



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 30 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

Online:

Ms Claire Sugden MLA

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

Apologies:

Ms Sínead McLaughlin MLA

In Attendance: Ms Róisín Kelly (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Nick Mitford (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Sarah-Anne McKinley (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Deborah Madden (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Andrienne Magee (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.39pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declarations of Interest

As below.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson updated Members that the Committee held its Strategic Planning session before the formal Committee meeting today.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the actions coming out of its Strategic Planning session for agreement under Matter's Arising at next week's meeting.

4. Draft Minutes

A Member raised an issue regarding the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 9 April 2025 and expressed concern over the wording of the second action under this item (item 6 - Inquiry) in the minutes which was:

The Committee agreed to retitle the Inquiry to more closely reflect the content of the draft final report, and that the Clerk will suggest a form of words for the revised title.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 9 April 2025 subject to textual change under this action of item 6 and the Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the following re-wording of this action and the Committee discussed the possibility of retitling the Inquiry to most closely reflect the contents of the draft final report, and that it would revisit this at a future meeting.

A Member raised concerns regarding the recent Supreme Court ruling on the legal definition of a woman and any potential implications that may arise in relation to Article 2 of the Windsor Framework. The Member queried how this ruling might be applied within this jurisdiction.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek legal advice on the issue from Assembly Legal Services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Equality Commission to request information on the timeline for publishing guidance in light of this judgment as well as the scope of the review being undertaken.

5. Matters Arising

There were no Matters Arising.

6. EU Affairs: Northern Ireland Assembly EU Affairs Manager

The officials joined the meeting at 2.52pm

Members received a briefing from:

- Shauna Mageean, EU Affairs Manager
- Claire Milliken, EU Affairs Officer

The officials provided an update on the Common Frameworks process.

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

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The officials left the meeting at 2.53 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to NIA EU Affairs Manager to follow up on a number of queries that were raised during the oral evidence session including:

- A link to the Common Frameworks page on the UK Government website.
- Further information on the text of Common Frameworks (pre the introduction of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland) and once received, for the

Committee to review this information and consider writing to the Department for further information if needed.

- The number of frameworks applying to the devolved administrations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Cabinet Office to request details of any publicity campaigns undertaken in relation to the recent changes affecting the movement of customer parcels between Great Britain and Northern Ireland for both customers and suppliers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask what publicity campaigns and action local government departments have taken regarding the recent changes affecting the movement of customer parcels between Great Britain and Northern Ireland for both customers and suppliers.

7. EU Affairs Update : Departmental Officials

This oral evidence session was postponed to a later date due to staff illness.

8. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the summary of Committee correspondence.
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual in relation to the HIA Redress Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue the draft response in the tabled papers to this individual.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance – The Retail NI Survey Report, a copy of survey results from Retail NI; “A Call for Action - A five-point plan to tackle the Cost of Doing Business Crisis”.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and agreed to write to the Department to ask if there are any immediate plans to re-establish the High Street Taskforce and what progress has been made on the fourteen recommendations to date.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual in relation to a complaint about the redevelopment of Mandela Hall at Queen's University Belfast.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue the draft response in the tabled papers to this individual.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual highlighting the failure of the Irish state Inquiry to include evidence from HIA victims and survivors from Church of Ireland and homes belonging to other Protestant denominations.

Agreed: Members agreed to note this item and to respond to the individual, thanking them for this correspondence, explaining that the Irish Inquiry is outside the Committee's remit, and that there will be an opportunity for any interested parties to provide evidence as part of the committee stage of the forthcoming Truth Recovery and Redress Bill.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual expressing concern about failure to include evidence of abuse at institutions run by the Church of Ireland and Protestant denominations in the Irish state Inquiry.

Agreed: Members agreed to note this item and to respond to the individual thanking them for this correspondence, explaining that the Irish Inquiry is outside the Committee's remit, and that there will be an opportunity for any interested parties to provide evidence as part of the committee stage of the forthcoming Truth Recovery and Redress Bill.

- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office responding to its correspondence of 31 March regarding TEO Budget 2025/2026 allocations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to write to the Department to ask for:

- Further information and a detailed breakdown on the increase of EVAWG costs and SIB costs from 2021 to 2025.
- Further detailed clarity on the role SIB staff in enhancing the EVAWG Strategy team, specifically whether these SIB staff were being paid by TEO or SIB and the total amount of these staff costs to the current day.
- Further detail on the dates these staff were seconded or moved into post within TEO to work on the Strategy and if they are still being staffed within the Department.

- Further information on the £147,000 depreciation value and the £1,197,000 listed as 'other' in the 24/25 budget allocation for SIB.
- Further information on the China overseas bureau and the £554,000 capital allocation for 2024/2025.
- Written briefing on, and copies of, any section 75 screening exercises undertaken by key business areas impacted by the budget allocations, once they are completed.
- Further information on how individual councils have spent money in regards to the Local Change Fund and what evaluation or oversight processes are in place to assess the effectiveness and impact of these Funds.
- Clarification on the common framework used for the evaluation of Local Change Fund spending. In particular if there is any criteria or conditions attached to allocations for example, whether there are stipulations for maximum expenditure on staffing versus programme delivery.
- Further information on the criteria for the Local and Regional Change Fund.
- Clarity on whether local councils receive advance notification of funding allocations from TEO including the timing and process in place.
- Further information on the allocation of Local Change Fund monies to each council area including a breakdown of what portion was allocated specifically for pre-planning activities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to each of the eleven council areas in Northern Ireland to request a breakdown of the monies allocated from this Local Change Fund by TEO including a list of the programmes and details of any pre-planning that was undertaken.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to send a memo for information to the Committee for Communities advising that this Committee will be writing to each of the eleven council areas in relation to the Local Change Fund.

- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Women's Policy Group NI in relation to the Co-design Terms of Reference for Social Inclusion Strategies, including a copy of the Terms of Reference sent to members of that group in November 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and agreed for the Clerk to engage with the Clerk of the Committee for Communities as DfC are the lead Department regarding social inclusion strategies.

- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) in response to its correspondence of 3 March.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and for the Committee team to liaise with NIO to look at possible dates for an oral evidence session, and to advise on session format.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from Ofcom to a conference on the Future of Connectivity in Northern Ireland on Tuesday 17 June 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and that any Member wishing to attend can register via the link in the invitation.

- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Mental Health Champion in response to correspondence of 14 April in relation to information to help Members better understand what describes a 'Trauma Informed Approach'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to forward the correspondence to the Department for information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to also consider this correspondence further as part of its preparation for the Truth Recovery and Redress Bill.

- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from Caleb's Cause regarding the lack of legislation around, and adequate provision for, Post-19 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to forward the correspondence to the Health, Education, Economy and Communities Committees to take forward the issues raised as these are not within the remit of the Executive Office.

- xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Interim Chair of the Victim's and Survivors' Consultation Forum responding to its correspondence of 17 April, confirming their appointment, providing an update to Committee queries and welcoming the opportunity to engage with the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and agreed to arrange in the first instance an informal meeting with the Chair and Deputy Chair to discuss the Forum and forthcoming Truth Recovery & Redress Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an oral evidence session with the Victims' and Survivors' Consultation Forum as part of the Committee stage of the bill.

- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office in Brussels updating on the work of the office for January to March 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to include it as a relevant paper for the overseas bureaux oral evidence session next month.

- xv. The Committee noted correspondence from Ofcom regarding the Protection of Children Codes of Practice and guidance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to consider the final guidance when published as part of the Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy.

- xvi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health responding to Committee correspondence of 31 March to ascertain whether their Department has a role delivering the Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy (EVAWG).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and that the Committee team will collate responses from departments to inform ongoing Committee work on EVAWG.

- xvii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Finance responding to Committee correspondence of 31 March to ascertain whether their Department has a role delivering the Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy (EVAWG).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence, and that the committee team will collate responses from the other statutory Committees to inform ongoing Committee work on EVAWG.

Agreed: The Committee agreed also agreed to write to the Minister of Finance welcoming the initiative of the e-Learning product and to express its support for it to be used as a model for other employees. The Committee also agreed to ask if the Committee could see the finalised information for this e-Learning product to raise awareness of EVAWG via collaboration between NICS HR and the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Directorate.

- xviii. The Committee noted the thirty-sixth Report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules. There were no rules for the attention of this Committee.
- xix. The Committee noted a news release from the Executive Office highlighting how FM and dFM are to become mentors as part of the SistersIN programme to develop female leaders of the future.
- xx. The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office in response to its correspondence of 19 March regarding consultations.

- xxi. The Committee noted correspondence from the First Minister and deputy First Minister outlining updates to the Executive Legislation Programme 2024-2025.
- xxii. The Committee noted the thirty-seventh Report of Examiner of Statutory Rules. There were no rules for the attention of this Committee.
- xxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from Survivors Together expressing their appreciation for the work of the Chair and Members following their oral evidence session on 2 April 2025.
- xxiv. The Committee noted a copy of the Corporate Plan for 2025/26 – 2029/30 for the Electoral Commission.
- xxv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department for Communities in response to its correspondence of 25 March requesting and update on outstanding strategies.
- xxvi. The Committee noted a news release from the Executive Office expressing condolences on the death of Pope Francis.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the draft forward work programme.

The Committee noted an update from the Assistant Clerk regarding rescheduled briefings for the month of May. The Committee will consider an updated draft report on the Committee's Inquiry at its meeting on the 7 May and a dedicated session on the Victim's Payment Scheme with stakeholders, the Victim's Payment Board with Departmental officials and the Victims & Survivors Service will take place at its meeting on the 14 May.

The Committee also noted an update regarding the rescheduling of today's planned session on EU matters and the rescheduling of the oral evidence session from the overseas bureaus on the 21 May which will be confirmed in due course.

Lastly, the Committee noted an update on a potential briefing on the Truth Recovery and Redress Bill at its meeting on the 28 May. There will also be a briefing from the TEO Permanent Secretary on the Departmental Business Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for information on the role of Junior Ministers and information on the projects and areas of responsibility they are currently engaged in.

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

10. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include a further question in its letter to the Cabinet Office and that is to ask if there was any discussion on the full impact regarding the new rules for GB businesses posting parcels to Northern Ireland at the recent Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee.

11. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 7 May at the later time of 4.00pm due to Committee training in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:08pm.

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office

Wednesday 30 April 2025