

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Meeting Venue: Parliament Buildings, Room 106

Meeting date: Wednesday, 4 March 2026

Meeting Time: 12.20 pm



Assembly Commission Members:

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

Officials present:

Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive
Steven Baxter, Director of Corporate Services
Gareth McGrath, Director of Parliamentary 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)
Terri Quigley, Head of Facilities Management (Items 9 and 12)
Paul Gill, Clerk Assistant (Item 11)
Feargal McGuinness, Clerk of EU and Interparliamentary Affairs (Item 11)
Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR (Items 13, 16, 17, 18 and 19)
Adam Leitch, Legal Adviser (Item 14)

The meeting commenced at 12.21 pm.

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared by Members.

3. CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

The Speaker reminded Members that Assembly Commission Question Time was scheduled for 10 March 2026.

The Speaker noted that Members had considered a paper on the Clerk/Chief Executive's Delegated Authority at the meeting on 19 November 2025 and agreed to increase previous limits. Following this, Members had had discussions around the Blue Flax refurbishment, and noted that they may wish to revisit that position. In light of these discussions, the Speaker therefore wanted to ensure that Members were content, before he signed a new letter of delegation.

The Speaker asked that officials leave the room whilst Members discussed the matter.

All officials with the exception of Robin Ramsey who remained to take a minute, left the meeting at 12.24 pm.

Following a brief discussion, Members agreed to rescind the decision taken at the meeting on 19 November 2025 in relation to the Clerk/Chief Executive's delegated authority limit and to maintain it at the previous level, particularly given that a number of other significant projects were proceeding in the time ahead. Members agreed that the position would be reviewed again before the end of the 2022-2027 mandate.

All officials re-joined the meeting at 12.33 pm.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Minutes from the Assembly Commission meetings on 19 November 2025, 19 December 2025, 13 January 2026 and 20 January 2026 were approved for publication.

5. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

6. ASSEMBLY COMMISSION ACTIONS

Members noted the status of actions.

7. CORRESPONDENCE

Members noted the following items of correspondence:

Correspondence dated 28 October 2025 from the Chairperson of the Committee for Communities in relation to the issue of visual fire alarms for visitors with hearing loss in Parliament Buildings, and the Speaker's response dated 18 November 2025.

Correspondence dated 20 October 2025 from the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance in relation to the lighting of Parliament Buildings to mark Baby Loss Awareness and the Speaker's response dated 9 January 2026.

Correspondence dated 26 November 2025 from the Chairperson of the Committee for Communities in relation to accessibility within Parliament Buildings for those with hearing loss, and the Speaker's response dated 26 January 2026.

Correspondence dated 4 February 2026 from the Chairperson of the Audit Committee in relation to Legislative change relating to the appointment and tenure of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Correspondence dated 9 February 2026 from the Speaker to the Deputy Ombudsman in relation to the Public Services Ombudsman Act (NI) 2016.

Correspondence dated 11 February 2026 from the First Minister and deputy First Minister in relation to the memorial to victims and survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse, and the Speaker's response dated 16 February 2026.

Correspondence dated 19 February 2026 from the Chairperson of the Independent Remuneration Board in relation to Members' Salaries Draft Determination – Consultation. The Speaker advised that a paper had been prepared on this issue for consideration at agenda item 10.

Correspondence dated 24 February 2026 from the Clerk to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee in relation to a review into Assembly and Executive reform – potential civic/citizen engagement exercise.

8. CLERK/CHIEF EXECUTIVE UPDATE

Lesley Hogg noted that her report provided Members with an update on the key issues which had arisen since the 19 November 2025 Assembly Commission meeting and highlighted the salient points.

Final Monitoring Position for 2025-26

Mrs Hogg advised Members of surrenders made in relation to Resource DEL, Capital DEL and the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Costs (WFDESC) to the Department of Finance at the December Monitoring Round.

Mrs Hogg noted that as the total final budget position for 2025-26 (excluding WFDSC) represented a reduction of 5.1% from the opening budget position, it had been reported to the Audit Committee, in line with the agreed approach to inform the committee if a variation of +/- 5% occurred.

Management Accounts – 31 January 2026

Mrs Hogg advised Members of the current forecast outturn for Resource DEL, Capital DEL and the WFDSC, noting the projected year-end position in relation to underspends in these areas.

Mrs Hogg referred Members to the Capital Plan table noting that the delivery of the Partial Electronic Access Control (EAC) into 2026-27 would require prioritisation and reallocation of capital budget in 2026-27.

