

## The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Meeting Venue: Parliament Buildings, Room 106

Meeting date: Wednesday, 18 June 2025

Meeting Time: 2.30 pm



### Assembly Commission Members:

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

### Officials present:

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

### Others in attendance:

David Murphy, Chairperson of the Assembly Commission Audit and Risk Committee (ACARC)  
 Paul Stitt, Private Secretary to the Speaker (Item 10)  
 Sinéad McDonnell, Head of HR (Items 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18)

*The meeting commenced at 2.44 pm.*

## 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Nuala McAllister and the Speaker also noted that Sinéad Ennis would not be in attendance for the start of the meeting.

## 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared by Members.

The Speaker declared an interest on behalf of all officials in agenda item 14, the Pay Claim 2025. He stated that, when considering this item of business, he would ask 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 Robin Ramsey would remain in order to minute the discussion.

### **3. CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS**

The Speaker reminded Members that Assembly Commission Oral Questions were listed for business on Tuesday, 24 June 2025.

### **4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

Minutes from the Assembly Commission meetings on 6 and 12 May 2025 were approved for publication.

The minute of the closed session on 6 May 2025 was also approved.

### **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:

A letter from the Chairperson of the Audit Committee dated 2 June 2025, in response to the Clerk/Chief Executive's letter dated 5 May 2025, on the salary arrangements for the Northern Ireland Comptroller and Auditor General, as considered at the Assembly Commission meeting on 6 May 2025.

A letter dated 5 June 2025 from the Chairperson of the Chairpersons' Liaison Group, in response to the Speaker's letter of 7 April 2025, in relation to standards of dress by MLAs in committee meetings.

A letter to the First Minister and deputy First Minister dated 10 June 2025, in response to their letter of 25 March 2025, on a memorial to victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse, as considered at the Assembly Commission meeting on 6 May 2025.

## **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 6 May 2025 Assembly Commission meeting, and highlighted the salient points.

### **Management Accounts – March 2025**

Mrs Hogg advised Members of the year end outturn for Resource DEL, Capital DEL and the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (WFDSC) costs.

### **Management Accounts – April 2025**

Members noted the current forecast outturn for Resource DEL, Capital DEL and WFDSC costs.

### **June Monitoring**

Mrs Hogg informed Members that the Department of Finance (DoF) had reduced the number of monitoring exercises for the financial year 2025-26 to two.

Mrs Hogg advised Members of monies that had been surrendered in relation to the roof repairs.

### **3-Year Spending Review and Budget 2026-27 to 2028-29**

Mrs Hogg stated that it was likely, in light of the 3-year spending review announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that DoF would shortly be commissioning a 3-year budget exercise for the period 2026-29 and a 5-year Capital budget exercise for the period 2026-31.

Although the timing of the budget exercise is still uncertain, Mrs Hogg advised that discussions with DoF had indicated that the Assembly Commission would have to undertake a 3-year exercise over the Summer recess, with consideration by the Assembly Commission late September/early October and presentation to the Audit Committee in October/early November.

### **Update on the Assembly Members (Independent Remuneration Board) Bill**

Mrs Hogg noted that the Assembly Members (Independent Remuneration Board) Bill had passed Final Stage on 16 June 2025 and that Royal Assent was awaited.

### **Independent Remuneration Board Recruitment**

Mrs Hogg noted that under her delegated authority from the Assembly Commission, matters relating to the appointment, terms and conditions and

remuneration of non-executive appointments are made by the Assembly Commission.

However, Mrs Hogg stated that the Assembly Commission had made it clear during the debate on the Bill that any appointments to the Remuneration Board would be overseen by her, as the Clerk/Chief Executive, independently from the Assembly Commission in order that Members would not be involved in the recruitment process.

In light of this, Mrs Hogg formally sought delegated authority from the Assembly Commission to form a panel to undertake a recruitment process and to identify and appoint a Chairperson and two Members of the Remuneration Board on equivalent terms and conditions and remuneration of those of ACARC.

