The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Meeting Venue: Parliament Buildings, Room 106

Meeting date: Wednesday, 10 September 2025

Meeting Time: 10.00 am

Assembly Commission Members:

Edwin Poots MLA, Speaker (Chairperson)
Sinéad Ennis MLA
Trevor Clarke MLA
Nuala McAllister MLA
Andy Allen MBE MLA
Colin McGrath MLA

Officials present:

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive
Tara Caul, Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services
Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary Services
Paula Ewart, Interim Director of Corporate Services
Robin Ramsey, Adviser to the Speaker/Head of Corporate Support
Janet Hughes, Clerical Supervisor
Krystal Clarke, Executive Assistant

Others in attendance:

David Murphy, Chairperson of the Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee (ACARC)
Paula McClintock, Head of Finance (Item 9)
Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR (Items 10, 11 and 12)

The meeting commenced at 10.10 am.

In the absence of Steven Baxter, Director of Corporate Services, the Speaker welcomed Paula Ewart, Interim Director of Corporate Services, to her first Assembly Commission meeting.

The Speaker advised of a matter that Lesley Hogg wished to discuss in closed session under AOB and stated that all other officials would be asked to leave the meeting, with Robin Ramsey remaining in order to minute the discussion.

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Speaker declared an interest on behalf of all officials in agenda item 10, the Pay Claim 2025. He stated that, when considering this item of business, he would ask Mrs Hogg and Sinéad McDonnell to present the paper and take questions from Members, before asking officials to leave the meeting to enable the Assembly Commission to have a further discussion. The Speaker added that Mr Ramsey would remain in order to minute the discussion.

3. CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

There was no Chairperson's business.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Minutes from the Assembly Commission meeting on 18 June 2025 were approved for publication.

5. MATTERS ARISING

Nuala McAllister and Sinéad Ennis asked for clarity on the policy in relation to what can be worn by visitors attending events in Parliament Buildings, particularly relating to slogans and emblems.

Mrs Hogg referred to the Assembly Commission's Policy on 'Conduct and Behaviour of Visitors in Parliament Buildings' and in particular the section on 'General Rules of Entry', which she advised clearly stated what is not permitted in relation to clothing.

Colin McGrath joined the meeting at 10.15 am.

However, Mrs Hogg also noted that this Policy had to be read in conjunction with the 'Sponsored Events in Parliament Buildings' Policy which included provisions in relation to visitors attending events.

Mrs Hogg acknowledged that there can be sensitivities at times in relation to events, meetings and protests at Parliament Buildings and that staff do their best to deal with these as fairly as possible within the Assembly Commission's policies. While issues may be raised on occasion, Mrs Hogg noted that the current policies were longstanding and there was unlikely to be any better way of managing potential issues.

Following discussion, it was agreed that copies of both policies would be circulated to Members to review and further discussion could be held if required.

Action: Mrs Hogg to arrange for the Assembly Commission's Policies on 'Conduct and Behaviour of Visitors in Parliament

Buildings' and 'Sponsored Events in Parliament Buildings' to be circulated to Members.

Colin McGrath left the meeting at 10.24 am.

6. ASSEMBLY COMMISSION ACTIONS

Members noted the status of actions.

7. CORRESPONDENCE

Members noted correspondence received from the Clerk to the Executive Office committee, in relation to the Women's Rights Network. The Speaker advised that a paper covering this subject would be considered at agenda item 12, after which a response would be issued on behalf of the Assembly Commission dependent on any decision taken.

8. CLERK/CHIEF EXECUTIVE UPDATE

Mrs Hogg noted that her report provided Members with an update on the key issues which had arisen since the 18 June 2025 Assembly Commission meeting and highlighted the salient points.

Management Accounts – July 2025

Mrs Hogg advised Members of the current forecast outturn for Resource DEL, Capital DEL and the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee costs and outlined the reasons for variances against the June Monitoring position.

Roof Update

Mrs Hogg updated Members on the progress of the remedial works to the roof of Parliament Buildings, which she noted had been broken down into two phases, with Phase 1 being overseen by Property Services Division (PSD) and Phase 2 by Construction Division (CD).

Colin McGrath re-joined the meeting at 10.30 am.

Mrs Hogg noted concerns in relation to delays in taking forward the remedial works to the roof and the quality of documentation that had been provided from those charged with overseeing the work.

Sinéad Ennis left the meeting at 10.33 am and re-joined at 10.37 am.

