



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 4 December 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Timothy Gaston MLA

Mr Harry Harvey MLA

Mr Brian Kingston MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

Ms Claire Sugden 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 2.01pm in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson reminded members that the Committee wrote to the Northern Ireland Office in May to ask about a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and a response has not been received.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for an update.

Sinéad McLaughlin MLA joined the meeting at 2.03pm.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 27 November 2024.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Identity and Language – Ulster Scots Agency – Oral Evidence

The witnesses joined the meeting at 2.03pm.

Members received evidence from:

- Mr Ian Crozier, Chief Executive, Ulster Scots Agency
- Mr David Gilliland, Head of Development, Ulster Scots Agency

The witnesses provided evidence on the structures to be established under the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022.

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 3.10pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to ask what progress has been made in establishing the Castlereagh Foundation provided for in section 8 of the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022.

7. Identity and Language – Departmental Oral Briefing

The witnesses joined the meeting at 3.12pm.

Members received a briefing from:

- Richard Irwin, Director of Equality, Rights & Identity, The Executive Office
- Eoin Mullan, Head of Language Commissioners Branch, The Executive Office

The witnesses provided evidence on the structures to be established under the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The witnesses undertook to confirm to the Committee the official status of the English language in Northern Ireland and in what statutes this appears.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The witnesses left the meeting at 3.44pm.

The meeting was suspended at 3.45pm.

The meeting resumed at 3.50pm with the following Members present:

Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson), Mr Timothy Gaston MLA, Mr Harry Harvey MLA, Mr Brian Kingston MLA, Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA and Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

The following Members were present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA and Ms Claire Sugden MLA

8. Identity and Language - Foras na Gaelige - Oral Evidence

The witnesses joined the meeting at 3.50pm.

Members received a briefing from:

- Seán Ó Coinn, Chief Executive, Foras na Gaelige
- Pól Deeds, Deputy Chief Executive, Foras na Gaelige

The witnesses provided evidence on the structures to be established under the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

The witnesses left the meeting at 5.18pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and ask for the rationale for excluding a duty to have 'due regard' for Ulster Scots in the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for the following information:

- Information on the official status of the English Language in Northern Ireland and in what statutes this appears.
- Why the interdepartmental working group on the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages has not met since 2016.

9. Inquiry into Gaps in Equality Legislation – Update

The Committee discussed the inquiry stakeholder event held on Wednesday 4th December 2024.

The Chairperson confirmed to members that the Committee is still open to receiving written submissions for the inquiry and there will be an interim report for the Committee to consider in the New Year.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule the session on clerical abuse planned for Wednesday 11 December 2024 to Wednesday 15 January 2025 and instead hold a session on the Committee's inquiry into gaps in equality legislation. The Committee further agreed to invite organisations representing the views of children and young people.

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

11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the summary of Committee correspondence.
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from The Executive Office on the investment strategy Northern Ireland.
- iii. The Committee considered a request from the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly to appear in front of the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add Northern Ireland Youth Assembly to the forward work programme.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from Ulster University on EU developments in equality and human rights, 'Impact of Brexit on the divergence of rights and best practice on the Island of Ireland: Update paper on developments post January 2022'.
- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Central Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses.
- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Research and Information Service on the Chancellor's Autumn Budget 2024.
- vii. The Committee noted a response from the Executive Office to the Committee's request for clarification on the extent to which safeguarding falls within the remit of the Executive Office.
- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee on the Tobacco and Vapes Bill.
- ix. The Committee noted a response from the Executive Office to the Committee's request for information on the historical institutional abuse memorial, discussions with the institutions on contributions, support services offered to victims and survivors, reviews of COSICA and VSS and allocation of resources.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share this information with victim and survivors' groups.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from The Executive Office on the Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24.
- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council on their Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024.
- xii. The Committee considered and noted an invitation to the annual human rights statement 2024 launch event on Monday 9 December 2024.

- xiii. The Committee noted an invitation to the Ofcom plan of work consultation event on 23 January 2025.
- xiv. The Committee noted a press release from The Executive Office on the junior Ministers meeting with innovators seeking to provide solutions to help tackle Ending Violence against Women and Girls.
- xv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on the public sector transformation board.
- xvi. The Committee considered and noted correspondence from Ulster Human Rights Watch.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add Ulster Human Rights Watch to the forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add Relatives for Justice to the forward work programme.

- xvii. The Committee considered correspondence regarding a suggestion that The Executive Office creates a competition for all school children in Northern Ireland to design a new inclusive civic flag for Northern Ireland.

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

- xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from The Executive Office on the Truth Recovery Programme – Public Consultation Report.
- xix. The Committee noted a response from the Executive Office to the Committee’s request for information on late papers and outstanding correspondence from the Department.
- xx. The Committee noted a response from the Executive Office to the Committee’s request for details on the organisational structure of the COSICA office and associated costs.

12. Any Other Business

The Committee held a discussion on the Chairperson's meeting with the First Minister on 23 October 2024.

13. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 11 December 2024 at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.37pm.

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office