



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

**Minutes of Proceedings**

**19 March 2026**

**Meeting location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings, Belfast**

**Present:** Declan McAleer MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
John Blair MLA  
Tom Buchanan MLA  
Aoife Finnegan MLA  
Daniel McCrossan MLA  
Michelle McIlveen MLA  
Gareth Wilson MLA

**In Attendance:** Dr Janice Thompson, Assembly Clerk  
Glenda Doherty, Senior Assistant Assembly Clerk  
Nick Faulkner, Assistant Assembly Clerk  
Michael Greer, Clerical Supervisor  
Kyle Lawlor, Clerical Officer

***The meeting opened in Public Session at 10:10am***

## 1. Apologies

Robbie Butler MLA (Chairperson)

## 2. Declaration of Interests

The Deputy Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility to declare any interests in any of the items under discussion.

None were declared.

## 3. Chairperson's Business

The Deputy Chairperson referred to a memo, dated 11 March, from the Clerk to the Committee for Communities, regarding a proposed joint concurrent Committee session with the Committee for Communities and the Committee for Infrastructure on Thursday 21 May, on the Sustainable Places Programme.

The Committee noted that if Members are unable to attend, the session will be reported by Hansard and all papers shared with each Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to propose to hold the joint concurrent session on Thursday 21 May at 10am and then commence the AERA Committee meeting after the session.

The Deputy Chairperson referred to three items of copied correspondence, dated 9th March, from an individual, regarding the progress of three separate Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR) requests to the Department, regarding the storage and management of combustible waste materials at Re-Gen Group sites.

The Committee noted it does not deal in individual matters, however it raised a wider matter of environmental health.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting information on whether these concerns are valid and if so, do they indicate a wider issue and to seek details on what actions the Department is taking, or intends to take.

The Deputy Chairperson referred to correspondence from Dogs Trust, dated 12 March, regarding its decision to remove the third-party public liability insurance benefit from its Companion Club from 1 July.

The Committee noted it outlined the significant impact this will have on owners of exempted dogs, as this is currently the only way for them to comply with the Dangerous Dogs Order and that DAERA has provided assurance that a solution will be in place by 30 June but to date have not provided any detail.

The Committee noted the Dogs Trust have offered to meet with the Committee to discuss the matter.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department in the first instance to request detail on what actions it is undertaking on the matter.

The Deputy Chairperson referred to the Minister's written statement to the Assembly, published on 19 March, regarding the laying in the Assembly of the Third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme, noting that Members received a copy of the statement in advance on 18 March.

The Committee noted the Plan sets out the actions to adapt to and build resilience to the impacts of climate change over the next five-year period and there has been significant engagement and input from across all departments and external stakeholders, with over 280 actions in the programmes Adaptation Delivery Plan.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note.

#### **4. Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 12 and 16<sup>March</sup> 2026.

#### **5. Matters Arising**

The Committee considered a response from the Department, dated 10 March, regarding the Sustainable Agriculture Programme (SAP) – Legislation Flowchart.

The Committee noted that further to its request, the legislative landscape diagram will now be published on the DAERA website alongside the flowchart outlining the interrelationship between SAP schemes, to allow farmers to access the information should they wish to do so.

**Agreed:** The Committee was pleased this had been actioned and agreed to note.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Shared Environmental Services (SES), dated 10 March, in response to its query if they hold any records covering the last 5 years regarding odour management on whether there has been any increases or decreases in the number of cases followed up, or any outcomes, which could be linked to any changes in polices.

The Committee noted the response states that the core function of the SES is to undertake Habitat Regulations Assessments on planning applications and Local Development Plans on behalf of all local councils concerning the protection of European sites, designated for species and habitats.

The Committee noted that its functions do not extend to the protection of public health and it has no role or remit in odour assessments and provides no advice in this regard.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note.

The Committee considered a response from the Department, dated 16 March, regarding Bonds Glen Road and the Reported Destruction within the Sperrin Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Adjacent Special Area of Conservation.

The Committee noted the Department advises site inspections conducted in October 2025 by the Natural Environment Division, the Environmental Crime Unit and the Water Catchment Unit found no legislative breaches.

The Committee also noted that there are no regulatory or enforcement powers associated with AONB and any protections are within the remit of Derry & Strabane District Council planning authority who have been investigating since 13 January.

The Committee noted notifications have been issued to The Loughs Agency due to the proximity of the River Faughan; DAERA Forestry Service due to claims of unlicensed tree felling; and the Department of Infrastructure's River Agency in response to allegations of diverting and culverting water courses.

The Committee noted that on 12 March it considered a request from Bonds Glen Group to brief the Committee and agreed to consider the matter once this response was received. A Member commented on the environmental damage done to the area and requested that the Committee is briefed by the Group on the matter.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite the Bonds Glen Group to an evidence session.

## **6. Dilapidation Bill - Committee Deliberations- Informal Decision Making (Clause by Clause)**

The Deputy Chairperson stated that the Committee was still in its deliberations on the Bill but will now move towards making some informal decisions on its agreement or otherwise with each clause and any proposed amendments in closed session with the Assembly Bill Office Official.

The Committee noted that it has now received a RaISe paper on the Review of Costs, to assist when scrutinising potential financial implications of the Bill and which proposes a range of questions and issues for consideration.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward any relevant issues and queries raised in the Review of Costs paper to the Department for response.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request a briefing from RaISe on the Review of Costs paper after Easter recess.

The Committee noted it had a copy of the Department's summary of its meetings with NILGA / Building Control NI on 24 February and 2 March.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite NILGA back to brief the Committee on any outstanding issues.

