appointed Chairperson of CLG with effect from April 2025.

Paula Bradshaw proposed that Nick Mathison be appointed as Deputy Chairperson of the Chairpersons' Liaison Group with effect from April 2025. Seconded by Phillip Brett.

Agreed: Mr Nick Mathison is appointed Deputy Chairperson of CLG with effect from April 2025.

6. Correspondence

Letter received from Committee for Communities to CLG

Members noted as an update, that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) have agreed to undertake a review of the scrutiny of cross-departmental strategies and that the draft terms of reference for the review are currently with the Executive Office for comment, before being finalised by AERC.

Agreed: CLG will issue letters as drafted:

- to AERC to ask them to keep CLG updated in relation to their review on scrutiny of cross-departmental strategies and;
- to Committee for Communities to note their concerns, draw their attention to existing provisions in Standing Order 64 which provides for committees to deal with matters of joint concern and advise that CLG have written to AERC to ask them to keep Chairs updated with their review.

Letter from Committee for Communities to CLG regarding Terms of Reference for Co-Design Programmes

Members noted the correspondence from the Committee for Communities seeking feedback as to whether any Committee has had sight of terms of reference for civil servants in relation to co-design of programmes.

Agreed: CLG will write to the Committee for Communities to advise that writing to all individual committees seeking feedback is an appropriate avenue for obtaining the information requested.

Kellie Armstrong joined the meeting at 1:32pm

7. Draft Forward Work Programme

Update: Development Session on Guidelines for Artificial Intelligence in Parliaments

Members noted an update on a session held on 1 April 2025, with Franklin De Vrieze of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WDF) and Dr Fotis Fitsilis (Hellenic Parliament) co-authors of the WDF publication 'Guidelines for AI in Parliaments'. In this session, Members were presented with the challenges and opportunities that AI presents for legislatures. Assembly Commission staff also attended the session.

Agreed: Members were content that the Assembly's Artificial Intelligence Working Group would be invited to periodically update the CLG on the work they will be undertaking.

Agreed: Members were content that CLG are briefed periodically by Heads of Business within the Parliamentary Services Directorate on the use of AI innovations that may support our parliamentary business.

Update: Summary of CLG Progress to Date and Next Steps

At its meeting in June 2024, CLG was content for the CAMS Office to proceed to arrange meetings, schedule business and commission development sessions on the basis of two strategic priorities.

1. Improving the effectiveness of Committees
2. Development and support for Chairpersons

Members noted the clerk's memo which provided an overview of progress against each of these strategic priorities with the agreed and proposed steps.

The Chair to CLG, Deborah Erskine, noted how busy Chairpersons are and how she saw the Group's purpose as a body of support to share common issues and problems.

Members discussed common issues affecting their respective committees to include; the SL1 reporting period, the timescales of Legislative Consent Motions (LCMs) as laid out in Standing Orders, policies that require cross-cutting scrutiny, the 30-day

timescale for the Committee stage of a Bill as laid out in Standing Orders and; the requirement of staffing for committees if they decided to meet during a recess period.

Agreed: Members are content with the proposed next steps in the Forward Work Programme as provided.

Agreed: Members are content to create space within the CLG meeting agenda to bring issues of common concern such as those shared above and; to share experiences and agree good practice.

Phillip Brett left the meeting at 1:50pm

8. Any Other Business

Members noted that at CLG's January meeting, as part of Chairpersons' Development, Members received a briefing from Raymond McCaffrey from the Assembly's Research and Information Service (RaISe) on a CLG commissioned paper entitled 'The Use of AI in Legislatures'. On the 25 March 2025, Mr McCaffrey requested agreement from Chairpersons to publish the paper on the RaISe pages and the CLG pages of the Northern Ireland Assembly website.

Agreed: Members are content that the paper 'The Use of AI in Legislatures' can be published on the RaISe pages and the CLG pages of the Northern Ireland Assembly website.

9. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Tuesday 13 May 2025, at 1pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:56pm.

Deborah Erskine (Chairperson)

8 April 2025