



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 17th September 2025

Meeting Location: Room 21, 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 Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Ms Áine Murphy MLA

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

Ms Claire Sugden MLA

Online:

None

Apologies:

None

In Attendance: Mr Nick Mitford (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Sarah-Anne McKinley (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Neil Porter (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Andrienne Magee (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 1.46pm in public session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Declarations of Interest

Áine Murphy declared a standing interest as having a family member who was born in a Mother and Baby institution in relation to the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson updated Members that the Committee held its third Familiarisation Session online on Thursday 11 September. Over the three sessions, more than 90 individuals attended, which will have successfully raised the understanding of the Bill process with stakeholders and other individuals. The Chairperson expressed their thanks to the Engagement and Bill Office teams, as well as the Committee team for facilitating these sessions.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 10 September 2025.

Timothy Gaston joined the meeting at 1.56pm

5. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the summary of Committee correspondence.

Áine Murphy joined the meeting at 1.59pm

Carál Ní Chuilín joined the meeting at 2.00pm

- ii. The Committee considered a response from TEO to the Committee's correspondence of 10 July regarding the NI Fiscal Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to write to the Committee for Finance outlining the Committee's view.

- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from TEO regarding the Independent review of the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress process – Supporting Justice Report and Key Agencies Action Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed note this item of correspondence and for the Committee team to liaise with the DALO to schedule an oral briefing in closed session.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from TEO providing an update on the Ending Violence against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence pending the oral briefing with officials at its meeting on the 19 November to discuss the EVAWG Framework and first Delivery Plan.

- v. The Committee considered correspondence from the Economy Committee regarding the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill - Call for Evidence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to write to the Department to ask whether the TEO has any views or comments on the Bill, and whether there are any implications, or any role, for TEO arising from the Bill.

- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Finance Committee in relation to Budget 2026-2029/30 Information Gathering.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to write to the Department to request that a copy of the proposed budgets completed by TEO are sent to the Committee upon the known outcome from DoF.

- vii. The Committee considered a Written Ministerial Statement from First Minister and deputy First Minister made on 4 July regarding the restoration of the Civic Forum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to write to the Department asking whether the Committee will be briefed on the proposed arrangements for the Civic Forum.

- viii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Finance Committee regarding the Legislative Consent Motion tracker.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to write to the Department and ask if there is a LCM tracker used by TEO and if not, to request an update on the current plans to implement such a tracker.

- ix. The Committee considered a response from TEO to the Committee's correspondence of 17 June in relation to Members requesting sight of the full final report compiled by Professor Alexis Jay, following her recent review of COSICA.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and for the Committee team to liaise with the DALO to agree a date for an oral briefing (in closed session) to the Committee.

- x. The Committee considered a response from TEO to the Committee's correspondence of 17 June regarding Regional Government HQ and its future use.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to write to the Department to request an update on the project following the working group meeting over the summer.

- xi. The Committee considered a response from TEO to the Committee's correspondence of 30 May in relation to Common Frameworks.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to write to the Department to request that the Committee is sent a copy of the revised delivery programme schedule when it has been completed by the Common Frameworks Project Board.

- xii. The Committee considered a response from TEO to the Committee's correspondence of 27 June in relation to the June Monitoring Round.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to write to the Department to request that they keep the Committee informed of any developments or decisions relating to the Central Good Relations Fund following ministerial consideration.

- xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding an issue with an application to Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to forward the correspondence to the Victim's Payment Board and request that they respond to the individual's concerns as outlined in the correspondence.

- xiv. The Committee considered a TEO News Release on the appointment of a New Commissioner for Victims and Survivors.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to write to the new Commissioner to congratulate them on their appointment and to schedule an oral briefing with them in the New Year.

- xv. The Committee considered a TEO News Release regarding the appointment of Claire Keatinge as the new Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item of correspondence and to write to the new Commissioner to congratulate them on their appointment and to schedule an oral briefing with them in the New Year.

- xvi. The Committee noted correspondence from Pivotal. - 18 months of the Northern Ireland Executive: A Review.

- xvii. The Committee noted a TEO News Release - Statement following the death of HRH the Duchess of Kent.
- xviii. The Committee noted the forty-third Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.
- xix. The Committee noted a TEO New Release - First Minister and deputy First Minister welcoming a £115m investment by Seagate Technology.
- xx. The Committee noted a Hansard Report - June Monitoring TEO: 25 June.
- xxi. The Committee noted the forty-first report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules. There are no rules for the attention of the Committee.
- xxii. The Committee noted correspondence from Investment Strategy NI – June, July and August Investing Activity Reports.
- xxiii. The Committee noted a Hansard Report - The Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill: Stakeholder List and Consultation Material from its meeting on 2 July.
- xxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Attorney General for Northern Ireland - Annual Report for 2024/25.
- xxv. The Committee noted reports from the Youth Assembly for Northern Ireland's Education Committee and Health Committee on 'A Curriculum fit for the 21st century – Learning for Life and Work' and 'Mental Health in Schools'.
- xxvi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance - Spending Review Assessment for the Executive.

- xxvii. The Committee noted Correspondence from Minister for the Cabinet Office to NI Scrutiny Committee - European Commission Work Programme.
- xxviii. The Committee noted a response from TEO to the Committee's correspondence of 17 June regarding Ms Sugden's Proposed Member's Bill.
- xxix. The Committee noted a response from TEO to the Committee's correspondence of 9 June regarding the Analysis of 2024-2025 Outturn and Forecast Outturn.
- xxx. The Committee noted a response from TEO to the Committee's correspondence of 24 June regarding an ageing population strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Commissioner for Older People.

