



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 2 April 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 Áine Murphy MLA
- Ms Claire Sugden
- Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

Online: None

Apologies: Ms Sínead McLaughlin

In Attendance:

- Ms Róisín Kelly (Assembly Clerk)
- Ms Sarah-Anne McKinley (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
- Ms Deborah Madden (Clerical Supervisor)

Ms Andrienne Magee (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.03 pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declarations of Interest

Carál Ní Chuilín declared an interest as holding the post of Communities Minister from June 2020 to December 2020, in relation to agenda item 7 on Civil Contingencies.

Brian Kingston declared an interest as a Member of the Committee for Communities in relation to item 8.2 under correspondence.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that a note of the informal meeting between the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson and the Co-Chairs of the Truth Recovery Independent Panel, as discussed at last week's meeting, was emailed to Members. The Chairperson informed Members, that the Truth Recovery Independent Panel would be discussed further under Matters Arising.

The Chairperson informed Members that correspondence was received from the First and deputy First Minister seeking a meeting to discuss the legislative timeline for the Truth Recovery and Redress Bill. An informal meeting next week is being explored and Members will be informed once arrangements have been finalised. A note of the meeting will also be circulated to Members.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 26 March 2025.

A Member provided a copy of a publication entitled 'Newry and a Border between Truth & Justice Part II' and requested that it be brought to the attention of the Assembly Research and Information Services (RaISe) in advance of the briefing paper on Legacy in the Republic Ireland scheduled for Wednesday 14 May.

5. Matters Arising

5.5 Committee Response to the Finance Committee on The Executive Office's Budget 2025-2026

The Chairperson referred Members to a draft response from the Committee to the Finance Committee on the TEO Budget for 2025-2026.

Members approved the draft response, paragraph by paragraph, with amendments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response, as amended, to the Finance Committee for consideration as part of their report on the 2025-2026 Draft Budget.

5.6 Victims' Payment Scheme – Panel session

Members noted a Clerk's briefing note on the Victims' Payment Scheme Panel session which is indicatively scheduled for the meeting on Wednesday 21 May.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the original correspondence about the Victims' Payment Scheme from Relatives for Justice to the Department for a response in advance of a planned panel session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to await a response from the Department before finalising arrangements for a panel session, and further agreed that the Committee team liaises with Clerk of the Committee for Justice any matters of joint concern.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerks and Chairpersons of this Committee and the Committee for Justice would consider options to for the disposal of matters

of joint concern, and further agreed that the Committee would consider an options paper on the handling of this matter of joint concern.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee team would liaise with the DALO to identify suitable dates for an oral briefing from the Department and the Victims' Payments Board ahead of the stakeholder panel sessions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee team would liaise with these stakeholders to explain the cross-cutting nature of the issues between the TEO and DoJ, and that the Committee will be in further contact in due course.

5.1 to 5.4 and 5.7 - Truth Recovery

The Chairperson referred Members to the following items:

- The Executive Office's response to Committee correspondence of 4 February on the Truth Recovery briefing on 29 January (5.2).
- Truth Recovery Panel's response to Committee correspondence of 14 February, following up on issues raised at the meeting of 29 January (5.3).
- A Clerk's Memo summarising developments to date (5.1)
- A Hansard of the Committee meeting of 29 January (5.4); and
- An Advice Note from the Clerk on a suggested approach to addressing issues on Truth Recovery – Gender Perspectives, and in responses to subsequent correspondence (5.7 Tabled Papers).

The Clerk advised Members that given the sensitivity of some of the issues and as evidence was initially taken in closed session, advice was sought from senior procedural and legal colleagues. The Clerk is advised that it would be prudent to defer consideration of these matters until next week for the Committee to take legal advice. The Clerk advised the Committee that any discussion of this matter today should be taken in closed session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 2.25pm to discuss this item of business further.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.25pm.

The meeting moved into open session at 2.38pm.

Members discussed the way forward in terms of the Committee's approach on dealing with this issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of this matter until next week's meeting to receive legal advice.

6. Survivors Together - Oral Evidence Session (closed session)

The oral evidence session began in closed session at 2.39pm

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

Áine Murphy left the meeting at 3.14pm and returned at 3.24pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 3.39pm.

The meeting moved into open session at 4.06pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if there is an agreed definition of 'trauma informed approach' and how this is applied in Government Departments and their statutory agencies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (copying in the Department for Communities and the Communities Committee) to request information on how the provisions of the points-based housing allocation system take account of a trauma-informed approach, in particular for individuals who have experienced Historical Institutional Abuse. The Committee also agreed to ask what actions the Northern Ireland Housing Executive could take to improve this process for victims of Historical Institutional Abuse, including could be done through guidance and what would require legislation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Committee team would explore, with the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, a session for the Committee on trauma informed practice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Communities (copying in the Communities Committee) to ask what trauma informed practices are applied by Capita staff during Personal Independence Payment (PIP) assessments, and training or other requirements there are for staff engaged in the PIP process.

