Northern Ireland Assembly

Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC)

Minutes of Proceedings

Tuesday 20 October 2026 at 9.30 a.m.

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Deborah Erskine MLA (Chairperson)
Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Sinéad Ennis MLA
Michelle Guy MLA
Michelle McIlveen MLA
Carál Ní Chuilín MLA
Matthew O'Toole MLA

Apologies:

Jonathan Buckley MLA
John Stewart MLA

In Attendance:

Northern Ireland Assembly

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk

Ashleigh Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk

Laura Gourley, Clerical Supervisor

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

In attendance by video conference:

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

The meeting commenced at 9.43 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.

No declarations were declared at this point in the meeting.

3. Draft minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2026.

Northern Ireland Assembly

4. **Matters arising**

None.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reorder the agenda.

5. **Review into Assembly and Executive Reform**

The Committee Clerk briefed the Committee on this agenda item.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the proposed schedule of meeting dates from January 2027 to the end of the mandate.

Noted: The Committee noted the updated analysis of reform options cited in the evidence provided to the review.

Noted: The Committee noted that the informal workshop will take place on Tuesday 3 November 2026 at 9.30 a.m. in Room 106.

6. **Review into Assembly committee engagement on cross-cutting Executive strategies – oral evidence session with the Head of the Civil Service and departmental Permanent Secretaries**

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the oral evidence session to be recorded by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward any additional questions, which are not addressed during the evidence session, to the Executive Office (TEO) for a follow-up response in writing.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 9.48 a.m.

Jane Brady, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service

Mike Farrar, Interim Permanent Secretary, Department of Health

Katrina Godfrey, Permanent Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Grainia Long, Permanent Secretary, Department for Communities

Moira Doherty, Permanent Secretary, TEO (online)

David Malcolm, Permanent Secretary, Department of Education (online)

Hugh Widdis, Permanent Secretary, Department of Justice (online)

Jane Brady provided introductory comments on behalf of the panel. This was followed by a question and answer session.

Sinéad Ennis joined the meeting at 9.51 a.m.

Matthew O'Toole joined the meeting at 9.55 a.m.

Michelle McIlveen left the meeting at 10.01 a.m.

Michelle Guy left the meeting at 10.25 a.m.

Carál Ní Chuilín declared an interest that she was previously a Minister in the Department for Communities, which was responsible for the delivery of the Supporting People programme.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their briefing and attendance.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11.01 a.m.

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 11.01 a.m.

Noted: The Committee noted the evidence to date including related evidence from the Reform review.

Noted: The Committee noted that an oral evidence session with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) is scheduled for 17 November 2026.

Noted: The Committee noted that a further review of evidence for the Review is scheduled for 17 November 2026.

Matthew O'Toole rejoined the meeting at 11.04 a.m.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send the Hansard from the oral evidence session to the Committee for Finance to inform its Inquiry on the Performance and Culture of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS).

7. Correspondence

None.

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 Chairperson reminded members of the informal workshop on the Review into Assembly and Executive Reform taking place on Tuesday 3 November 2026 at 9.30 a.m. in Room 106.

The next formal meeting of the AERC will take place on Tuesday 17 November 2026 at 9.30 a.m. in Room 21.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.04 a.m.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Deborah Erskine MLA
Chairperson, Assembly and Executive Review Committee

10 November 2026