Members delegated authority to Mrs Hogg to undertake the recruitment and appointment process as proposed.

### **Salary of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) and Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG)**

In light of correspondence from the Deputy Ombudsman and the Audit Committee, in relation to the salary arrangements for the NIPSO and the C&AG respectively, Mrs Hogg proposed that the Assembly Commission undertake a review of the remuneration of both roles.

Members agreed with the proposal.

**Action:** Mrs Hogg to arrange for a review of the remuneration of the roles of NIPSO and C&AG to be undertaken.

### **Cleaning of the Façade of Parliament Buildings**

Mrs Hogg noted that cleaning of the east and west elevations of Parliament Buildings had completed and given the extremely positive comments received from MLAs, proposed proceeding with the cleaning of the front elevation.

Members were content with the proposal.

### **Update on Partial Electronic Access Control (EAC)**

Mrs Hogg advised of an anticipated start date of August 2025 for the work on the installation of a partial EAC system and she confirmed that communications would issue before and during the work to ensure building users were kept informed.

### **Corporate Risk Register (CRR) June 2025**

Members noted the CRR as at June 2025.

### **Update on the Blue Flax Refurbishment**

Mrs Hogg advised Members that work would begin on the refurbishment of the Blue Flax restaurant on 7 July 2025 and that, whilst the work was ongoing temporary facilities would be provided in the Visitors' Restaurant and Café Recess.

Members discussed how the Blue Flax had been busy on a number of recent occasions, that customers had to queue for a long time to pay due to only one till being open and that MLAs were often under pressure to return to plenary business. Mrs Hogg agreed to follow up on this feedback and consider reminding MLAs of the need to give prior notice if they were bringing large groups to the canteen.

### **All Staff Conference 4 July 2025**

Mrs Hogg reminded Members that Parliament Buildings would be closed to the public on 4 July 2025 to facilitate an all staff conference.

### **Potential Donation of an Artwork**

Mrs Hogg advised that the Assembly Commission had been approached in relation to receiving a donation of a sculpture.

In relation to whether to accept the artwork, Mrs Hogg referred to the review that had been undertaken by the Assembly Commission in 2022, on what should be displayed in the public areas of Parliament Buildings, and fact that Members had recently agreed that they would not be reopening the review process. Mrs Hogg also noted that the locations for a display of a sculpture were more difficult to find than for a wall hanging piece.

Members agreed to issue a response to indicate that while the Assembly Commission was willing to accept the donation, it did not have any display space currently available and that other locations may be able to offer an immediate display opportunity.

**Action:** Speaker to issue a response in relation to the donation of artwork.

### **Supplementary Oral Question – 1 April 2025 (Artificial Intelligence (AI))**

Mrs Hogg referred to Oral Questions to the Assembly Commission in April 2025, when a commitment was made to go back to Ms Bunting on her supplementary question regarding any potential savings that could be made as a result of AI, including around translation services.

Members agreed to issue a response advising that, the Assembly Commission is researching AI opportunities for the future which will form part of the Digital Strategy over the next three to five years.

**Action:** Corporate Support Unit to arrange for a response to issue to Ms Bunting.

### **Upper Car Park Allocation of Spaces**

Mrs Hogg referred to a query raised by Sinéad Ennis at the Assembly Commission meeting on 6 May 2025, in relation to the fact that the allocation of spaces for party staff within the upper car parks had not been reviewed to reflect the change on party size following the results of the last election.

Having considered a number of initial options, Members agreed that Mrs Hogg would review the number of spaces that could be available and come back with a proposal for distribution to include all five main parties.

**Action:** Mrs Hogg to provide Members with a proposal for distribution of Upper Car Park spaces to include all five main parties.

*Sinéad Ennis joined the meeting at 3.12 pm.*

## **9. PROGRESS OF REMEDIAL WORKS TO THE ROOF OF PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

Mrs Hogg updated Members on the progress of remedial works to address all of the defects to the roof of Parliament Buildings.