The Committee also agreed to ask for the Department's assessment of whether the process is constraining the application of a trauma informed approach, in particular when engaging with Historical Institutional Abuse victims. The Committee also agreed to ask whether the review process for PIP recipients after 10 years requires an update to better reflect a trauma informed approach

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Mental Health Champion for Northern Ireland to ask for their definition of a trauma-informed approach and their perspective on its key principles.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) to ask what role, if any, it had in the oversight of training schools and prisons. The Committee also agreed to request information on what records the NIO maintained of individuals in training schools and borstals during that time, and the availability of these records.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission RalSe to provide a briefing paper on a trauma informed approach in context of victims and survivors globally.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health (copying in the Health Committee) to ask what role was played by social services at the time. The Committee also agreed to seek information on how the Department is addressing the needs of Historical Institutional Abuse victims who now require end-of-life care and/or care in nursing and residential homes, given the potential for these settings to be traumatic for victims.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) to ask how it is continuing to promote its support services following the closure of the HIA Redress Board on the 2 April 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) to ask about the process for nominations for King's Honours awards. The Committee also agreed to ask whether the NICS has put forward suggestions for Victims and Survivors groups, particularly in relation to the King's Birthday Honours List in 2023.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Survivors Together to express its appreciation for their oral briefing, to let them know what actions the Committee has

taken following their oral briefing, and that the Committee will keep them updated on the progress of these actions in due course.

Claire Sugden left the meeting at 15.58.

7. Civil Contingencies - Departmental Oral Evidence Session

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the briefing should be reported by Hansard.

The officials joined the meeting at 4.09pm.

Members received a briefing from:

- Colin Moffett, Director, Civil Contingencies Division, The Executive Office
- Jane Holmes, Director, Covid Strategy, Recovery and Inquiry, The Executive Office

The officials provided an update on the work on civil contingencies.

Carál Ní Chuilín declared an interest as holding the post of the Communities Minister from June 2020 to December 2020, and having appeared before the Covid inquiry in 2024.

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 4.49pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask the following questions:

- Are the Civil Contingencies Group Northern Ireland (CCG(NI)) minutes publicly available and, if not, whether they will be made available going forward?
- What, in detail, is included in the bid for capital funding of £580k to establish an Emergency Operations Briefing Room capable of linking in with the UK Cabinet Office and what are the implications if this bid is not successful?

- Does TEO receive any additional funding directly from Westminster for Civil Contingency planning and implementation of the recommendations contained within the response to the UK Covid Inquiry?

8. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the summary of Committee correspondence.
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities in relation to the terms of reference for civil servants undertaking co-design work.

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

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly Public Engagement Manager regarding the 2025 Balmoral Show.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and agreed to discuss the possibility of attendance at the Balmoral Show further at next week's meeting.

- iv. The Committee noted an invitation from the Centre for Public Policy and Administration at Queen's University Belfast titled 'The Potential for AI in the Public Sector Seminar' which will take place on Tuesday 15 April 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and that members wishing to attend should register directly using the link included in the invitation.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Equality Coalition highlighting a recent recommendation from the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and its direct relevance to the Committee's ongoing Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and agreed that the Clerk would include reference to this correspondence in the consideration of recommendations for the Inquiry.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office in relation to the Draft Refugee Strategy and Delivery Framework.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and agreed to write to the Department to ask that it keeps the Committee updated on:

- Any Executive or Whitehall departmental plans to extend or replace the fund beyond the 31 March;
- What changes are expected in the funding structure and overall allocation;
- When final decisions on funding structures will be confirmed; and
- How the Department plans to ensure continuity of support for refugees in the absence of continued funding.

- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office regarding the Strategy for Victims and Survivors of the Troubles / Conflict 2024 - 2034. The Committee requested a written briefing on the criteria for the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme, including for the families of victims which has been provided in the correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and agreed to add this written briefing as a relevant paper for the Victims' Payment Scheme Panel Stakeholder session due to take place on Wednesday 21 May.

- viii. The Committee noted further correspondence from an individual included in the meeting pack from the 26 March meeting in relation to the HIA Redress Scheme which is due to close on 2 April 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and agreed to respond to the individual, explaining that the Committee does not have the power to extend the HIA Redress Scheme and that this power lies with the Executive and seeking the individual's consent to forward their correspondence to the Executive Office for a response.

- ix. The Committee noted a news release from the Executive Office - Junior Ministers Welcome Guests to 'Ulster Fry for St Patrick's Day' in Brussels.
- x. The Committee noted news release from the Executive Office - Ministers affirm commitment to Ethnic Equality Monitoring.
- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from Pivotal who have published a report titled 'Achieving greater integration in education and housing.'

9. Forward Work Plan

The Committee considered the draft forward work programme.

The Committee noted an update from the Assistant Clerk in relation to an oral briefing from the Commissioner for Older People which has now been scheduled for Wednesday 2 July 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to proceed with the remaining briefings as set out in the forward work programme.

10. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for a comprehensive list of assets held by the Executive Office, along with details on the cost for implementing health and safety measures, the associated management costs, and any usage plan for these assets.

11. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 9 April at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.04pm.

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office

Wednesday 2 April 2025