



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for the Executive Office

# End of Session Report February 2024 to July 2025

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# **Powers and Membership**

## **Powers**

The Committee for the Executive Office is a Statutory Departmental Committee established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement and under Assembly Standing Order No 48. The Committee has a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Executive Office and has a role in the initiation of legislation. The Committee has nine members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of five.

The Committee has power to:

- consider and advise on Departmental budgets and Annual Plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- approve relevant secondary legislation and take the Committee Stage of relevant primary legislation;
- call for persons and papers;
- initiate enquiries and make reports; and
- consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by the First Minister, deputy First Minister or junior Ministers.

## **Membership**

The Committee has 9 members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of five members. The membership of the Committee is as follows:

- Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)
- Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Mr Timothy Gaston MLA
- Mr Harry Harvey MLA
- Mr Brian Kingston MLA
- Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA
- Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

- Ms Aíne Murphy MLA
- Ms Claire Sugden MLA

1 With effect from 9 September 2024 Mr Timothy Gaston replaced Mr Pádraig Delargy.

2 With effect from 8 November 2024 Mr Stewart Dickson replaced Ms Connie Egan.

3 With effect from 10 February 2025 Ms Aíne Murphy replaced Emma Sheerin.

# **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms used in this Report**

## Introduction

1. The Committee held a total of fifty-five meetings between February 2024 and July 2025. Thirty-nine of these were held in public session, while one additional meeting was held in closed session on Tuesday 22 October 2024 to provide Members with legal advice in advance of a briefing from the First Minister the following day. The remaining fifteen meetings comprised a combination of both open and closed sessions.
2. The Committee held one visit during this period, to Ebrington Barracks on 16 October 2024, followed by a subsequent Committee meeting held at the Ebrington Hotel.

# Primary Legislation

## **The Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill**

3. The Committee considered one piece of primary legislation in the February 2024 to July 2025 session which was the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.
4. In a Written Ministerial Statement on the Executive's Legislative Programme on 9 April 2025, the First and deputy First Ministers outlined that they aimed to introduce the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill before summer recess.
5. The purpose of the Bill is to set up a Statutory Public Inquiry to establish the facts about these institutions between 1922 and 1995. It will further include provision for the Executive Office to establish a Redress Service to administer a statutory financial redress scheme.
6. The Committee agreed at its meeting on the 11 June to extend the Committee stage of Bill until the 30 January 2026
7. The Committee stage of the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill formally commenced on Wednesday 25 June 2025.
8. The Committee launched its Call for Evidence on Monday 7 July and the consultation will be live for twelve weeks until Monday 29 September.
9. The Committee also held its first Familiarisation session with stakeholders on Monday 7 July in the Long Gallery. The purpose of the session was to outline that during the Committee Stage of the Bill, the focus shifts to a detailed examination of its provisions.. The familiarisation session aimed to explain this, helping stakeholders to understand the legislative process of the Bill, and in particular the Committee Stage.

10. The Committee also held two additional Familiarisation Sessions which took place on Tuesday 9 September at WAVE Trauma Centre Belfast and online on Thursday 11 September.
11. The Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill will take priority in the Committee's forward work programme during the September to December 2025 session.



## Subordinate Legislation

12. The Committee considered a number of Statutory Rules subject to draft affirmative and negative resolution.
13. The first was the Fair Employment (Monitoring) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024. The Committee considered a proposal by the Executive Office to make a statutory rule to amend the Fair Employment (Monitoring) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999 to provide monitoring information in respect of school teachers from 12 May 2024 only. At its meeting on 11 September the Committee agreed that it was content with the proposal for the statutory rule but asked the Department to clarify whether the Equality Commission will receive any extra funding in relation to the monitoring.
14. The second Statutory rule considered by the Committee was the Period Products (Executive Office Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024. The Committee considered a proposal by the Executive Office to make a statutory rule to specify by regulations those public service bodies to which the duty to make free period products available for users while on their premises applies. The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposal for the Statutory Rule at its meeting on 11 September 2024.
15. The Committee considered the Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024, beginning with an initial review of the SL1 on 15 January 2025, where it expressed contentment with the draft. Prior to this, on 23 October 2024, the Committee had referred the SL1 to the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (AERA) for input. Following a supportive response from AERA on 11 November, the Committee revisited the SL1 on 20 November and agreed to withhold consent until recommended amendments from the Climate Change Committee (CCC) were incorporated. It also requested further information on the Commissioner's office, including costs, structure, and future placement within TEO. A response, including CCC input, was received from TEO on 4 December, and on 15 January 2025, the Committee confirmed it had no objection to the Rule.

16. At its meeting on the 26 March 2025 the question was then put that the Committee had considered the Draft Statutory Rule the Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly. The Committee divided: Ayes 5; Noes 3; Abstain 0.

**AYES:** Ms Paula Bradshaw, Ms Claire Sugden, Miss Áine Murphy, Ms Sínead McLaughlin and Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

**NOES:** Mr Timothy Gaston, Mr Brian Kingston and Mr Harry Harvey.

17. The Committee considered the Draft Statutory Rule the Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2025 and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.
18. The last SR to be considered in this session was the Fair Employment (Specification of Public Authorities) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025.
19. The Committee considered SR 2025/34 The Fair Employment (Specification of Public authorities) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 made under powers conferred by Articles 50 and 51 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, and which will amend the Schedule to the Fair Employment (Specification of Public Authorities) Order (Northern Ireland) 2004 at its meeting on the 26 March 2025. The Committee had no objection to the Rule.