Partial Electronic Access Control System Update

Mrs Hogg noted that the EAC system contract had been signed.

Designation of Parliament Buildings as a Protected Site under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005

Mrs Hogg advised Members that the Northern Ireland Office had approached the Assembly Commission in relation to Parliament Buildings being designated under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005.

Mrs Hogg stated that the view of officials was that designation of Parliament Buildings was a positive measure with no evident disadvantages, and would bring the building into line with the other UK legislatures, and possibly other key buildings or sites within Northern Ireland. In light of this, she sought and received approval from the Assembly Commission for officials to progress the necessary application form.

Freedom of Information (FOI) Request

Mrs Hogg updated Members on a FoI request complaint which had been referred to the Information Commissioners Office (ICO).

Corporate Risk Register – December 2025

Mrs Hogg referred Members to the latest version of the Corporate Risk Register updated as at December 2025.

2026 Members' Survey

Mrs Hogg advised that a survey of MLAs would be launched later that month, to enable Members to provide their views on the extent to which the services provided by the Assembly Commission support their work, and to advise of any suggestions for improvement. She stated that the findings would be used

to inform a report and proposed action plan which would be brought to the Assembly Commission for consideration.

Colin McGrath raised previous discussions about changing the name of the Members' Dining Room. Mrs Hogg noted that this was still proposed, that there had been no agreement on a new name and that the matter would be brought back to the next meeting.

Colin McGrath left the meeting at 12.50 pm.

Terri Quigley joined the meeting at 12.50 pm for agenda item 9.

9. UPDATE ON REMEDIAL WORKS TO THE ROOF OF PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Terri Quigley provided an update on the progress of the remedial works to the roof of Parliament Buildings.

Miss Quigley advised that in relation to Phase 1, the overall position remained positive, and was progressing as planned with work expected to commence imminently.

In relation to Phase 2, Miss Quigley advised that both the expert witness and Construction Division (CD) of Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) had recommended that further investigation was required to identify all sources of water ingress and that CD had proposed appointing an Integrated Consultant Team (ICT) to carry out detailed investigations. In light of this, Miss Quigley sought and received approval to appoint an ICT as outlined in the paper.

Members noted the complexities of the project and that the further scale and duration of repair work would depend on the results of investigations by the ICT and that associated communications should reflect this.

Terri Quigley left the meeting at 1.01 pm.

Gareth McGrath left the meeting at 1.02 pm.

10. PUBLICATION OF A DETERMINATION ON MEMBERS' SALARIES BY THE INDEPENDENT REMEUEARATION BOARD (THE BOARD) – STATUTORY CONSULTATION WITH THE ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Robin Ramsey referred to correspondence from the Board on the publication of a draft Assembly Members' (Salaries) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2026 (the draft determination). He noted that the Board was required by legislation to consult the Assembly Commission on a draft determination, the intended purpose of which was to enable the Assembly Commission the opportunity to highlight any issues which might affect the implementation of the determination.

Mr Ramsey advised that he had engaged with colleagues on the draft determination and no significant implementation issues had been highlighted for the Assembly Commission to raise with the Board.

In the absence of there being any implementation issues to raise, and as the Assembly Commission had been clear throughout about the importance of the Board dealing with these matters independently, Mr Ramsey advised that the Assembly Commission should make no comment on the substance of the recommendations of the determination as proposed in the draft response. Members agreed the draft response.

Feargal McGuinness joined the meeting at 1.07 pm for agenda item 11.

11. INTERPARLIAMENTARY AND INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION 2026-30

Feargal McGuinness presented and sought approval of a draft Interparliamentary and International Strategy for the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission 2026-30.

Members noted that the aim of the Strategy was to capture the range of interparliamentary and international engagement activity already undertaken and to strategically maximise these opportunities to enhance the profile and increase the impact and influence of the Assembly.

Mr McGuinness advised that action would be taken in the following three areas in order to achieve the Strategy's aim:

- Strengthening relationships with other parliaments and internationally;
- Empowering Members to represent the Assembly in interparliamentary and international forums; and
- Identifying, understanding and sharing good practice.

Paul Gill joined the meeting at 1.08 pm.

Paul Gill noted that it was the Assembly Commission's role to ensure the Assembly was supported in these activities rather than necessarily determining the detail of them.

Gareth McGrath re-joined the meeting at 1.08 pm.

Following consideration, Members approved the draft Strategy as presented.

Paul Gill and Feargal McGuinness left the meeting at 1.13 pm.

The Speaker left the meeting at 1.14 pm and Trevor Clarke took on the role of Chairperson.

