



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 12 March 2025

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Timothy Gaston MLA

Mr Harry Harvey MLA

Mr Brian Kingston MLA

Ms Áine Murphy MLA

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

Online: Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Ms Claire Sugden MLA

Apologies: Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

In Attendance: Ms Róisín Kelly (Assembly Clerk)

Ms Sarah-Anne McKinley (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Mr Stephen McGlennon (Clerical Officer)

Ms Andrienne Magee (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.03pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Correspondence - Competition for the commissioner for public appointments

Members noted correspondence from the First and deputy First Minister informing the Committee of the launch of the competition for the commissioner for public appointments. This was also emailed to Members on Monday 10 March.

4. Draft Minutes

Members noted updated minutes of its meeting on the 5 March. These were updated following an error in numbering and to reflect that the Finance Committee is the relevant Committee for correspondence in relation to the NIAO report on Non-Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme.

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

Harry Harvey joined the meeting at 2.06pm.

Stewart Dickson joined the meeting remotely at 2.10pm.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 Clerk's Brief - Matters Arising 12 March Meeting

The Chairperson referred Members to a Clerk's Brief detailing information on the three items of Matter's Arising in today's meeting pack.

5.1 Memo from Clerk - Draft Refugee Integration Strategy and associated Delivery Framework

Members noted a memo from the Clerk which provides a draft response from the Committee on the draft Refugee Integration Strategy and associated Delivery Framework.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send the response with the stronger wording option as drafted and for the response to be sent to the Department for consideration.

5.2 Memo from Clerk - TEO Budget 2025-2026

Members noted a Departmental response to the Committee's request for a written briefing on TEO's Budget for 2025-2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to raise a number of queries that were brought up by Members during discussion of the TEO Budget for 2025-2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department to provide an urgent oral briefing (in the absence of this an urgent written briefing) at next week's meeting on the queries raised by Members regarding the TEO Budget for 2025-2026.

6. Programme for Government: Consultation Report; Equality Impact Assessment; Rural Needs Impact Assessment and Child Rights Impact Assessment – Departmental Oral Evidence

The witnesses joined the meeting at 2.16pm.

Members received a briefing from:

- Ms Karen Pearson: Deputy Secretary, COVID Recovery, Civil Contingencies and Programme for Government
- Ms Louise Slevin: Grade 7, Programme for Government
- Mr Matthew McFarland: Principal Statistician

The witnesses provided evidence on the Programme for Government Consultation Report, Equality Impact Assessment, Rural Needs Impact Assessment and Child Rights Impact Assessment.

Carál Ní Chuilín left the meeting at 2.54pm and returned at 2.58pm.

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 3.03pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request that they update their consultation list when issuing ‘calls for groups’ to ensure all relevant groups are included in future consultations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to take a short comfort break and suspend the meeting.

The meeting was suspended at 3.05pm.

The meeting resumed at 3.14pm in closed session.

7. Birth Mothers for Justice N.I – Stakeholder Oral Evidence Session

The oral evidence session began in closed session at 3.15pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed at the request of the witnesses, to allow two members of this group to be permitted to observe the meeting from the public gallery.

Stewart Dickson left the meeting at 3.40pm.

Áine Murphy left the meeting at 4.05pm and returned at 4.08pm

Brian Kingston left the meeting at 4.44pm.

The meeting moved into open session at 4.48pm.

8. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the summary of Committee correspondence.
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from Ofcom regarding the Online Safety Act and practical guidance to create a safer online for women and girls.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and agreed to consider this item further once a reply from Ofcom has been received.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Executive Office in relation to the effect of compensation payments under the Republic of Ireland's Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme on means-tested benefits.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and agreed to consider this item further when this Committee is copied into the reply.

- iv. The Committee noted an invitation from the Children's Law Centre to the Annual Lecture 2025 on Wednesday 30th April at 3:30pm at The Inn of Court, Old Bar Library.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to RSVP to the email address within the invitation if they wish to attend.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Policing Board regarding Historical Institutional Abuse. The Policing Board have indicated that they have raised the matter with the PSNI and have recently been advised that it is the PSNI's intention to respond to the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and to consider this item further when a response has been received from the PSNI.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the UK International Agreements Committee in relation to its visit to the Northern Ireland Assembly and its request to meet the Committee on 7 May 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and to meet the International Agreements Committee on Wednesday 7 May, subject to availability.

- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office regarding Rights, Language and Identity Appointments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and to write to the Department to seek clarity on the recruitment process, how long the process will last, to explain the term of 'unregulated appointments' and request that the Committee is kept updated on the outcome of the competitions.

- viii. The Committee noted a report from the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission titled Annual report and accounts 2023 – 2024.

- ix. The Committee noted a press release from the Executive Office following the appointment of a new Commissioner for Older People.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and to issue a letter of congratulation to the new Commissioner on behalf of the Committee, and an introductory meeting with the Commissioner be added to the Forward Work Programme.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance in relation to the Budget Sustainability Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask that they send a copy of the 5 year TEO Business Plan to the Committee once it has been finalised.

- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Convenor of the Free Presbyterian Church querying invites to the long gallery event held as part of the Committee's Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Convenor explaining the process of the Inquiry to date and to inform him how to make a written submission to the Committee's Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to compile a stakeholder list for consultations going forward.

- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office regarding seasonal agricultural workers and visa recommendations.
- xiii. The Committee noted a press release from the Executive Office in relation to the Competition for Language Commissioners being launched.
- xiv. The Committee noted a press release from the Executive Office regarding Individual Wellbeing statistics in Northern Ireland for 2023-2024.
- xv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Finance Committee in relation to the capital easements highlighted in the Spring Supplementary Estimates as a result of ongoing legal challenge.

9. Forward Work Plan

The Committee considered the draft forward work programme.

The Chairperson advised Members that the Strategic Planning session will take place after the formal Committee meeting on the 19 March.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold a Strategic Planning session after its formal meeting on the 19 March.

Áine Murphy left the meeting at 4.59pm and returned at 5.03pm.

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

10. Any Other Business

A Member raised a query in relation to invitations being sent to the First and deputy First Minister to appear before the Committee.

The Clerk updated the Committee that Ministerial briefings will be discussed during the Strategic Planning session on 19 March 2025.

11. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

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

The meeting was adjourned at 4.58pm.

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office

Wednesday 12 March 2025