



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 26 March 2025

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)

Ms Claire Sugden MLA

Mr Timothy Gaston MLA

Mr Harry Harvey MLA

Mr Brian Kingston MLA

Ms Sínead McLaughlin

Ms Áine Murphy MLA

Online: Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

Apologies: Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

In Attendance: Ms Róisín Kelly (Assembly Clerk)

Ms Sarah-Anne McKinley (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Mr Kevin Marks (Clerical Supervisor)

Ms Andrienne Magee (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.01pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declarations of Interest

Brian Kingston declared an interest as a Member of the Committee for Communities regarding items 11.4 and 11.5 under correspondence.

Carál Ní Chuilín joined the meeting remotely at 2.05pm.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson updated Members that, as per her email to Members on Monday, she and the Deputy Chairperson met informally with the Co-Chairs of the Truth Recovery Independent Panel on Wednesday 26 March in relation to recent correspondence.

A note of the meeting will also be emailed to Members following today's meeting.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 19 March 2025.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 Clerk's Brief - Matters Arising 19 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.

5.2 Responses to Historical Institutional Abuse in Great Britain – Updated presentation

Members noted an updated PowerPoint presentation following last week's oral evidence session on Redress processes in Great Britain provided by Assembly Research and Information Services (RaISe).

5.3 Scotland's Redress Scheme additional information – RaISe Briefing Note

Members noted a RaISe briefing note which provides further information on the organisations named on the contributor list for Scotland's Redress Scheme as requested by the Committee at last week's meeting.

5.4 Response from the DALO – Truth Recovery

Members noted a response from the Department to the Committee's letter from the 4 February 2025 requesting information following the Committee's evidence session from Truth Recovery officials at its meeting on the 29 January 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this information and agreed to consider it together with a draft response to the Co-Chairs of Truth Recovery Independent Panel, at next week's meeting.

5.5 Draft Letter from the Committee to the Scottish Government – HIA in Scotland

Members noted a draft letter from the Committee to the Scottish Education, Children and Young People Committee who are responsible for focusing on the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry and Scotland's Redress Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Committee team to issue the letter once the Clerk has spoken to the Clerk of the Scottish Committee to find out the most relevant organisations for the correspondence to be sent.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission RaISe to provide a briefing paper on HIA and Redress in the Republic of Ireland.

5.6 Hansard Report – The Executive Office Draft Climate Commissioner Regulations 19 March 2025

Members noted the Hansard from the Executive Office Draft Climate Commissioner Regulations oral evidence session on the 19 March 2025.

5.7 The Executive Office, Response to queries on the draft Climate Commissioner Regulations – 21 March 2025

Members noted a response from the Executive Office in relation to queries from the Committee on the draft Climate Commissioner Regulations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note both these items and to consider the contents further under Agenda item 6 in today's meeting.

5.8 Victims Payment Scheme – Panel session

The Chairperson updated Members that, following last week's meeting the Committee agreed to schedule an oral evidence session with Relatives for Justice and other organisations as part of a wider panel session on the Victims Payment Scheme.

The Committee team emailed Members for suggestions. A number of suggestions were put forward including:

- South East Fermanagh Foundation (SEFF)
- The Ely Centre
- WAVE
- Ashton

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Committee team to make contact with these stakeholders to, in the first instance, ascertain availability and interest in participating in multiple panel sessions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Committee team to prepare a briefing note on proposed panel sessions on the Victims Payment Scheme and to bring it back for consideration by the Committee.

6. SR: Draft Regulations the Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department to allow for the Executive Office to establish an independent office to be known as the 'Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner' (NICC) and to allow the NICC to have the following functions to:

- Oversee and report on the exercise of functions of Northern Ireland departments under the Act.
- Provide advice and make recommendations to Northern Ireland departments on the operations of the Act.
- Undertake or commission research concerning the operations of the Act.
- Monitor the implementation of climate action plans and sectoral policies.
- Publish reports, advice, recommendations and other relevant information relating to the operations of the Act.

The question was put that the Committee has considered the Draft Statutory Rule the Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 and recommends that it be approved by the Assembly.

The Committee divided: Ayes 5; Noes 3; Abstain 0

AYES: Ms Paula Bradshaw, Ms Claire Sugden, Miss Áine Murphy, Ms Sínead McLaughlin and Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

NOES: Mr Timothy Gaston, Mr Brian Kingston and Mr Harry Harvey.

Agreed: The Committee considered the Draft Statutory Rule the Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2025 and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

7. SR 2025/34: The Fair Employment (Specification of Public Authorities) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025

The Committee considered SR 2025/34 The Fair Employment (Specification of Public authorities) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 made under powers conferred by Articles 50 and 51 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, and which will amend the Schedule to the Fair Employment (Specification of Public Authorities) Order (Northern Ireland) 2004.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2025/34 The Fair Employment (Specification of Public Authorities) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 and had no objection to the rule.