Sinéad Ennis left the meeting at 1.15 pm.

Change to agenda running order.

15. ANNUAL PLAN 2025-2026 STATUS AT 31 DECEMBER 2025

Steven Baxter updated Members on the status of the actions in the Annual Plan 2025-2026 at 31 December 2025.

Sinéad Ennis re-joined the meeting at 1.17 pm.

Mr Baxter advised that it was expected that 80% of the actions within the Annual Plan would be achieved or partially achieved by the end of March 2026.

Members noted the progress made to date on the actions within the Annual Plan.

Terri Quigley re-joined the meeting at 1.18 pm for agenda item 12.

12. DISABILITY ACCESS SURVEY OF PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Miss Quigley presented a paper outlining the findings from the Disability Access Audit of Parliament Buildings.

Miss Quigley noted that, on the whole, the findings were very positive with nothing major to report.

Miss Quigley did however draw Members attention to one of the key findings in relation to the automation of corridor doors and the recommendation to install automatic door openers on corridor doors on floors not currently already automated.

Other recommended remedial works were also noted.

Andy Allen noted the need to complete the full automation of corridor doors. He also acknowledged that he had been consulted in relation to his experience and suggested that there were groups who could give advice from an accessibility perspective to maximise co-design. Mr Allen also asked if door automation could be carried out earlier. Mrs Hogg said that budget provision had been made in 2027-28 for the works and that a lead in time was required to scope and tender for the works, but that this could be explored.

Mr Clarke raised the issue of the lack of automation on the bathroom door opposite the Members' Bar on the first floor. Miss Quigley agreed to give consideration to options to address this issue as part of the planned activity.

Action: Miss Quigley to consider options to address the automation of the bathroom door opposite the Members' Bar on the first floor.

Terri Quigley left the meeting at 1.25 pm.

20. FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF A PROPOSAL TO DISPLAY A PORTRAIT OF HIS MAJESTY THE KING IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Mr Ramsey noted that he had had further discussions on the proposal to display a portrait of His Majesty The King in Parliament Buildings.

Mr Ramsey outlined precedents and previous arrangements, including that no portrait had been displayed of Queen Elizabeth II but that images of some of her previous visits to Parliament Buildings and the Stormont Estate were included in a display of images of events during the life of Parliament Buildings. While there was no agreement on a stand-alone portrait, Members discussed whether the display of events connected to the Assembly and Parliament Buildings could be added to.

Mr Ramsey advised that he was content to reflect on these discussions and consider options for a further paper at a future meeting. He noted however that the matter needed to be resolved one way or another, and that if a position was agreed by majority, rather than by consensus, that would necessitate an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) which would be lengthy.

Action: Mr Ramsey to prepare a further paper for consideration at the next Assembly Commission meeting.

Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 1.36 pm for agenda items 13, 16, 17, 18 and 19.

13. PROVISION OF RESTROOM FACILITIES IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Sinéad McDonnell noted that Members had considered a number of papers on the implications of the UK Supreme Court Judgment in *For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers*, most recently at its meeting on 10 September 2025, specifically on whether amendments were needed to the Assembly Commission's Transgender Policy and associated Guidance.

Mrs McDonnell also referred to the interim advice issued by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) to employers and organisations on how to provide facilities which will allow all people to feel comfortable.

Mrs McDonnell noted that officials had recommended an interim solution at the Assembly Commission meeting on 10 September 2025, but that agreement was not reached on this and officials had been asked to explore further options.

Colin McGrath re-joined the meeting at 1.40 pm.

Mrs McDonnell subsequently presented further options for consideration.

Mrs Hogg recorded that it remained her advice, and the advice of officials, that the Assembly Commission agree an interim approach in order to comply with legislation, whilst awaiting the final guidance from the ECNI.

Members considered the further proposals and expressed different views.

Mr Allen proposed accepting Option 4, to convert the smaller male restroom located opposite the Speaker's Corner into a single-occupancy Universal restroom, with all restrooms currently designated as female or male designated for use by biological women or biological men only, other than the restroom in Option 4, and the amendment of the current Transgender Policy and Guidance to reflect that transgendered staff, visitors and users of Parliament Buildings should use the Universal Restroom.

Members exercised a weighted vote on the proposal:

For:

Andy Allen	10 votes
Trevor Clarke	25 votes
Total:	35 votes

Against:

Sinéad Ennis	27 votes
Nuala McAllister	17 votes
Colin McGrath	8 votes
Total:	52 votes

The proposal fell.