Members noted the update and agreed that Mrs Hogg, Steven Baxter (Director of Corporate Services) and the Speaker would manage the progress of remedial works going forward.

*Paul Stitt joined the meeting at 3.16 pm for agenda item 10.*

## **10. REVIEW AND AMENDMENT OF THE PORTRAITS POLICY**

Paul Stitt presented a paper outlining the findings of a review that had been undertaken, in line with the policy requirements, on the budgetary limits for official portraits.

Mr Stitt stated that following review, the recommendation was that no change is made to the current negotiating limit for the commissioning of official portraits.

Mr Stitt also noted that whilst reviewing the budgetary limit, the opportunity was taken to consider some amendments to the policy, and he proposed that the policy was updated to record the procurement process involved with commissioning portraits; that the maximum size permitted for any portrait is reduced; the policy is updated to take account of the approved locations for the display of official portraits; and that the option of photographs is removed, as paintings are more in keeping with the setting of the Great Hall.

Following consideration, Members agreed with the recommendations.

*Paul Stitt left the meeting at 3.19 pm.*

## **11. DELEGATED AUTHORITY ARRANGEMENTS**

Mrs Hogg presented a paper seeking a review of the delegation of functions to her as Clerk/Chief Executive.

Mrs Hogg noted that the internal audit of Corporate Governance arrangements had recommended that her Letter of Delegation be reviewed.

Mrs Hogg provided comparative information for consideration, on the delegation of functions by the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body and Senedd Commission to their Clerk/Chief Executive equivalent positions.

Mrs Hogg subsequently proposed revisions to her Letter of Delegation.

Following discussion, Members agreed that the matter required further consideration and that Mrs Hogg should engage with Members individually and bring back a further version reflecting on the feedback given.

**Action:** Mrs Hogg to meet with Members individually and bring a further paper to an Assembly Commission meeting.

## **12. ANNUAL PLAN 2024-2025 END OF YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Mrs Hogg presented the Annual Plan 2024-2025 End of Year Performance Report.

Mrs Hogg noted that of the 77 actions and milestones contained in the Annual Plan, 64 were fully achieved, 9 were partially achieved and 4 were not achieved.

Members noted the Annual Plan 2024-2025 End of Year Performance Report, and the final status of the actions and milestones contained therein.

## **13. ANNUAL PLAN 2025-2026**

Mrs Hogg presented a paper on the Annual Plan 2025-2026.

Mrs Hogg advised that the actions and milestone contained in the Annual Plan had been developed to deliver the Corporate Plan 2023-2028 and linked to the four Corporate Strategy priorities.

Members noted and approved the 2025-2026 Annual Plan.

*Change to agenda running order.*

**19. NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES REPORT FOR 2024-2025**

Gareth McGrath presented a paper on the Complaints Policy and Procedures Report for 2024-2025, advising of one admissible complaint during the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Members noted the report.

**20. ASSEMBLY COMMISSION AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025**

David Murphy presented the ACARC Annual Report for 2024-2025.

Mr Murphy noted that ACARC had met four times during the reporting period, and he thanked ACARC colleagues and Assembly officials for their work on the Committee.

Mr Murphy advised that ACARC had set and met its four key objectives, and that the Assembly Commission's Internal Auditor had undertaken nine internal audit reviews during the reporting period.

Mr Murphy advised that the Assembly Commission's Internal Auditor's Annual Assurance Report had provided a satisfactory level of assurance on the system of internal control in the Assembly Commission.

Members noted the Report.

*Sinéad McDonnell joined the meeting at 3.40 pm for agenda items 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18.*

**14. PAY CLAIM 2025**

Sinéad McDonnell presented a paper which outlined the key elements of the 2025 Pay Claim submitted by the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA).

