



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (DSC)

Room 371
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX

Meeting Note

Purpose of Meeting	To discuss the handling of notifications by departments and general considerations around reserved / excepted matters, including in relation to EU product safety legislation (such as Regulation (EU) 2025/2509).
Venue/Date	Room 30, Parliament Buildings, 13 January 2026
List of Attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ciara Ferguson MLA – Chairperson, DSC• David Brooks MLA – Deputy Chairperson, DSC• [REDACTED] – Clerk, DSC• [REDACTED] – Senior Assistant Clerk, DSC• [REDACTED] – Senior Assistant Clerk, DSC• [REDACTED] – Director of Europe Strategy and International Relations, TEO• [REDACTED] – Assistant Director, Windsor Framework and Democratic Scrutiny Branch, TEO• [REDACTED] – Windsor Framework and Democratic Scrutiny Branch, TEO
Note of Discussion	
<p>Reason for convening the meeting:</p> <p>The First Minister and deputy First Minister requested that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (DSC) meet informally with officials from the Post EU Exit Coordination Group in the Executive Office (TEO).</p> <p>This request came in response to correspondence from the DSC on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) The DSC's request for a structured solution to be found for identifying the most relevant departments to engage with the Committee on EU acts relating to product safety (including on the safety of toys); andb) The DSC's review of its operations.	
<p>Summary of the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In relation to Regulation (EU) 2025/2509, TEO officials stated that they had taken extensive steps to identify and seek information from relevant departments, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Engaging with the Department for the Economy, Department for Health, Department for Agriculture, and Department for Communities;○ Exploring whether the Trading Standards Service have a role in relation to it; and○ Requesting that <u>all</u> NI departments respond in relation to whether they had an interest in the legislation.• TEO officials described the EU act as an example of “orphan” legislation, whereby no NI department has a remit. In response to the DSC's position that an EU act being outside of a department's remit does not prevent it from providing a view on impact, TEO officials stated that in instances such as this one, there is no official in any NI department with the expertise/information needed to assess impact.• TEO officials agreed to clarify this position in future responses to the DSC. TEO officials were also reminded that in such instances, the DSC considers NI departments to be	

best placed to liaise with counterparts in the UK Government (UKG) in order to obtain the relevant information.

- TEO officials noted that officials from NI departments may be reluctant to provide evidence on an EU act which sits solely within the remit of UKG, as they may be constrained in what they can say. The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson noted that, if so, it would be helpful for officials to attend the DSC and state that they haven't been provided with sufficient lines/information from UKG counterparts.
- The Deputy Chairperson suggested that TEO's role in relation to requests from the DSC should include proactively *allocating* a department – in instances such as these - to coordinate inputs from relevant departments and/or UKG. TEO agreed to consider this internally and in discussions with UKG.
- TEO officials highlighted resource constraints associated with the work they undertake to service the DSC, despite the fact that - in its Statement of Funding Policy - UKG states that it will maintain its commitment to fund the direct costs associated with reaching the required level of compliance to implement its obligations under the Windsor Framework. In its response to the Independent Review, UKG also states that scrutiny by the DSC of EU regulations forms a 'direct cost' of the Windsor Framework.
- TEO officials are considering the issue of handling reserved and excepted matters in light of the Independent Review of the Windsor Framework and the UK Government's response. TEO is scheduled to meet with other NI departments in relation to that in the coming weeks, and intends to have further discussions with the Cabinet Office and Northern Ireland Office on the UK Government's next steps.
- In particular, TEO are seeking further detail on the recommendation that *"There should be more coordination between Whitehall and Belfast in advising the Democratic Scrutiny Committee, and Northern Ireland Civil Servants should be empowered to provide good and appropriate advice."* For example, TEO wish to ascertain whether this would include NI departments receiving written/oral briefings from UKG officials and how that would be coordinated within the existing timescales for which NI departments must provide information to the DSC.
- TEO are also seeking more information the "triage" system referred to in the UKG Government's response to the Review.
- The Clerk discussed the need for clarity on the information provided by NI departments to UKG as part of its preparation of Explanatory Memoranda (EMs). For example, the [EM for COM/2023/462](#) stated the Northern Ireland Executive was consulted and it had "not raised any issues". It is unclear whether this is because NI departments did not respond, or stated that they had no issues. TEO officials intend to raise this with UKG and with NI departments.
- The Deputy Chairperson stated that it was important that NI departments provide views to UKG as part of the drafting of EMs, because UKG may form a view on NI-specific impact based on that input.
- The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson noted that there had been an improvement, overall, in the level of information provided to the DSC by NI departments. They both stated that they wanted to work together with TEO, NI departments, and UKG to see resolutions to ongoing issues such as those related to reserved/excepted matters.

- Actions arising:
 - Seek Committee agreement to write to UKG to state that the DSC is strongly of the view that the work undertaken by NI departments– including TEO – to allow the DSC to properly carry its statutory functions, is a 'direct cost' of the Windsor Framework and should be funded accordingly.

Date: 19.01.2026