



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC)

## Minutes of Proceedings

Tuesday 4 November 2025 at 9.30 a.m.

**Meeting Location:** Room 21, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Jonathan Buckley MLA (Chairperson)  
Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Sinéad Ennis MLA  
Michelle Guy MLA  
Michelle McIlveen MLA  
Gary Middleton MLA

**In attendance by video :**

Matthew O'Toole MLA

**Apologies:**

Carál Ní Chuilín MLA  
John Stewart MLA



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### **In Attendance:**

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk

Ashleigh Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Supervisor

Laura Gourley, Clerical Officer

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to start the meeting in closed session.

The meeting commenced at 9.31 a.m. in closed session.

### **1. Apologies**

As above.

### **2. Declaration of Interests**

The Chairperson advised Members of the ongoing requirement to declare relevant financial or other interests, as and when they arise, and before taking part in any Assembly proceedings, including Committee proceedings, relating to that matter.

No interests were declared at this stage in the meeting.



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### **3. Designing a civic/citizen engagement exercise – preliminary briefing by the Assembly Engagement Office**

The following members of staff from the Assembly Engagement Office joined the meeting at 9.33 a.m.

Clare Maguire, Public Engagement Manager

Caroline Moore, Participation and Outreach Manager

The Engagement Office staff briefed the Committee on questions which the Committee would need to address when considering the design of engagement options, and this was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Engagement Office staff for their briefing.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the issues identified in the briefing and agreed to consider them in more detail at a future meeting of the Committee, once the evidence-gathering process has been concluded, and the full range of options identified.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to further consider whether to request that the Engagement Office provides follow-up information on the extent to which it could support the Committee in undertaking an engagement exercise. In particular this would relate to a 'Citizens' Assembly' approach, and on whether/what external support might be required if the Committee was to undertake such an exercise.

The meeting moved into open session at 10.07 a.m.

### **4. Draft minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2025.



## **5. Matters arising**

None.

## **6. Review into Assembly and Executive Reform – oral evidence session**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the oral evidence session be recorded by Hansard.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 10.07 a.m.

Professor Joanne McEvoy, University of Aberdeen (joined remotely)

Professor Allison McCulloch, Brandon University, Canada (joined remotely)

Dr Robin Wilson, University College London

Professor Michael Kerr, Kings College London

The witnesses briefed the Committee, and this was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

Michelle McIlveen left the meeting at 10.46 a.m.

Sinéad Ennis left the meeting at 10.49 a.m.

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on future meeting dates for the Committee and other issues relating to the evidence gathering process.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the provisional meeting dates up to Easter 2026 and that agreed evidence sessions are scheduled for the applicable meeting dates.

**Noted:** The Committee noted the follow-up information provided by Dr Sean Haughey following his oral evidence session on 7 October 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to commission comparative research from RaISe on the role, powers and accountability of the Speaker, which examines arrangements across applicable legislatures, as suggested by Dr Haughey.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed a letter to issue to Dr Haughey and Professor Jon Tonge, that will be submitted as part of their Research Excellence Framework Audit.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted correspondence from Professor Feargal Cochrane and his research colleague Professor Edward Morgan-Jones on sources of public opinion/survey data on institutional reform options, and agreed to commission research from RalSe which identifies, collates and analyses existing public opinion data on institutional reform preferences and options.

### 7. Review of Assembly Committee engagement on cross-cutting Executive strategies – update on the call for evidence

The Senior Assistant Clerk introduced this agenda item and provided an update on the review.

**Noted:** The Committee noted the responses received to date on the Call for Evidence and the updated list of cross-cutting strategies provided by the Executive Office (TEO).

**Noted:** The Committee noted that a summary of all response received to the Committee's Call for Evidence will be provided at a future meeting.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the submission from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to its corresponding Assembly Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Finance to provide a list of departments that have provided substantive written submissions to the review.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to include the Department of Finance report on budget alignment to Programme for Government priorities, which was provided by the Committee for Finance, to the body of evidence for the review.



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### 8. Review into the development of a formal process and guidance on the handling of Westminster Statutory Instruments (SIs) which include a role for the Assembly – update on the call for evidence

The Senior Assistant Clerk introduced this agenda item and provided an update on the review.

**Noted:** The Committee noted the responses received to date on the Call for Evidence for the review.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to TEO to suggest that an interim process could be agreed for inclusion in its guidance that is being developed for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) on the handling of applicable Westminster SIs.

**Agreed:** The Committee agree to request an update from TEO on the status of any discussions between the Executive and the UK Government on the handling of applicable Westminster SIs.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Communities to share the Terms of Reference for the Review and the response to the Review from its corresponding department.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to all statutory committees to ask for examples of any SIs they may have considered, that are similar to the example shared by the Committee for Communities.

**Noted:** The Committee noted that a summary of all the responses to the Committee's Call for Evidence will be provided at a future meeting.

### 9. Correspondence

None.



## **10. AOB**

None.

## **11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the AERC will take place on Tuesday 25 November 2025 at 9.30 a.m. in Room 21.

*The meeting was adjourned at 11.15 a.m.*

**Pat Sheehan MLA**  
**Deputy Chairperson, Assembly and Executive Review Committee**

**25 November 2025**