



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 15 January 2025

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Timothy Gaston MLA

Mr Harry Harvey MLA

Mr Brian Kingston MLA

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin 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 2.00pm in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised the Committee that she will be meeting with the Commissioner of Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse next week.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 11 December 2024.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Historical Institutional Abuse Victims and Survivors Groups – Stakeholder Oral Evidence

The witnesses joined the meeting at 2.02pm.

Sinéad McLaughlin MLA joined the meeting at 2.02pm.

Members received evidence from:

- Mr Cyril Glass, Survivors Together
- Mr Gerry McCann, Rosetta Trust
- Mr Jon McCourt, Survivors (North West)

The witnesses provided evidence on historical institutional abuse.

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

The witnesses undertook to forward their reading notes to the Committee.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

The witnesses left the meeting at 3.15pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add Survivors Together to the forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Law Society to note that historical institutional abuse victims and survivors groups have advised the Committee that, while the redress scheme does not close until 2 April, solicitors are already refusing to take on cases.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the PSNI to ask if they have a senior responsible officer assigned to historical institutional abuse cases.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ask if cross border historical institutional abuse cases can be raised at a meeting of the North South Ministerial Council.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to The Executive Office for the following:

- Request an update on the number of applications submitted to the Redress Scheme.
- Confirm if the Department has taken into consideration payments from institutions made in the Republic of Ireland in relation to redress.

Emma Sheerin MLA left the meeting at 3.19pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to The Executive Office for the following:

- Establish how the Department liaises with Health Social Care Trusts on this matter.
- Detailed run down of costs and service user numbers of the specialised services delivered to date for HIA victims and survivors

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Public Records Office NI to ask if there is any impediment to the provision of records in relation to historical institutional abuse.

Emma Sheerin MLA returned to the meeting at 3.22pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to The Executive Office for the following:

- Ask how the Department intend to highlight the imminent closure of the redress scheme on 2 April 2025 to reach as broad an audience as possible.

7. Historical Clerical Child Abuse – Departmental Oral Briefing

The witnesses joined the meeting at 3.24pm.

Members received a briefing from:

- Mr Patrick Gallagher, Director of Victims and Survivors, The Executive Office
- Mr David Hall, Joint Head of the HIA Implementation Branch, The Executive Office
- Ms Lisa Caldwell, Independent Chair of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Historical Clerical Child Abuse.

The witnesses provided a briefing on historical clerical child abuse.

The Chairperson left the meeting at 3.40pm and the Deputy Chairperson took the Chair.

The Chairperson returned to the meeting at 3.42pm and resumed the Chair.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Claire Sugden MLA left the meeting at 4.05pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

The witnesses left the meeting at 4.18pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office for a copy of their historical clerical child abuse communications strategy.

8. Inquiry into Gaps in Equality Legislation – Consideration of Interim Report

The Committee considered the Inquiry into Gaps in Equality Legislation interim report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee team draft an options paper for Members to consider.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the Christian Institute and the Women's Rights Network to the forward work programme.

9. SL1 The Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the Executive Office is proposing to make a Statutory Rule, subject to the draft affirmative resolution procedure, 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'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed with the proposal for the Statutory Rule.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite ICRIR to the Committee on Wednesday 26th February 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add Joining the Dots Together to the forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the Ulster Human Rights Watch to the 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 an invitation from Ofcom to attend a consultation event in Parliament Buildings on 23 January 2024.
- iii. The Committee considered a response from the Public Prosecution Service to the Committee's request for information on historical institutional abuse prosecutions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward questions regarding historical institutional child abuse from Professor Patricia Lundy to the NI Policing Board.

- iv. The Committee noted an invitation from Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland to attend a conference on "Systems to Support our People – Embedding a Trauma Informed Approach" on 23rd January 2025 at Stormont Hotel.
- v. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance on Department of Justice Budget 2025-2026 Equality Impacts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking if they have considered equality impacts in the draft budget.

- vi. The Committee noted a response from The Executive Office to the Committee's request for information on October Monitoring.
- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on Department of Finance Commissioning Letters to Departments - 2024/25 Spring Supplementary Estimates (SSEs) and January Monitoring.

- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from Ofcom on Online Safety Act – Publication of Illegal Harms Statement.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from The Executive Office on Central Good Relations Fund 2025/26 guidance notes.
- x. The Committee considered correspondence from MEARS declining to appear before the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to approach MEARS again and invite them to appear at the Committee.

- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Independent Monitoring Authority on their session with the Committee on 13 November 2024.
- xii. The Committee noted a response from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the Committee's request for information on the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act.
- xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities on the replacement for the outgoing Commissioner for Older People NI.
- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from The Executive Office on the Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse for the year ended 31 March 2024.
- xv. The Committee noted correspondence from The Executive Office on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Experiences and attitudes of adults in Northern Ireland in 2023.
- xvi. The Committee noted a press release from the Department of Finance on the 2025 – 26 budget.
- xvii. The Committee considered correspondence from Committee for Justice regarding an individual wishing to meet the Committee regarding ICRIIR.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the individual to a relevant panel of witnesses at a future date.

- xviii. The Committee considered a response from The Executive Office to the Committee's request for information on a Bill of Rights: Panel of experts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to Professor Colin Harvey, QUB.

- xix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Youth Assembly for Northern Ireland.

- xx. The Committee considered a response from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the Committee's request for information on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to brief the Committee on the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, the Legacy Act and the Identity and Language Act.

- xxi. The Committee considered a response from The Executive Office to the Committee's request for information on a historical institutional abuse.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the response with the HIA victim and survivor groups.

- xxii. The Committee noted correspondence from The Executive Office on Investment Strategy Northern Ireland delivery tracking system – investing inactivity report.

- xxiii. The Committee considered a response from The Executive Office to the Committee's request for information on common frameworks.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking for an updated list of the remaining Common Frameworks to be signed off.

- xxiv. The Committee noted a press release from the Department of Justice on Domestic abuse prosecutions, convictions, and case processing time statistics for 2022-23 to 2023-24.

- xxv. The Committee noted a press release from the Department of Justice on first statistics on domestic abuse prosecutions and convictions.

- xxvi. The Committee noted a press release from The Executive Office on the launch of Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Local Change Fund by the First Minister and deputy First Minister.
- xxvii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee on the Administration of Justice and Amnesty International UK on their session with the Committee on 27 November 2024.
- xxviii. The Committee noted correspondence from The Executive Office on the 2023 - 2024 annual report of the dedicated mechanism on the implementation of Article 2 of the Windsor Framework.
- xxix. The Committee noted a response from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the Committee's request for information on due regard duty for the Ulster Scots language.

Brian Kingston MLA left the meeting at 4.42pm.

12. Any Other Business

Mr Timothy Gaston MLA asked for an update on correspondence that the Committee sent to the Executive Office on October Monitoring.

13. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 22 January 2025 at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.43pm.

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office