Nuala McAllister then proposed either retaining existing arrangements until further guidance was issued by ECNI, or that a single space be designated as a Universal Restroom without any amendment to the Assembly Commission's Transgender Policy.

Mrs Hogg reiterated her advice that doing nothing until the ECNI issued further guidance was not recommended. She noted that the main issue for consideration with the latter proposal was whether it would meet the requirement to provide suitable and sufficient separate facilities for men and women under the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993.

It was agreed that Mrs McDonnell would bring a further advice paper back for consideration of this option.

Action: Mrs McDonnell to bring a further advice paper on the designation of a single space as a Universal Restroom without any amendment to the Assembly Commission's Transgender Policy, to the next meeting, including how this would comply with the legislative position and the Equality Commission's guidance.

16. REVIEW OF JOB SPECIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERS' SUPPORT STAFF

Mrs McDonnell noted that at its meeting in May 2025 the Assembly Commission had requested that the current template job specifications for MLAs' support staff be reviewed, with a view to streamlining where possible.

Mrs McDonnell advised that the review had been completed, that consultation had taken place with party Whips and she presented and sought approval of revised template job specifications for MLAs' support staff, for inclusion in the Recruitment Guidance provided to MLAs and publication on the MLAs' Portal.

Following consideration, Members approved the revised template job specifications.

Nuala McAllister left the meeting at 2.11 pm.

17. DRAFT FIVE-YEAR REVIEW REPORT (2021-2025) ON THE APPLICATION OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION'S EQUALITY SCHEME

Mrs McDonnell presented the draft Five-Year Report (2021-2025) on the application of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme.

Mrs McDonnell advised that all equality obligations under the Equality Scheme were met during the 2021-2025 period and she asked Members to note the progress made on the application and implementation of Equality Scheme commitments as detailed in the draft five-year review (2021-2025) of the Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme, prior to it being submitted to the ECNI and publication on the Assembly website.

Members noted and were content with the Review Report.

18. AUDIT OF INEQUALITIES ACTION PLAN 2022-2026 CLOSURE REPORT

Mrs McDonnell presented the Audit of Inequalities Action Plan 2022-2026 Closure Report.

Mrs McDonnell advised that all eight actions within the Action Plan had been completed and she asked Members to note the Audit of Inequalities Action Plan 2022-2026 Closure Report prior to its publication on the Assembly website.

Members noted and were content with the Action Plan Closure Report.

19. APPROVAL OF EQUALITY SCHEME REVIEW 2026-2031 AND THE DRAFT AUDIT OF INEQUALITIES REPORT AND ACTION PLAN 2026-2031 FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Mrs McDonnell presented and sought approval of the Equality Scheme Review 2026-2031 and the draft Audit of Inequalities (Aol) Report and Action Plan 2026-2031 for public consultation.

Mrs McDonnell noted that following review, only minor administrative changes were required to the Equality Scheme for 2026-2031, to ensure it remained up to date.

In relation to the draft Aol Report and Action Plan 2026-2031, Mrs McDonnell advised that key inequalities identified would be addressed during the 2026-2031 reporting period.

Mr Allen noted that in the past sign language interpretation had been provided to make the legislative process more inclusive and whether this could be considered for the future.

Gareth McGrath noted that sign language interpretation was being provided during the passage of the Sign Language Bill and that once the Bill was passed and became law, there would be a further opportunity to consider the provision the Assembly Commission made in this area.

Following consideration, Members noted and approved the revised Equality Scheme for 2026-2031 and the draft Audit of Inequalities Report and Action Plan 2026-2931 for public consultation.

Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 2.20 pm.

Adam Leitch joined the meeting at 2.20 pm for agenda item 14.

14. LITIGATION UPDATE

Adam Leitch provided a detailed breakdown of ongoing litigation to which the Assembly Commission is currently a named party. Members noted the update.

Adam Leitch left the meeting at 2.36 pm.

21. ITEMS ISSUED VIA CORRESPONDENCE

Letter dated 8 December 2025 from the Senior Assistant Clerk to the Audit Committee in relation to the budget for the Blue Flax refurbishment, and the Director of Corporate Service's response dated 9 December 2025.

Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee minutes of 22 October 2025.

22. DECISIONS MADE VIA CORRESPONDENCE

Assembly Commission paper on Proposed Partial Electronic Access Control System for Parliament Buildings.

Lighting Request:

World Wish Day and 40th Anniversary of the make-A Wish Foundation – **Accepted.**

23. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

24. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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

The meeting ended at 2.38 pm.