## Inquiries

20. The Committee conducted an inquiry on differences in equality legislation between the regions of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The purpose of the inquiry is to find out where equality legislation is different in Northern Ireland to other jurisdictions and to understand the impacts this has. This is especially important since the UK has left the European Union, where equality legislation may have diverged.
21. The Committee's terms of reference for this inquiry, were considered as part of a Clerk's brief at the meeting on the 29 May 2024 detailing the terms of reference, witnesses and timescales for the inquiry. The terms of reference were as follows:
  - Examine differences in equality legislation between Northern Ireland and other jurisdictions of the UK
  - Examine divergence between equality legislation in Northern Ireland, the European Union and other jurisdictions since the UK exit from the EU (Brexit)
  - Examine concluding observations relating to legislative change relating to equality in Northern Ireland from examinations of the UK by international human rights bodies
  - Investigate the impacts of gaps in legislation
  - Make recommendations for change in legislation in Northern Ireland
22. To address these terms of reference the Committee drew on the following sources of information.
23. Research papers were commissioned from the Assembly's Research and Information Service (RaISe) on Comparative study of equality legislation in the United Kingdom and Ireland (NIAR 125-2024); and Summary of International Human Rights Standards' Concluding Observations on Northern Ireland (NIAR 126-2024).

24. The online questionnaire on the Citizen Space platform was live from 10 June 2024 to 6 September 2024. There were 124 responses to the online questionnaire by the closing date. The Committee received an additional 25 written responses.
25. Oral evidence was taken from the Equality Coalition, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Office of the Commissioner for Older People, Age NI, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, YouthAction NI, Christian Institute and the Women's Rights Network.
26. A stakeholder event was also held in the Long Gallery on 4 December 2024
27. At the meeting of 9 April, the Committee considered a paper from the Clerk summarising the research and evidence received by the Committee to date, against the agreed terms of reference for the inquiry. Following discussion, the Committee agreed that the Clerk would compile a draft report for Committee consideration in early May.
28. At its meeting on 7 May, the Committee considered the draft report and agreed to provide feedback and suggested amendments/additions to the report by Friday 16 May 2025. A template to assist in providing feedback was circulated to Members. A further deadline of Wednesday 28 May 2025 was agreed for submission. This was then extended to Monday 2 June 2025.
29. At its meeting on the 18 June the Committee agreed to revisit the draft report in the next session.
30. Deliberations have continued and the Committee is due to consider a further draft of the report in early 2026.

## EU Scrutiny

31. The Committee held various discussion with departmental officials (as part of its routine scrutiny) on the impact of departmental delivery and policy in relation to interactions with the EU
32. The Committee also held four meetings specifically on EU matters, including updates on the Common Frameworks.

## Policy Scrutiny

33. The Committee examined the work of the Civil Contingencies Unit, including the Covid 19 Inquiry: Resilience and preparedness (Module 1 Report).
34. The Committee held ongoing discussion with the Department over the Programme for Government, including the EIA, Rural Needs Impact Assessment and Child Rights Impact Assessment.
35. The Committee examined the work and delivery to date on the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework.
36. The Committee reviewed the report Joining the Dots on Good Relations.
37. The Committee examined the impact of the draft Refugee Strategy, as well as the Racism Action Plan.

## Engagement - Informal meetings/events

38. On 4 December 2024, the Committee hosted a stakeholder roundtable event in the Long Gallery as part of its Inquiry into Gaps in Equality Legislation.

## Committee motion

39. On 9 October 2014, the Committee tabled the following motion for plenary debate:

*That this Assembly condemns ongoing racist incidents in our community; and calls upon the First Minister and deputy First*

*Minister to urgently carry out a comprehensive review into the racist attacks of July and August 2024 (to include what happened, why it happened, who was involved) and to bring forward proposals on how to prevent it happening again.*

## Likely priorities for the next session

40. The Committee stage of the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.
41. Examination of the upcoming Race Relations Order legislation.
42. Ongoing examination of the delivery of the Programme for Government.

## Expenditure for the period 3 February 2024 – 31 August 2025

Budget area	Details	Expenditure
Committee Travel - committee members and staff travel and subsistence in relation to visits and meetings outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of committee visits to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ebrington Barracks to discuss the work of the Business Centre</li> <li>External Meeting at the Ebrington Hotel</li> <li>Chairperson and Clerk visit to Washington DC for St Patrick's Day activities</li> <li>Chairperson and clerk attending Common Framework meeting at Westminster x 2</li> </ul>	£8, 583.04  £366.04 £1200 £5960 £1057
Printing of committee reports	Includes the cost of committee reports on	£n/a
Advertising – the cost of public notices relating to committee inquiries, the committee stage of Bills and meetings held outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of public notices in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inquiry into Gaps in Equality Legislation</li> </ul>	£855.55

Specialist Advice - the cost of specialist advisers appointed by the committee and commissioned research, also the cost of drafting Standing Orders		£n/a
Refreshments & Hospitality	Includes the cost of all refreshments and hospitality provided by the committee; to include meetings, working lunches, seminars and any other such expenditure.	£ 2904.20
General expenses	Includes the cost of seminars (excluding refreshments and hospitality); room hire; witness expenses; gifts provided by the committee during visits; and conference fees for members.	£1674.45
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>£12,489.74</b>

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