Mrs Hogg also provided further information in relation to budget requirements for both Phases, and following discussion, Members agreed the quantum of budget provision for 2026-29.

Commissioner for Standards Appointment

Mrs Hogg noted that Mark McEwan had been appointed as the new Commissioner for Standards with effect from 8 September 2025.

Independent Remuneration Board Recruitment

Mrs Hogg updated Members on the live recruitment competition for the Independent Remuneration Board, noting that it was anticipated that the Board would be appointed by November 2025.

Trevor Clarke noted his disappointment at the length of time taken to appoint a Board. Mrs Hogg explained the timeframe, noting that the Assembly Members (Independent Remuneration Board) Bill was still awaiting Royal Assent.

Salary of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) Update

Mrs Hogg advised Members that, following consideration of a paper at the Assembly Commission meeting on 6 May 2025 on the salary arrangements of the C&AG, and correspondence from the Audit Committee, she had arranged on behalf of the Audit Committee, for a role evaluation and salary benchmarking exercise for the C&AG to be undertaken. Mrs Hogg noted that this work had been completed and that she had provided the Chairperson of the Audit Committee with a copy of the report.

Update on Partial Electronic Access Control (EAC)

Mrs Hogg referred Members to the update provided at the meeting on 18 June 2025 on the installation of a partial EAC system, at which point it was anticipated that work would commence in August 2025. Mrs Hogg stated that, as the date for submission of tenders had been extended, work was not now due to commence until mid/late October 2025.

Upper Car Park Allocation of Spaces

Mrs Hogg noted that the allocation of spaces in the upper car park had been discussed at the Assembly Commission meeting on 18 June 2025, at which point it had been agreed that Mrs Hogg would review the number of spaces that could be available and come back to Members with a proposal that would include a sitting day permit for all five main parties.

Mrs Hogg stated that, following review, in order to ensure that each of the five main parties were allocated at least one sitting day permit, the total number of permits available needed to increase from 7 to 10, the impact of which she stated would mean that People Before Profit Alliance (PBPA) and the Traditional Unionist Vote (TUV) would lose their access to a non-sitting day permit.

Following consideration, Members agreed to proceed with the proposal.

Paula McClintock joined the meeting at 11.02 for agenda item 9.

9. ASSEMBLY COMMISSION BUDGET 2026-29

Paula McClintock presented a paper providing a detailed breakdown of the Assembly Commission proposed 3-year Resource DEL budget for 2026-29 and 4-year Capital DEL budget for 2026-30.

Mrs McClintock stated that, if Members were content with the proposed budgets, they would be presented to the Audit Committee at its meeting on 17 September 2025 and provided to Department of Finance for planning purposes.

Following consideration, Members approved the draft budgets as proposed, subject to an amendment in relation to the quantum for roof remediation works as noted under agenda item 8.

Paula McClintock left the meeting at 11.21 am.

Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 11.22 am for agenda items 10, 11 and 12.

10. PAY CLAIM 2025

Mrs McDonnell noted that the pay claim for 2025 submitted by the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) had been considered by the Assembly Commission at its meeting on 18 June 2025, following which Mrs Hogg had advised NIPSA on the agreed Assembly Commission position in relation to the various elements of the pay claim.

Mrs McDonnell stated that NIPSA had subsequently written to Mrs Hogg, voicing concerns about the pay offer, and advising that following a ballot of their members, the element of the pay claim in relation to the offer of a rise of 3% to all pay points had been rejected, with members deeply unhappy that it was below inflation, and fell short of addressing the financial pressures many staff continue to face.

Mrs McDonnell noted that she and Mrs Hogg had met with NIPSA representatives to discuss the pay offer in detail, and presented a paper outlining details of the discussion and NIPSA’s rationale for a higher percentage pay uplift.

Mrs Hogg advised Members of the financial implications of a pay point uplift higher than 3%; highlighted pay awards of other comparator organisations; and asked Members to give consideration to NIPSA’s request for a higher percentage uplift.

All officials with the exception of Mr Ramsey left the meeting at 11.38 am.

Following discussion, Members agreed an increased pay offer of 4%.

Officials re-joined the meeting at 11.43 am.

Action: Mrs McDonnell to advise Trade Union Side (TUS) of the Assembly Commission's revised agreed position in relation to the percentage uplift on pay points for the 2025 Pay Claim.

