Northern Ireland Assembly

Ad Hoc Committee on the School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 2 July 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30

Present:

Aoife Finnegan MLA (Chairperson)

Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Robbie Butler MLA

Andrew McMurray MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Deborah Erskine MLA

Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Emma Sheerin MLA

Apologies:

None.

In Attendance:

Marie Austin, Clerk

Jessica Jacques, Senior Assistant Clerk

Lisa Chestnutt, Clerical Supervisor

Damien Brown, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 9.34am in public session with the Clerk in the Chair.

1. Election of Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson

The Clerk invited nominations for the position of Chairperson.

Emma Sheerin proposed that Aoife Finnegan be Chairperson of the Committee.

The proposal was seconded by Sinéad McLaughlin.

Aoife Finnegan accepted the nomination.

There were no other nominations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Aoife Finnegan, being the only candidate proposed, be Chairperson of the Committee.

The Chairperson assumed the Chair at 9.36am.

Deborah Erskine joined at 9.36am.

The Chairperson invited nominations for the position of Deputy Chairperson.

Robbie Butler proposed that Pam Cameron be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee.

The proposal was seconded by Emma Sheerin.

Pam Cameron accepted the nomination.

There were no other nominations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Pam Cameron, being the only candidate proposed, be Deputy Chairperson of the Committee.

2. Apologies

As above.

3. Committee Membership

The Committee noted its membership.

The Committee noted that its quorum for taking decisions is five Members and the quorum for hearing evidence is four Members.

4. Declaration of Interests

Members noted the requirement to register their interests under Standing Order 69(5).

5. Arrangements for Committee Meetings

The Committee noted the practical arrangements for meetings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that meetings should, as a rule, be held in public session unless it agrees there is a reason for proceedings to be held in closed session.

6. Committee Procedures

The Committee noted that it is a matter for the Committee to determine its own procedures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that all questions shall be decided by a simple majority, and voting shall be conducted by a show of hands.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would not allow the nomination of substitute members to attend Committee meetings in the place of Committee Members should they be unable to attend a meeting of the Committee.

The Committee noted the Guide for Members to the Role and Functions of the Committee Secretariat.

The Committee noted the Guide to the Role of Chairpersons.

The Committee noted the Guide to the Powers and Operation of Standing and Ad Hoc Committees for Chairpersons and Members.

7. School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill - Handling of Committee Stage

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the proposed handling arrangements for the Committee Stage of the Bill.

The Committee noted that the Bill Clerk would attend the Committee meeting on 8 September 2026 to brief the Committee.

The Committee considered a draft Citizen Space survey on the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to launch the Citizen Space survey on the Bill, with a closing date of Sunday 23 August 2026.

The Committee considered a list of key stakeholders from the Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write directly to invite the stakeholders identified by RaISe to take part in the consultation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask RaISe to provide details of relevant organisations which represent parents, and to invite them to take part in the consultation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange oral evidence sessions with the Bill Sponsor, Department of Education and the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission a briefing paper from RaISe on the Bill, including information about any similar provisions in other legislatures, and its financial implications.

The Committee noted the provisional Bill timetable.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish papers relating to its consideration of the Bill on its webpage including minutes of proceedings, minutes of evidence, and research papers.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted the draft forward work programme.

9. Chairperson's Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson during periods of recess to submit views on the releasing or withholding of information in any non-routine or contentious Freedom of Information requests received by the Committee.

10. Any Other Business

None.

11. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 8 September at 1pm in Room 29.

The meeting was adjourned at 9.51am.