



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for The Executive Office

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Wednesday 5 March 2025**

**Meeting Location:** Room 30, Parliament Buildings

**Present:** Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Timothy Gaston MLA  
  
Mr Harry Harvey MLA  
  
Mr Brian Kingston MLA  
  
Ms Áine Murphy MLA

**Online:** Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)  
  
Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA  
Ms Claire Sugden MLA

**Apologies:** Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

**In Attendance:** Ms Roisin Kelly (Assembly Clerk)  
  
Ms Sarah-Anne McKinley (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
  
Mr Jonathan Lawless (Clerical Supervisor)

Ms Andrienne Magee (Clerical Officer)

*The meeting commenced at 2.17pm in public session.*

## **1. Apologies**

As above.

The Deputy Chairperson, Stewart Dickson, took the Chair as the Chairperson was ill, however she attended online.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **3. Chairperson's Business**

### **3.1 Memo from Clerk Assistant - Data breach ICO outcome**

Members noted a memo from the Clerk Assistant regarding the ICO outcome of the data breach that occurred in the course of collecting information for the Inquiry into Gaps in Equality Legislation.

### **3. 2 First and Deputy First Minister - Programme for Government 2024-2027**

Members noted correspondence from the First and Deputy First Minister following Executive agreement of the Programme for Government 2024-2027 on the 27 February.

The Committee expressed concern about the late timing of documents received in the Tabled Pack relating to the Programme for Government oral evidence session.

### **3.3 Note of the meeting with First and Deputy First Minister on Programme for Government - 3 March 2025**

Members noted the note of an informal meeting between the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, the First and deputy First Minister on the 3 March in relation to the

Programme for Government. A note of the meeting was also emailed to Members the same day.

### **3.4 St Patrick's Day Invitations**

Members noted invitations to the Chairperson from the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington D.C. and the British Embassy in Washington D.C, to participate in events to mark St Patrick's Day, and that the Chairperson would not be attending.

## **4. Draft Minutes**

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

## **5. Matters Arising**

### **5.1 Clerk's Brief - Matters Arising 5 March Meeting**

The Deputy 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 Inquest Referrals**

Members noted correspondence from Relatives for Justice regarding information about inquests, a hard copy of which was provided by Mr Mark Thompson during the Committee meeting last week.

### **5.3 Signed Petition - Mr Raymond McCord**

Members noted correspondence from Mr Raymond McCord which contains information in relation to a signed petition, a hard copy of which was provided during the Committee meeting last week.

### **5.4 Draft Press Release - HIA Redress Board**

The Deputy Chairperson referred Members to a draft press release on the HIA Redress Board encouraging HIA victims to apply to the Redress scheme before the 2 April cut off date.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to issue the draft press release subject to amendments regarding criteria of the scheme. The updated press release will be emailed to Members for information before being issued.

## **6. Programme for Government – Departmental Oral Evidence**

**Agreed:** Members agreed that the briefing should be reported by Hansard.

*The witnesses joined the meeting at 2.32pm.*

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 agreed Programme for Government (PfG).

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

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

The Deputy Chairperson asked Members to send any relevant questions to the Clerk in advance of next week's oral evidence session on the Programme for Government Consultation Report; Equality Impact Assessment; Rural Needs Impact Assessment and Child Rights Impact Assessment, for submission to the Department.

*Áine Murphy left the meeting at 3.31pm and returned at 3.36pm.*

*The witnesses left the meeting at 3.37pm.*

*Carál Ní Chuilín left the meeting at 3.37pm*

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

*The meeting was suspended at 3.37pm.*

*The meeting resumed at 3.44pm in open session.*

## **Draft Refugee Strategy and Delivery Framework – Departmental Oral Evidence**

**Agreed:** Members agreed that the briefing should be reported by Hansard.

*The witnesses joined the meeting at 3.44pm.*

- Ms Orla McStravick: Assistant Secretary, Refugee and Asylum Support and Integration
- Mr Jonathan McNaught: Grade 7, Refugee and Asylum Operations
- Julie Cuming: Grade 7, Refugee and Asylum Policy

The witnesses provided a briefing on the work of the Draft Refugee Strategy and Delivery Framework.

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

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

The Deputy Chairperson reminded Members to send any views on the Draft Refugee Strategy and Delivery Framework to the Clerk to help inform the development of a response from the Committee at next week's meeting.

