



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for The Executive Office

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Wednesday 12 February 2025**

**Meeting Location:** Room 30, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Timothy Gaston MLA

Mr Brian Kingston MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Ms Áine Murphy MLA

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

**Apologies:**

Mr Harry Harvey MLA

Ms Claire Sugden MLA

**In Attendance:**

Mr Michael Potter (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**

As above.

### **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson welcomed Ms Áine Murphy MLA to the Committee and thanked Ms. Emma Sheerin MLA for her contribution to the Committee.

### **4. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 5 February 2025.

### **5. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **6. EU Citizens' Rights – Advice NI Oral Evidence**

*The witnesses joined the meeting at 2.03pm.*

Members received evidence from:

- Ms Fiona Magee, Deputy CEO, Advice NI
- Mr Matt Cole, Information Officer, Advice NI
- Mr Oleg Danuta, Team Leader Financial Health and Wellbeing Team, Migrant Centre NI

The witnesses provided evidence on EU Citizens' Rights.

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 3.07pm.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department on the following points:

- With the European Union Settlement Scheme funding due to finish at the end of March 2025, how the Department plans to fill the gap in funding.
- How European Union Law is communicated to people who come into Northern Ireland and/or seeking settled status.
- Whether funding can be extended for the Minority Ethnic Development Fund to include support for immigration advice without prejudice to other funding being delivered.
- The need for an inter-departmental approach to help people going through the verification process.
- The Department to explain how it can assist agencies help citizens retain their status as other regions of the United Kingdom do, especially as the agencies are currently oversubscribed with referrals.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Justice to ask for views on the impact of the current legal aid dispute on immigration advice.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add the Independent Monitoring Authority for Citizens' Rights Agreements to the Forward Work Programme.

## **7. Post EU Exit Matters – Departmental Oral Briefing**

The Committee agreed to postpone this session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for an explanation as to why the Committee did not receive the briefing paper.

## **8. Inquiry into Gaps in Equality Legislation – The Christian Institute Oral Evidence**

*The witnesses joined the meeting at 3.14pm.*

Members received evidence from:

- Mr Sam Webster, Solicitor-Advocate, The Christian Institute
- Mr James Kennedy, NI Policy Officer, The Christian Institute

The witnesses provided evidence on matters relevant to the Committee's inquiry into gaps in equality legislation.

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 3.52pm.*

## **9. Inquiry into Gaps in Equality Legislation – Women's Rights Network Oral Evidence**

*The witnesses joined the meeting at 3.52pm.*

Members received evidence from:

- Ms Marianne Buchanan Stewart, Policy and Engagement, Women's Rights Network
- Ms Kirsty Montgomery, Policy and Engagement, Women's Rights Network
- Ms Theresa McVeigh, Policy and Engagement, Women's Rights Network

The witnesses provided evidence on matters relevant to the Committee's inquiry into gaps in equality legislation.

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 4.39pm.*

The Committee considered a draft social media post detailing end of submissions for the Inquiry.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to publish the social media post.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that the Clerk will provide an amended options paper to incorporate today's evidence and the written evidence received last week from the Equality Commission.

## **10. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the draft forward work programme.

**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 Professor Colin Harvey on a panel of experts for Bill of Rights.
- iii. The Committee noted an invitation from Housing Rights to attend a legislative theatre event on domestic abuse and homelessness prevention on 12 March 2025.
- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on analysis of 2024/24 outturn and the forecast outturn.
- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee on post primacy scrutiny of Comptroller & Auditor General.
- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery accepting the Committee's invitation to meet on 26 February 2025.

- vii. The Committee noted a response from the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims Remains to the Committee's invitation to provide an update on their work.
- viii. The Committee noted a response from the Executive Office to the Committee for Communities on Participation and the Practice of Rights.
- ix. The Committee noted a response from the Executive Office to the Committee's correspondence on identity and language.
- x. The Committee noted an invitation from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to attend their annual human rights lecture on 24 February 2025.
- xi. The Committee noted the thirty-first report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules to the Assembly.

## **12. Any Other Business**

The Committee considered evidence received during the closed session on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2025

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed for the Chairperson to write to the Truth Recovery Independent Panel with the concerns raised during the session.

The Committee discussed the communication strategy for historical clerical child abuse.

The Committee discussed the session on effective questioning delivered on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

## **13. Date, Time and Place of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 19 February 2025 at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 4.49pm.*

**Paula Bradshaw MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office**