



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

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COMMITTEE RESPONSE TO TEO COMMITTEE – INQUIRY (MOTHER AND BABY INSTITUTIONS, MAGDALENE LAUNDRIES AND WORKHOUSES) AND REDRESS SCHEME BILL (BILL 15/22-27)

Introduction

1. The Committee for Communities welcomes the opportunity to respond to the correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office dated 6 October 2025 inviting views on the *Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill*. Committee appreciates the extension of the date for responses to enable it to collate, review and agree a substantive response.
2. The Committee notes that the Bill's primary purpose is to establish a statutory Truth Recovery Public Inquiry and a Truth Recovery Redress Service to provide financial and other redress for those affected by the operation of Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries, and Workhouses between 1922 and 1995.
3. While the Bill is being led by The Executive Office, the Committee for Communities has identified a number of areas which fall within, or are closely related to, the remit of the Department for Communities (DfC). The Committee therefore agreed to submit a substantive response outlining these areas of potential overlap and scrutiny interest, informed by the areas of scrutiny and issues which most frequently come before the Committee.

Interaction with Social Security and Benefits Legislation & Disregards

(Clause 37 and Schedule 4)

4. The Committee noted that the Bill provides for redress payments to be disregarded for the purposes of means-tested benefits, residential care costs and means-tested Legal Aid. As DfC holds policy and delivery responsibility for most social security and welfare benefits in Northern Ireland, this is a significant intersection. Committee regularly receives correspondence from individuals living in different parts of these islands who are directly affected by issues with the applications of disregards in relation to payment schemes.
5. For example, most recently an individual who was resident in a Mother and Baby home in RoI as a child but is now resident in NI and who would have met the qualifying criteria for payments under the RoI scheme contacted the Committee anonymously, seeking help or assurance that the RoI payment could be disregarded in the context of her existing UC benefits. Committee is also conscious that children previously resident in mother and baby homes in NI, may now reside in other jurisdictions and require reciprocal arrangements to be in place in order to mitigate against any potential loss of current entitlements.
6. Members considered it important that:
 - The drafting of the disregard provisions is comprehensive and includes all relevant benefits, including Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, and legacy payments.
 - Consideration be given to reciprocal arrangements being in place between the different jurisdictions across the islands
 - The Department confirms how it intends to operationalise the disregard and communicate it to Social Security Agency staff and claimants.

- Any necessary delegated legislation under Schedule 4 is scrutinised by the Committee for Communities to ensure there is no inadvertent loss of entitlement for survivors or their families.
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Provision of Advice, Assistance and Financial Guidance to Survivors

(Clause 39)

7. The Bill enables the Truth Recovery Redress Service to provide advice, assistance and financial management support to applicants. The Committee notes that DfC currently funds and oversees a network of independent advice and welfare services, which may overlap or interact with this new function.
 8. The Committee recommends that:
 - The Executive Office and DfC develop joint guidance to ensure survivors can access trauma-informed welfare and financial advice without duplication.
 - Funding and referral mechanisms are coordinated with existing DfC programmes such as the Regional Advice Network and debt advice contracts.
 - The Redress Service's remit in this area is clearly delineated to avoid confusion among applicants already engaging with community-based advice services.
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Equality, Inclusion and Ongoing Support for Survivors

(Part 2 – Redress and Support)

9. The Committee recognises that many survivors may continue to experience social isolation, poverty, and housing vulnerability. Given DfC's lead role in social inclusion, equality and gender policy, and community support programmes, the Department has a continuing responsibility to ensure that survivors are supported beyond financial redress.

10. Members considered that:

- DfC should assess how survivors may be prioritised or supported within housing, employability, and social inclusion schemes.
 - The Department should ensure that access to support is non-stigmatising and integrated into mainstream community services.
 - The cross-departmental approach to redress should include a clear referral pathway from the Redress Service to DfC-funded social programmes, particularly where survivors experience financial hardship or housing insecurity.
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Archival Access, Preservation and Historical Records Management

(Clauses 1–4, 16 and 36)

11. The Committee notes that the Bill provides powers for the Inquiry and Redress Service to compel the production and disclosure of records and to preserve documentary evidence. As the Department for Communities has responsibility for the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), there is a clear role in the long-term preservation and accessibility of records generated by the Inquiry.

12. The Committee recommends that:

- DfC, through PRONI, works closely with The Executive Office to ensure that archival standards, digitisation protocols, and privacy safeguards meet statutory requirements.
 - The Executive Office provides clarity on where custody and access responsibilities will sit after the Inquiry and Redress Service conclude.
 - PRONI's capacity and resourcing to manage potentially sensitive and high-volume material are considered at an early stage.
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Community Impact, Memorialisation and Legacy Programmes

(Potential post-Inquiry outcomes)

13. The Committee notes that the Truth Recovery Design Panel's recommendations and subsequent Inquiry findings may include proposals for memorialisation, education, and community remembrance initiatives. These activities could fall naturally within DfC's remit for heritage, arts, and community development.

14. Accordingly, the Committee suggests that:

- DfC should engage proactively with TEO to plan for community-based legacy projects, ensuring they are survivor-led and co-designed.
- Consideration be given to potential funding partnerships between DfC, local councils, and heritage bodies to sustain long-term remembrance work.
- Lessons from previous DfC-supported memorial programmes (such as conflict-related legacy projects) be applied to support respectful and inclusive commemoration.

Potential Ongoing Financial and Administrative Implications for the Department for Communities

(Cross-cutting issues)

15. The Committee notes that while overall funding for the Inquiry and Redress Scheme will be met from the Executive block grant, several aspects—such as benefit disregard implementation, PRONI record management, and community support—may have direct or indirect financial implications for DfC, which is already reporting operating within a constrained budget.

16. The Committee therefore recommends:

- Early engagement between DfC and TEO on budget planning, staffing, and interdepartmental resourcing.
 - Clarity on whether DfC will require additional allocations to deliver associated administrative functions.
 - Ongoing monitoring of costs to ensure appropriate accountability and transparency across departments.
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Conclusion

17. The Committee for Communities recognises the importance of this Bill as a key step toward truth recovery, accountability, and redress for victims and survivors of Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses.

18. Whilst the primary scrutiny role resides with the Committee for the Executive Office, the Committee for Communities considers that several clauses have direct implications for the Department for Communities' statutory functions and should therefore be kept under review through an agreed approach to cross-committee cooperation.

19. The Committee requests that the Committee for the Executive Office notes these concerns and considerations and ensures that The Executive Office engages with the Department for Communities as the Bill progresses through Committee Stage and subsequent implementation phases.

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