



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for The Executive Office

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Wednesday 7 May 2025**

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

**Present:** Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Harry Harvey MLA

Mr Brian Kingston MLA

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

Ms Sínead McLaughlin

Ms Áine Murphy MLA

**Online:** None

**Apologies:** Mr Timothy Gaston MLA

Ms Claire Sugden MLA

Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

**In Attendance:** Mr Nick Mitford (Assembly Clerk)

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 4.05pm in public session.*

### **1. Apologies**

As above.

### **2. Declarations of Interest**

As below.

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

There are were no items of Chairperson's Business in today's meeting.

### **4. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 30 April 2025.

### **5. Matters Arising**

#### **5.1 Revised Minutes of 9 April**

The Chair reminded the Committee that Members agreed at last week's meeting for the Committee team to update the minutes from the meeting on the 9 April, subject to textual change of item 6 in relation to the Inquiry. The Committee agreed to a rewording of this action to the possibility of retitling the Inquiry to more closely reflect the contents of the draft final report, and that it would revisit this at a future meeting.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the revised minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 9 April 2025.

## 5.2 Draft Strategic Planning Actions

The Clerk discussed with the Committee the draft actions for agreement from the strategic planning session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to hold familiarisation sessions for witnesses in relation to the forthcoming Truth Recovery & Redress Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that any familiarisation session held in Parliament Buildings should be recorded for witnesses to access in their own time and remain on the Committee webpage as a point of resource for witnesses during Committee stage.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed for the Committee team to seek additional support for witnesses on evidence days, including additional team members to provide support, and an additional room for witnesses to ensure a quiet space is available before and after evidence sessions.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to review whether and how it could use its powers to compel witnesses to attend, in relation to the religious orders that previously refused to give evidence in relation to HIA, citing evidence could prejudice ongoing negotiations around their contributions to the HIA redress scheme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to review the benefits of engaging, virtually or in person, with relevant organisations in Scotland on their work on this subject (Scottish Government; the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry team; and Redress Scotland) and if possible, parliamentarians in Scotland, to share learning on this subject.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to continue to gather responses from the statutory Committees in relation to the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy on their investment and actions in relation to the Strategy, and to review these when all responses have been received.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request from the Department the entry and exit impact studies from the 2025 Communities in Transition programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for an update in relation to its legislative timeframe for the introduction of the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an update on the finalised Refugee Strategy and associated Delivery Framework in relation to any changes since the draft Strategy was considered at its meeting of 5 March, in particular the Committee would like to find out if the Committee's feedback has been considered as part of the final Strategy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to combine the strategic areas of Victims and Survivors and the Troubles and Conflict going forward as one strategic priority workstream.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Foreign Affairs in the Republic of Ireland and to ask the Irish government's role in relation to information retrieval and the UK Legacy Act.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add the recent Supreme Court ruling on the legal definition of a woman as an addendum to the Committee's draft final report for its Inquiry.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request an oral briefing from the Department from the PFG Delivery unit before the summer recess and to schedule updates in each session between now and the end of the mandate.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Departmental Briefings document would be a live document and added as an annex to the agreed Strategic Priorities document.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed for the Committee team to add EU Matters as a separate priority workstream to the Strategic Priorities document going forward.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed for the Clerk to compile a Strategies Matrix on all current TEO Strategies.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed for the Committee team to update the Draft Strategic Priorities – Proposed programme of work 2025 to 2027, including the requested formatting and content changes for consideration at its meeting on the 14 May.

### **5.3 Clerk's Brief – Common Frameworks Briefing Paper – NIA EU Affairs Manager**

The Chairperson updated Members that following the oral briefing by the Assembly's EU Affairs Manager on Common Frameworks at last week's Committee meeting, the EU Affairs Manager has provided further information in relation to:

- The link to the Common Frameworks page on the UK Government website.
- Further information on the number of frameworks applying to the devolved administrations.
- Further information on the text of Common Frameworks (pre the introduction of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland).

The Chair reminded Members that at last week's meeting the Committee also agreed to seek legal advice from Assembly Legal Services on the recent Supreme Court ruling. This legal advice has been requested and the Committee will be updated in due course.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note these updates.

