



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC)

## Minutes of Proceedings

Tuesday 24 February 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  
Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk



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Laura Gourley, Clerical Supervisor

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

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

**1. Apologies**

As above.

**2. Declaration of Interests**

The 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.

Matthew O'Toole declared an interest that he is related to one of the witnesses attending the oral evidence session, under agenda item 5.

**3. Draft minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2026.

**4. Matters arising**

Members noted that a matter arising, in relation to writing to the Assembly Commission, will be considered under the next agenda item.



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## 5. Review into Assembly and Executive Reform – oral evidence session

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the oral evidence session will be recorded by Hansard.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 9.34 a.m.

Arlene Foster, Baroness Foster of Aghadrumsee (former First Minister)

Mark Durkan (former deputy First Minister)

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

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 10.20 a.m.

Matthew O'Toole rejoined the meeting at 10.23 a.m.

Carál Ní Chuilín left the meeting 10.53 a.m.

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 11.06 a.m.

John Stewart left the meeting at 11.39 a.m.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11.49 a.m.

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on future meetings and other issues relating to the evidence gathering for the review.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule oral evidence sessions with Eoin Tennyson MLA, representing the Alliance Party, and with Ann Watt from Pivotal, which will be scheduled for 12 May 2026 subject to availability.

The Committee considered the draft letter to the Assembly Commission on the budget implications of conducting an engagement exercise.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the draft letter for issue to the Assembly Commission.



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**6. Review into Assembly and Executive Reform – RaSe briefing on comparative research on the power and accountability of the Speaker.**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed, due to time constraints, to note the RaSe briefing on comparative research on the power and accountability of the Speaker, which will be added to the evidence base for the review.

**7. Correspondence**

The Committee considered correspondence, dated 11 February 2026, from the Committee for Communities which suggested that the AERC undertakes reviews into the timeliness of departmental responses to statutory committees and on the issue of ministerial sanctions.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to respond to the Committee for Communities to explain that the AERC Forward Work Programme is fully committed and to suggest that the Committee for Communities raises the issue of the timeliness of departmental responses with the Chairpersons' Liaison Group, which oversees the protocol between the Assembly and Departments in that regard.

**8. Forward Work Programme**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

**9. AOB**

None.



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**10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the AERC will take place on Tuesday 24 March 2026 at 9.30 a.m. in Room 21.

*The meeting was adjourned at 11.52 a.m.*

**Jonathan Buckley MLA**  
**Chairperson, Assembly and Executive Review Committee**

**24 March 2026**