Mrs McDonnell referred to the first two elements of the Pay Claim, namely:

- a. That the 2025 pay implementation date is effective from 1 April 2025, with pay progression for those entitled staff who have accrued enough service in the 2024 – 2025 reporting period; and
- b. a 3% plus 7% (10%) increase or £3,000 (whichever is higher) on all pay points.

In relation to the first element, Mrs McDonnell stated that it was in line with current practice and recommended that it is accepted by the Assembly Commission. Members agreed with the recommendation.



In relation to the second element, Mrs McDonnell noted that the Assembly Commission budget only included provision for an increase of 3% to all pay points. Members recognised that while the Pay Claim noted the level of the recent Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) pay deal, it had not been acknowledged that for a number of years the Assembly Commission had awarded pay deals greater than the NICS award.

*All officials with the exception of Mr Ramsey left the meeting at 3.43 pm.*

Members agreed an increase of 3% in the context of the budget and previous awards.

*Officials re-joined the meeting at 3.44 pm.*

In relation to the other elements of the Pay Claim, the Assembly Commission agreed:

- c. An increase in the on-call allowance of 3% for staff at Assembly Grade 8 to Assembly Grade 6; and
- d. a 10% increase in the overtime rates up to Assembly Grade 4.

Mrs McDonnell advised that consultation would be taking place with Trade Union Side (TUS) on a multi-year pay deal with effect from 2026-27.

**Action:** Mrs McDonnell to advise Trade Union Side (TUS) of the Assembly Commission's agreed position in relation to the Pay Claim for 2025.

## **15. REPORTS SUMMARISING THE RESULTS OF THE 2024 STAFF SURVEY AND NEXT STEPS**

Mrs McDonnell presented a paper, outlining the findings of the 2024 Staff Survey and the work that is being taken forward.

Members noted the Report.

## **16. DISABILITY ACTION PLAN REPORTS**

Mrs McDonnell presented a paper on the Disability Action Plan, which included the Five-Year Review (2023-2025), the 2025-2030 Public Consultation Outcome Report and the draft Action Plan 2025-2030.

Mrs McDonnell advised that 92% of the actions had been completed and Members noted the outcomes of the public consultation for the 2025-2030 Action Plan.

Mrs McDonnell sought Members approval of the Five-Year Review (2023-2025), the 2025-2030 Public Consultation Outcome Report and the draft Action Plan 2025-2030 for publication and implementation.

Trevor Clarke raised an issue in relation to the accessibility of the disabled toilets on the first floor. Mrs McDonnell agreed to refer the issues raised to Building Services for review.

**Action:** Building Services to review the accessibility of the disabled toilets on the first floor.

Members approved all documents for publication and implementation.

## **17. GOOD RELATIONS ACTION PLAN REPORTS**

Mrs McDonnell presented a paper on the Good Relations Action Plan, which included the Action Plan 2022-2025 Closure Report, the 2025-2030 Public Consultation Outcome Report and the draft Good Relations Action Plan 2025-2030.

Mrs McDonnell advised that 82% of the actions for 2022-2025 had been completed and Members noted the outcomes of the public consultation for the 2025-2030 Action Plan.

Mrs McDonnell sought Members approval of the Action Plan 2022-2025 Closure Report, the 2025-2030 Public Consultation Outcome Report and the draft Good Relations Action Plan 2025-2030 for publication and implementation.

Members approved all documents for publication and implementation.

## **18. ANNUAL EQUALITY PROGRESS REPORT TO THE EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND 2024-2025**

Mrs McDonnell presented the 2024-2025 Annual Equality Progress Report.

Members noted and were content for the Report to be submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and published on the Assembly website.

*Sinéad McDonnell left the meeting at 4.06 pm.*

## **21. ITEMS ISSUED VIA CORRESPONDENCE**

The Speaker noted that the minutes of the ACARC meeting of 19 February 2025 had been issued to Members for information on 19 May 2025.

**22. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

**23. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Speaker noted that officials would be in contact with a date for the next full meeting after the summer, but stated that an earlier meeting would be held, if business required.

*The meeting ended at 4.07 pm.*