*The witnesses left the meeting at 4.24pm.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for information regarding funding allocations from the Home Office and a list of the funding programmes currently available to the Executive Office.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 4.32pm to discuss the next agenda item relating to the Committee's Inquiry into Gaps in Equality Legislation.

## **7. Inquiry into Gaps in Equality legislation – Review of evidence to date and options for recommendations**

*The meeting moved into closed session at 4.32pm.*

*The meeting moved into open session at 4.57pm.*

Members discussed the way forward in the Inquiry into Gaps in Equality Legislation.

**Agreed:** Members agreed that the Clerk would bring forward, by early April, further information and an updated draft report for Committee consideration.

## **8. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the draft forward work programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to postpone the oral evidence session scheduled for 12 March with the Truth Recovery Independent Panel Co-Chairs to a later date, to facilitate further briefing on the Programme for Government.

The Deputy Chairperson advised Members that the oral evidence session with Birth Mothers for Justice will be briefing the Committee on the 12 March rather than the 19 March.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to this change and to update the Forward Work Plan.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to reschedule some departmental briefings and items of business to facilitate the Committee's strategic planning session in March.

The Deputy Chairperson updated Members that the Departmental briefing on EU matters has been moved to the 30 April rather than the 9 April to allow for a dedicated session on the Inquiry.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to this change and to update the Forward Work Plan.

Claire Sugden suggested that the Committee should hear from Hourglass in relation to elder abuse as part of Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. The Deputy Chairperson suggested that this could be considered further at the Committee's strategic planning session.

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

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

## 9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the summary of Committee correspondence.
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Justice regarding Immigration Law and Legal Aid Funding.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and agreed to forward the response to Advice NI.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Executive Office in relation to wastewater infrastructure. The Committee will be copied into any response.
- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office regarding the draft Budget 2025-2026 and Equality Impacts.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and agreed to consider this as part of the Committee's response to the Finance Committee on the Department's Budget for 2025-2026.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Agriculture Committee who are seeking the views of all Statutory Committee's on the Agriculture Bill. Included in this correspondence is the Bill as introduced, an Explanatory Memorandum and a Bill Research Paper produced by RaISe.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and agreed to send any response that the Committee may have to the Agriculture Committee by 21 March.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for its views on the Bill and if there is any role for the Executive Office.

- vi. The Committee noted a report from the Investment Strategy Northern Ireland entitled Delivery Tracking System Investing activity report.
- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from NISRA regarding the quarterly sick absence update for the NICS for October 2024 to December 2024.

- 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 Department of Justice Executive summary report on a review carried out by a Domestic Homicide Review Panel.
- x. The Committee noted a press release from the Executive Office following the publication of the ‘Young People’s Attitudes to Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Northern Ireland 2024’ report.
- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee in relation to primacy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for the Finance to ascertain that committee’s plans in relation to the Northern Ireland Audit Office reports on the Northern Ireland Non-Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive scheme released by the Public Accounts Committee at its meeting of 27 February 2025

- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office regarding the Committee’s concern around the absence of a briefing paper relating to Post EU Exit Matters.
- xiii. The Committee noted a ‘save the date’ from the Centre for Public Policy and Administration at Queen's University to a seminar on “The Potential for Artificial Intelligence in the Public Sector” on Tuesday 15 April.
- xiv. The Committee noted a press release from the Executive Office on the First Minister and deputy First Minister approving a £9m investment in the Urban Villages Initiative.
- xv. The Committee noted a Hansard report from the oral evidence session with the Christian Institute on the 12 February.
- xvi. The Committee noted a Hansard report from the oral evidence session with the Women’s Rights Network on the 12 February.



- xvii. The Committee noted the 33<sup>rd</sup> Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules to the Assembly and appropriate Committees. There are no rules for the attention of this Committee.
- xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Finance Committee regarding a response from the Department of Finance who have provided further details and figures in relation to employer National Insurance costs and funding. The estimated costs for 2025-2026 for TEO is £1million.

## **10. Any Other Business**

The Deputy Chairperson referred Members to a written statement received by Members regarding the appointment of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland.

## **11. Date, Time and Place of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 12 March 2025 at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 5.15pm.*

**Stewart Dickson MLA**

**Deputy Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office**

**Wednesday 5 March 2025**