#### **5.4 Clerk's Brief – Main Estimates, associated Supply Resolutions and the No.2 Budget Bill**

The Chairperson updated Members that the Finance Committee has updated all Statutory Committees that as part of the Spring Supply Resolutions, the Assembly agreed Vote on Account allowing departments to spend approximately 45% of their 2024-2025 Budget at the beginning of the 2025-2026 financial year, prior to the passage of the No.2 Budget Bill (which will legislate for the spending of the 2025-2026 financial year Budget allocations). Indicative dates have been provided in relation to these items.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note this update and to write to the Department to request:

- An update on the final budget position and any changes since the last update was provided to the Committee.
- Detail on the Main Estimates, specifically outlining Departmental spending allocations.

## **6. Inquiry: Consideration of recommendations – Consideration of Draft Report – Inquiry into gaps in equality legislation (closed session)**

*The meeting moved into closed session at 4.18pm.*

*The meeting moved into open session at 4.53pm.*

Members discussed the first draft of the final report for the Inquiry.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to provide comment and suggested updates to the Clerk by Friday the 16 May for consideration by Members at its meeting on the Wednesday 21 May.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed a methodology to progress the report to completion, publication and debate.

## **7. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted the summary of Committee correspondence.
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from Civic Initiative requesting an opportunity to brief the Committee on Civic Engagement and Citizen's Assemblies.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and for the Committee team to arrange in the first instance, an informal meeting with the Chair and Deputy Chair to discuss this work.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Office in response to Committee Correspondence of the 14 April in relation to information about Training Schools and Borstals.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to write to the Department of Justice to request this information.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office in response to Committee Correspondence of the 19 March regarding the appointment of the Commissioners and the Members of the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to write to the Department to request that they keep the Committee updated on the progress of the schedule in the 1995 Order as it is taken forward.

**Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to ask the Department why fluency in Irish, including a proficiency test, is a requirement for the Irish Language Commissioner and to seek the rationale for this in comparison to the Ulster-Scots Commissioner, who is not required to be fluent in Ulster-Scots and no test is required.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance in relation to 2024-2025 Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn information.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to write to the Department to request:

- Further detail including a breakdown on the non-ring-fenced Resource DEL underspend of £2.3 million and to ask the reason for the delays in filling vacancies within the Department.
- Further detail on the £0.3 million relating to Treasury-earmarked funding for transformation, including details of the projects that will be funded in this area.
- Further detail on the easements regarding the £0.2 million underspend and further detail on the new NSMC lease in Capital DEL.
- Further detail on the areas listed within the £2.0 million reduction in March non Ring-fenced Resource DEL.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department for Finance in relation to the Northern Ireland Investment Fund, information on Financial Transactions Capital and the role of CBRE.

- vii. The Committee noted an activity report from Investment Strategy Northern Ireland; Investing Activity Report 27 April 2025.

- viii. The Committee noted a response from the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) to Committee correspondence of 14 April, outlining how the VSS will

continue to promote its services to victims and survivors of HIA following the closure of the Redress Board.

- ix. The Committee noted a News Release from the Executive Office regarding the re-appointment of Dame Brenda King as Attorney General for Northern Ireland for a period of five years until 30 June 2030.
- x. The Committee agreed to note correspondence from the Committee for Finance in response to its correspondence 31 March in relation to the Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy. The contents of this correspondence was sent directly to the Committee from the Department for Finance on the 24 April and was included in last week's meeting pack.
- xi. The Committee agreed to note the thirty-eighth report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules. There were no rules for the attention of this Committee.

## **8. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the draft forward work programme.

The Committee noted an update from the Assistant Clerk in relation to the stakeholder panel session to discuss the Victim's Payment Scheme on the 14 May. Confirmed stakeholders in attendance will be Wave, SEFF, Relatives for Justice and the Ely Centre.

The Committee also noted an update regarding an informal working lunch with WAVE, Adopt NI and VSS to discuss their role Supporting Survivors of Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses in Northern Ireland which has been arranged before the formal Committee meeting on the 21 May.

Lastly, the Committee noted an update that the postponed EU session with Departmental officials has been re-arranged and will now take place at its meeting on the 4 June.

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



## **9. Any Other Business**

The Chairperson asked that any Members who plan to attend the Balmoral Show on Wednesday the 14 May and will be absent from next week's meeting to inform the Clerk by the beginning of next week.

## **10. Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 14 May at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 5.08pm.*

**Paula Bradshaw MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office**

**Wednesday 7 May 2025**