The Committee agreed to go into Closed session and then return to public session to put any queries raised to the DAERA Bill Officials.

***The meeting went into closed session at 10:22am***

***John Blair MLA joined the meeting at 10:39am***

***The meeting resumed in public session at 11:44am***

***The Departmental Officials joined the meeting at 11:44am***

## **7. Dilapidation Bill - Evidence session with DAERA Bill Officials**

***This agenda item was recorded by Hansard***

The Senior Assistant Clerk gave a summary, for the record, of the discussions during the closed session which covered Clauses 7 to Schedule 2.

Areas of discussion included:

- Councils' views of the draft Statutory Guidance;
- Clarification of Councils understanding of what work is required in the Appeals process;
- Councils' involvement in issuing of fixed penalty notices; and
- Impact of fines on inherited property owners versus company-owned property.

The Deputy Chairperson requested that the Bill Officials address the queries discussed in the closed session.

A question and answer session followed:

Officials advised that are awaiting clarification from their legal team regarding Emergency action and the implications for serving a notice if it has not been possible to attach a notice to a dangerous building; and, what is understood to be "reasonable Costs" to District Councils.

Officials also advised that the statutory guidance would provide transparency and clarify how to submit an appeal.

In response to a Member's query regarding the impact of planning delays in conservation areas, officials noted the need to achieve an appropriate balance but emphasised that public safety remains the overriding concern.

In relation to the Power of Entry, officials advised that an amendment would be considered to provide that, where consent is refused, authorisation may be sought from a lay magistrate.

The Officials advised that the Department has provided NILGA with its summary of the meetings with officials and await a response. The Deputy Chairperson advised officials that NILGA will be invited to further brief the Committee on its concerns and issues raised during its meeting with Officials

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

***The Departmental Bill Officials left the meeting at 12:05pm***

***The Departmental Officials joined the meeting at 12:06pm***

## **8. SL1 - Mandatory Use of Closed-Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses Regulations (NI) 2026- Departmental Oral evidence session**

***This agenda item was recorded by Hansard***

The Committee noted the Department submitted SL1 and draft SR to the Committee on the 9 February, and on 19 February it agreed to receive an oral briefing from DAERA officials; publish the Department's papers and issue a call for views using the Citizen Space survey, which closed on 4 March with no responses submitted.

The following Officials briefed the Committee:

- Mr Neal Gartland, Director, Animal Health, and Welfare Policy;
- Mr Christopher Andrews, Deputy Director Animal Health, and Welfare Policy;
- Mr Barry McGarvey, Senior Principal Veterinary Officer; and
- Mr Chris Wade, Farmed Animal Welfare Policy Lead.

The Committee heard that the Department intends to make the SR under the affirmative procedure to make it compulsory for all licenced slaughterhouses in Northern Ireland to have CCTV installed where live animals are present, keep

recordings for 90 days and to allow access to the footage for authorised persons to view, copy or seize.

The Committee heard this would enhance transparency; improve animal welfare; strengthen enforcement capability; improve staff training; and provide the opportunity for the study of the movement and behaviour of animals at various stages of the slaughter process.

The Committee heard that the proposals would ensure parity of standards, as Northern Ireland is currently the only UK jurisdiction without mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses. Officials advised that, of the 20 slaughterhouses in Northern Ireland, 15 already have CCTV in place, while the remainder have little or no coverage.

There then followed a question and answer session:

The Committee heard that CCTV has been used successfully as evidence in prosecutions in England and has shown to provide safeguards and higher welfare standards.

The Chair thanked the Officials for their attendance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content to support the SR as drafted in the debate in the Assembly.

***The Officials left the meeting at 12:15pm***

## **9. Correspondence**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the following items of correspondence.

- A communique from the Minister regarding his attendance at the (EFRA) Interministerial Group meeting on 5th February.
- Correspondence dated 12 March from the Department regarding the intention to launch the Consultation on Regulating Cross-Boundary Carbon Capture and Storage Pipelines under the UK ETS.
- A memo dated 13 March from the Senior Assistant Clerk to the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (DSC) regarding a Proposal for a

Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability.

- A memo dated 13 March from the Clerk to the Committee for Finance regarding the Report on administrative and financial Provisions Bill.
- A memo dated 12 March from Clerk to the Committee for Finance regarding the Department of Finance summarising the outworkings of the additional funding allocated to the Executive following the Chancellor's Spring Statement.
- Correspondence dated 10 March the Committee has been copied into from the Cabinet Office to the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee regarding an update on Veterinary Medicine Supply in NI.
- Correspondence the Committee has been copied into between the Chair of the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee and Defra regarding The School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Scheme; and Certain Obligations of Operators and Traders.
- The 60th ESR Report dated 16 March which contained no SRs of relevance to this Committee.

The Committee considered correspondence dated 12 March from Principle Merchants (NI) Limited regarding what it describes as the impending threat to the Northern Ireland heavy engineering cluster from steel tariffs and CBAM Implementation with a request to brief the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add Principle Merchants (NI) Limited to the list of Committee briefings.

## **10. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the draft Forward Work Programme.

The Deputy Chairperson reminded Members of the Committee visit to the Enva recycling facility in Toomebridge on 26 March.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to publish the Forward Work Programme.

**11. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

**12. Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 26 March at The Lough Neagh Fisheries Visitors Centre, Toomebridge at 10:00am.

***The meeting was adjourned at 12:25pm***

**Signature:** .....

**Robbie Butler MLA, Chairperson**

**Dated** .....