



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC)

Minutes of Proceedings

Tuesday 13 January 2026 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
Carál Ní Chuilín MLA
Matthew O'Toole MLA
John Stewart MLA

Apologies:

Gary Middleton MLA

In Attendance:

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk



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Ashleigh Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Laura Gourley, Clerical Supervisor

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

Clare Maguire, Public Engagement Manager (Agenda item 3)

Caroline Moore, Participation and Outreach Manager (Agenda item 3)

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

The meeting commenced at 9.32 a.m. in closed session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

The Deputy 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.

Michelle McIlveen joined the meeting at 9.33 a.m.



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3. Designing a civic/citizen engagement exercise – follow-up 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 the design of a potential civic/citizen engagement exercise. This was followed by a question and answer session.

Matthew O'Toole joined the meeting at 9.49 a.m.

John Stewart joined the meeting at 9.49 a.m.

The Chairperson thanked the Engagement Office staff for their briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request follow-up advice from the Engagement Office on the range of issues discussed during the briefing.

The meeting moved into open session at 9.54 a.m.

4. Draft minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2025.

5. Matters arising

The Senior Assistant Clerk updated the Committee on the review of evidence received to date for the Review of Assembly Committee engagement on cross-cutting Executive Strategies and the Review into the development of a formal



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process and guidance on the handling of Westminster SIs which include a role of the Assembly.

Noted: The Committee noted that draft documents providing a consideration of the evidence for each of the ongoing reviews will be presented at a future Committee meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the secretariat will work to encourage wider engagement on the Review of Assembly Committee engagement on cross-cutting Executive strategies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission further research from RalSe in order to develop a full understanding of the range of Westminster SIs which may impinge on devolved matters and should therefore be considered by the Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Senedd to seek information on the effective operation of its approach to the handling of Westminster SIs.

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 9.59 a.m.

Emma DeSouza, Founder of Deliberative Democracy Platform

Peter Emerson, The de Borda Institute

Dr Anthony Soares. The Centre for Cross-Border Cooperation

Ann Watt, Pivotal

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

Carál Ní Chuilín left the meeting at 10.36 a.m.

Jonathan Buckley left the meeting at 11.04 a.m. The Deputy Chairperson took the chair.



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Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 11.07 a.m.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

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 to schedule an oral evidence session with Mark Durkan for 24 February 2026.

Noted: The Committee noted the schedule of agreed evidence sessions and research briefings between February and March 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to offer the 21 April and 12 May 2026 as options for the First Minister and deputy First Minister to attend an oral evidence session with the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer a decision on the format of the oral evidence sessions with Assembly parties to a future meeting.

Agreed: The Committee noted the additional information provided by Daniel Holder from the Equality Coalition and information provided by Dr Katie Jackson, University of Liverpool and agreed to add it to the evidence base for the review.

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on the procedural advice that had been requested on inviting the current Assembly Speaker and former office holders to provide oral evidence to the review.

Agreed: The Committee noted the procedural advice and agreed to revisit the issue if necessary.

7. Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee noted the emailed correspondence, dated 8 December 2025, from Katie Lines, the Bingham Centre, on the Report of the Independent Commission on UK Public Health Emergency Powers, and agreed to add the information to the evidence base for the Review into Assembly and Executive Reform.



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Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence, dated 16 December 2025, from the Assembly Engagement Office in respect of Committee participation in the Balmoral Show; the Committee agreed to decline the invitation as it is not applicable to the Committee's remit.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence, dated 7 January 2026, from the Clerk of EU and Parliamentary Affairs in respect of a proposed briefing to inform the Committee's Review into the arrangements for Assembly Members' participation in interparliamentary and international bodies. The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing for the meeting on 3 February 2026.

Noted: The Committee noted an item of copied correspondence from an anonymous member of the public, dated 7 January 2026, which does not fall under the remit of the Committee.

8. Forward Work Programme

Noted: The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

9. AOB

None.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the AERC will take place on Tuesday 3 February 2026 at 9.30 a.m. in Room 21.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.21 a.m.



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Jonathan Buckley MLA
Chairperson, Assembly and Executive Review Committee

3 February 2026