8. TEO Budget 2025-2026 – Departmental Oral Evidence Session

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

The witnesses joined the meeting at 2.25pm.

Members received a briefing from:

- Ronan Murtagh, Grade 5 Finance
- Paula Shearer, Grade 7 Financial Management and Budgeting

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

The witnesses provided evidence on the TEO Budget for 2025-2026.

Claire Sugden left the meeting at 3.12pm and returned at 3.16pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

The witnesses left the meeting at 3.18pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would prepare a draft Committee response on the Budget for 2025-2026 for Member's consideration at the meeting on 2 April 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance to request further information on the role of CBRE and the NI Investment Fund including the costs for CBRE to manage this fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department and request further information on the following:

- Clarification on running costs for the Strategic Investment Board, including staff costs for those staff that were seconded to work on the Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy (EVAWG) and to ask whether those staff are still seconded to the Department.
- Further detail on running costs for the Strategic Investment Board more widely.
- EVAWG Strategy – Further detail on the approval process for the Local Change Fund, including whether TEO or local councils are responsible for approving the grants under this Fund? Further detail on the current distribution of this Fund, including geographical spread.
- Good Relations – Is it a 50/50 split for the Central Good Relations Fund and the District Good Relations Fund? Further detail on the breakdown of the bids for each Fund and how the Department is engaging about and allocating this money.
- Breakdown of costs for the Rights, Language and Identity competitions - Including the funding allocation to each Office, the number of posts identified for each Office and further information on the eight posts more generally. Also, whether the office costs for these posts would be made publicly available?
- Breakdown of the operating costs for the three overseas bureaux in Beijing, Washington and Brussels.
- Equality Impact – Further detail on the screening exercise carried out to take into account the likely equality and good relations impacts of the budget proposals on each of the Section 75 categories. The Committee requests a copy of this screening exercise, and information on where this is available to view on the TEO website.
- Further information on any travel budget for the Department for 2025-2026.
- Clarity on the delay in responding to questions, including written and oral questions, from the Department to Members.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to other Statutory Committees to ascertain how much each Department has bid and/or earmarked to the EVAWG Strategy given it has been identified as a priority in the Programme for Government.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to schedule a visit to the Maze Long Kesh Development Cooperation as part of its Forward Work Programme.

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

The meeting was suspended at 3.26pm.

The meeting resumed at 3.35pm in open session.

9. Communities in Transition - Departmental Oral Evidence Session

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

The witnesses joined the meeting at 3.35pm.

Members received a briefing from:

- Ricky Irwin, Grade 5 Equality, Rights, and Identity
- Carolyn Mada, Grade 7, Communities in Transition

The witnesses provided an update on the Communities in Transition project.

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

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

Sinead McLaughlin left the meeting at 4.25pm.

Timothy Gaston left the meeting at 4.26pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 4.32pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a copy of the research report referred to by officials, as well as the other queries raised by Members during the oral briefing.

10. Join the Dots Together – Oral Evidence Session

The witnesses joined the meeting at 4.33pm.

Members received a briefing from:

- Mr Edwin Graham, Chairperson of the NI Interfaith Forum
- Fr Gerry Clarke, Chaplain University of Ulster
- Rev Cheryl Meban, Chaplain University of Ulster

The witnesses provided an update on Join the Dots Together Network.

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

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

The witnesses left the meeting at 4.58pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Join the Dots Together to express its appreciation for their oral briefing and to request that they share any relevant information on their ongoing work, including a copy of the Faith Initiative magazine distributed during the session.

11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the summary of Committee correspondence.
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual, writing on behalf of his father who is unable to apply to the HIA Redress Scheme on behalf of a deceased family member as their relationship falls outside the eligibility criteria of the scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and agreed that the Clerk would write to the individual to express the Committee's sympathy and to signpost them to the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) who provide dedicated and specialist long term support and services to survivors of HIA.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy to the Executive Office in relation to the Maze Long Kesh Development Cooperation.

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

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Executive Office regarding the funding of Foras na Gaeilge.

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.

Agreed: For reasons of time pressure, the Committee agreed to defer, to next week's meeting, consideration of the remaining items of correspondence in this week's meeting pack.

12. 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 with the EU Affairs Manager scheduled to take place at its meeting of 30 April. The Committee also noted that an updated briefing from RalSe on legacy in the Republic of Ireland has been scheduled for the meeting of 14 May.

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

13. Any Other Business

A Member raised an issue in relation to a previous session on Truth Recovery and the role of the Committee in relation to complaints. The Chairperson reminded Members that earlier in the meeting they had noted receipt of the detailed response

from TEO and decided to defer further consideration of the response and this issue until next week's meeting. This is to allow time to review the detailed material received and to identify any further action and follow up that may be required.

14. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 02 April at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.06pm.

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office

Wednesday 2 April 2025