



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 20 November 2024

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Timothy Gaston MLA

Mr Brian Kingston MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

Ms Claire Sugden MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Apologies:

Mr Harry Harvey MLA

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

In Attendance:

Mr Michael Potter (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Jim McManus (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Tom Armstrong (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Mr Neil Porter (Clerical Supervisor)

Ms Andrienne Magee (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed the Committee that she attended the Inter-Parliamentary Forum on Friday 15th November 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request an update on common frameworks from the Department and share the response with the Inter-Parliamentary Forum.

The Chairperson informed the Committee of her meeting with the Independent Reviewer of COSICA on Monday 18th November 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request the organisational structure and associated costs of the COSICA office.

The Chairperson informed members that she held a meeting with women involved in the Victims and Survivors Consultative Forum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the attendees to come before the Committee in January 2025.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the amended minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 13 November 2024.

5. Matters Arising

The Committee considered questions from Professor Patricia Lundy and Patrick Corrigan regarding historical institutional abuse following the Chairperson's meeting last week with victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the list of questions to the PPS and PSNI for answer, copying in the Justice Committee.

6. Historical Institutional Abuse Independent Facilitator – Oral Evidence

The witnesses joined the meeting at 2.08pm.

Members received evidence from:

- Mr Paul Sweeney, HIA Independent Facilitator
- Mr Patrick Gallagher, Director, Victims and Survivors Division, The Executive Office

The witnesses provided the Committee with an update on discussions with the institutions relating to contributions towards the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Scheme and support services.

The oral evidence session was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

The witnesses left the meeting at 3.12pm.

The meeting was suspended at 3.12pm

The meeting resumed at 3.18pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request the following information from the Department:

- What is the timescale for contributions to be made from the institutions?
- What is the remit for officials who are negotiating the contributions from the institutions?
- If no legal route is in place to force institutions to make contributions, would The Executive Office consider introducing legislation that would enable mandatory contributions?
- How long will payments continue to be made to victims and survivors after April 2025 and for how long will late applications be accepted?
- Are payments being sought by the Department from the institutions for redress payments only, or other costs as well, such as support services, costs associated with the Hart Inquiry, departmental administrative costs, etc.?
- The Committee also indicated its concern that a comment made by the Independent Facilitator that the Committee role in this process was limited. The Committee reiterated that it has an important role in this process and will continue its scrutiny role.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will be attending a meeting with the victims and survivors groups to hear their views on an historical institutional abuse memorial.

7. RaISe – Historical Institutional Abuse - Oral Briefing

The official joined the meeting at 3.27pm.

Members received a briefing from:

- Mr Thomas Lough, Research Officer

The official provided the Committee with an overview of the processes carried out by the Irish Government in response to historic institutional abuse in the Republic of Ireland.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson left the meeting at 3.54pm.

The Deputy Chairperson left the meeting at 3.54pm.

The Clerk assumed the Chair at 3.54pm.

The Clerk asked for nominations for a member to take the chair.

Proposed: *Mr Brian Kingston proposed Ms Claire Sugden as temporary Chairperson of the Committee.*

Seconded: *Mr Timothy Gaston.*

There were no further nominations.

Ms Claire Sugden assumed the chair at 3.55pm.

Chairperson returned to the meeting at 3.57pm and resumed the chair.

The Chairperson thanked the official for his attendance.

The official left the meeting at 4.04pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission Research and Information Services to undertake an overview of the processes carried out in England, Scotland and Wales in response to historical institutional abuse.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request clarification from Research and Information Services as to how Data Protection / GDPR regulations were circumvented in the Republic of Ireland.

Sinéad McLaughlin MLA left the meeting at 4.07pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request whether there is an indemnity in place for victims and survivors who accept a payment from the Redress Board, i.e. renounce the right to make a civil claim against an institution?

8. SL1 – The Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered a proposal by the Executive Office to make a Statutory Rule that will allow for the Executive Office to establish an independent office to be known as the ‘Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner’ under powers conferred by Section 50 of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

The Chairperson informed members that before making regulations under the Act, the Department must request advice from the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) about the proposal to make the regulations and take the CCC's advice into account.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to withhold consent to the regulations until any amendments recommended by the CCC have been incorporated.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request the following information from the Department:

- The cost of establishing the office.
- The organisational structure of the office.
- Will the office remain within the remit of The Executive Office when it has been established?
- The timescale for response from the CCC.

9. Draft Programme for Government – Committee Response

Members discussed the Committee's response to the Draft Programme for Government consultation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Department.

10. Inquiry into Gaps in Equality Legislation – Update

The Committee discussed the inquiry stakeholder event scheduled for Wednesday 4th December 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to the Equality Commission attending the event in an observer capacity.

11. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the first meeting of the Committee following recess will be on Wednesday 15th January 2025.

The Chairperson reminded members that the following had been agreed by the Committee for scheduling next year:

- Racism, refugee and asylum issues – inviting Mears, the Housing Executive and Migrant Help.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to also invite the PSNI for an update on actions on their Race and Ethnicity Action Plan.

- Truth Recovery Independent Panel.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to also invite the Department to provide a briefing on the responses to the mother and baby consultation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an effective questioning session in February 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that they were content to proceed with the briefings as set out in the work programme.

12. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the summary of Committee correspondence.
- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs Committee on the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) Review - Seasonal Agricultural Workers Visa Review Recommendations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister and ask them to represent the views of the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Minister to the UK Government.

13. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed the Democratic Consent Mechanism.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ask for the reasons they have not brought forward the motion on the Democratic Consent Mechanism.

14. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 27 November 2024 at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.22pm.

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office