11. NORTHERN IRELAND PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN SALARY ARRANGEMENTS

Mrs Hogg noted that she had informed the Assembly Commission in May 2025 of correspondence received from the Northern Ireland Public Services Deputy Ombudsman, seeking a review of the remuneration of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO), and that at the Assembly Commission meeting on 18 June 2025 Members had agreed that a review be undertaken.

Mrs Hogg advised that an independent evaluation and salary benchmarking exercise for the role of the NIPSO had been undertaken. Mrs McDonnell subsequently presented a paper outlining the findings of the exercise, and sought Members' views in relation to the recommendations within the report.

Members noted the comparisons in relation to both salary levels of the post of Ombudsman in other jurisdictions and also caseloads and performance.

Following a detailed discussion, Members requested that officials obtain some additional information.

Action: Mrs McDonnell to obtain additional information as requested by Members, and bring a further paper to an Assembly Commission meeting.

12. REVIEW OF THE TRANSGENDER POLICY AND GUIDANCE ON ASSISTING AND SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER VISITORS AND OTHER USERS OF PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Mrs Hogg noted that, in light of the Implications of the Supreme Court Judgment in For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers, Members had agreed at the Assembly Commission meeting on 12 May 2025, that a full review of the Assembly Commission Transgender Policy and Guidance should be undertaken, including consideration of advice and guidance from the Equality Commission.

Mrs Hogg confirmed that the review had been completed and, along with Mrs McDonnell, presented a paper outlining the findings.

Mrs Hogg stated that having considered legal advice provided previously on this matter and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's (ECNI) Legal Paper and Information published in June 2025, which provided interim information for employers, service providers and public authorities, she was recommending that Members give consideration to some proposed interim changes to the Transgender Policy and Guidance and the provision of facilities throughout Parliament Buildings, pending further guidance from ECNI.

Mrs Hogg noted that the proposed changes to the current Transgender Policy and Guidance were minor and Mrs McDonnell outlined the proposed interim changes to the provision of facilities throughout Parliament Buildings.

Mrs Hogg also stated that a further paper would be prepared for consideration by Members once ECNI had obtained legal clarification.

Members considered all proposals and expressed different views. While there was agreement in relation to exploring options to make interim changes to toilet facilities, there was no agreement on the recommendations to make interim changes to the current policy and guidance prior to legal clarity being provided in the courts.

Mr Clarke proposed accepting the recommended interim changes to the current policy and guidance, whilst also exploring further options in relation to changes to the provision of facilities throughout Parliament Buildings. The Speaker agreed that Members could exercise a weighted vote on the proposal:

For:	
Trevor Clarke	25 votes
Andy Allen	10 votes
Total:	**35 votes**
Against:	
Sinéad Ennis	27 votes
Nuala McAllister	17 votes
Colin McGrath	8 votes
Total:	**52 votes**

The proposal fell.

Action: Mrs McDonnell to explore further options in relation to changes to the provision of facilities throughout Parliament Buildings and bring a further paper to the Assembly Commission.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 12.30 pm.

Nuala McAllister and Andy Allen left the meeting at 12.30 pm.

13. SECURITY REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY POLICE SERVICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND (PSNI) AND THE OUTWORKINGS OF THE TERRORISM (PROTECTION OF PREMISES) ACT 2025 (AKA MARTYN'S LAW)

Mrs Ennis advised the Chair that she would not be able to stay for the full presentation of this agenda item, and the paper was therefore deferred to the next meeting due to a lack of quorum.

14. ITEMS ISSUED VIA CORRESPONDENCE

Minutes of ACARC meeting of 16 May 2025 issued to Members on 26 June 2025.

13. DECISIONS MADE VIA CORRESPONDENCE

The following decisions were made via correspondence since the last meeting:

Agreement to follow DCMS guidance to fly the Union flag at half mast to mark the death of HRH The Duchess of Kent on 4 September 2025.

Lighting Requests:

International PKU (Phenylketonuria) Day – **Not accepted**.

80th Anniversary of the Victory over Japan (VJ Day) – **Accepted**.

85th Anniversary of Battle of Britain – **Accepted**.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Speaker noted that there was an item of AOB to be discussed in closed session.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Officials to liaise with Members in relation to arranging a date for the next meeting.

The meeting went into closed session.

All officials, with the exception of Mrs Hogg and Mr Ramsey, left the meeting at 12.31 pm.