- xxxi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Strategic Investment Board - Annual Review and Financial Statements 2024-25.
- xxxii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Equality Commission - Annual Report & Accounts 2024-25.
- xxxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from HOL NI Scrutiny Committee to Rt Hon Nick Thomas-Symonds MP in relation to the Commission Work Programme.
- xxxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee to Feryal Clark MP regarding geographical indicators for Craft.
- xxxv. The Committee noted a news release from FM and deputy FM – Ministers welcome major benefits and opportunities as 'The Open' returns to the north coast.

xxxvi. The Committee noted a Written statement from the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the publication of the Executive 2nd response to the Covid-19 Inquiry Module 1 Report recommendations.

xxxvii. The Committee noted a response from the Minister for Communities to the Committee's correspondence of 24 June regarding perceived difficulties survivors of HIA have encountered when applying for social housing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to HIA groups.

xxxviii. The Committee noted a response from TEO to the Committee for the Communities' correspondence regarding delays with the publication of the Irish Language Strategy.

xxxix. The Committee noted correspondence from The Executive Office - TEO 2024-25 Consolidated Annual Report and Accounts.

xl. The Committee noted a response from TEO to the Committee's correspondence of 9 June regarding funding to support the Refugee Integration Strategy and its associated Delivery Framework.

xli. The Committee noted a response to the Committee's correspondence of 30 May regarding the EVAWG Strategy.

xlii. The Committee noted correspondence from the NI Fiscal Council – Public expenditure Data Bank.

xliii. The Committee noted a response to the Committee's correspondence of 9 July regarding what steps are being taken to embed the EVAWG Strategy in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Youth Assembly.

- xliv. The Committee noted a response from TEO to the Committee's correspondence of 6 May in relation to the High Street Task Force.
- xliv. The Committee correspondence from the First and deputy First Minister announcing the recruitment of a Chairperson and new Board Members for the Community Relations Council.
- xlvi. The Committee noted a News Release from TEO following the deputy FM and Finance Minister meeting the Chancellor.
- xlvi. The Committee noted a response to the Committee's correspondence of 10 July from the Education Authority regarding the EVAWG Strategy and specifically reporting systems in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Youth Assembly.

- xlvi. The Committee noted a response from TEO to Committee's correspondence of 24 June in relation to the New AI and Digital Office.
- xlix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health informing the Committee that the Health Minister visited Shankill Women's Centre and how the centre is available for Committee bookings.
- I. The Committee noted correspondence from QUB regarding the reinstatement of the Body Donation Programme.
- li. The Committee noted correspondence from AERC that their 'Call for Evidence' for its review on Cross-Cutting Executive Strategies will close on 30 September. If any Member wishes to comment please email the Clerk by 23 September.

lii. The Committee noted correspondence from Claire Sugden updating Members that her call for evidence has now concluded on her Private Member's Bill.

liii. The Committee noted correspondence from the AERA Committee in relation to its Call for Evidence for the Dilapidation Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Department to ask whether the TEO has any views or comments on the Bill, and whether there are any implications, or any role, for TEO arising from the Bill.

liv. The Committee noted correspondence from TEO to AERC Committee - Review of Assembly Committee Engagement on Cross Cutting Executive Strategies.

lv. The Committee noted a response from TEO to correspondence 9 July in relation to Connect and Social Cohesion Funding.

lvi. The Committee noted a response from DoJ to Committee's correspondence of 10 July regarding EVAWG: Delivery and Operational responsibilities.

lvii. The Committee noted a News Release from TEO - Appointment of His Honour Judge Mark McGarrity to serve on the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission.

lviii. The Committee noted a News Release from TEO - Executive statement on racist and sectarian attacks.

6. Matters Arising

The Clerk discussed the Call for Evidence themes to date for the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Committee team to liaise with Assembly Engagement and Communications teams for a final push to raise awareness of the Call for Evidence before the closing date on the 29 September.

7. Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill: The Consultative Forum – Oral Briefing

Agreed: The Committee agreed for Hansard to record the evidence session.

The witness joined the meeting at 2.17pm.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Marie Breen-Smyth – Interim Chair, Victims' & Survivors' Consultative Forum

The witness provided information on the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.

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

The Chairperson thanked the witness for her attendance.

Áine Murphy left the meeting at 2.20pm and returned at 2.24pm.

Stewart Dickson left the meeting at 2.33pm and returned at 2.37pm.

Claire Sugden joined the meeting at 2.43pm.

The witness left the meeting at 2.46pm.

8. Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill: Birth Mothers and their Children for Justice - Oral Briefing

Agreed: The Committee agreed for Hansard to record the evidence session.

The witnesses joined the meeting at 2.47pm.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Oonagh McAleer, Birth Mothers and their Children for Justice
- Mechelle Dillon, Birth Mothers and their Children for Justice

The witnesses provided information on the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.

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

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

Carál Ní Chuilín left the meeting at 3.17pm and returned at 3.20pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 3.31pm.

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

The meeting was suspended at 3.32pm.

The meeting resumed at 3.39pm in public session.

9. Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill – Truth Recovery NI - Oral Briefing

The witnesses joined the meeting at 3.40pm.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Maria Arbuckle, Truth Recovery NI
- Paul McClarey, Truth Recovery NI

Paul McClarey declared an interest as a Member of the Truth Recovery Independent Panel.

The witnesses provided information on the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.

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 4.26pm.

10. Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill: Birth Mothers and Their Children Together - Oral Briefing

The witnesses joined the meeting at 4.28pm.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Adele Johnstone, Birth Mothers and their Children Together
- Barbara McCann, Birth Mothers and their Children Together

The witnesses provided information on the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.

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

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

Sinéad McLaughlin left the meeting at 4.50pm and returned at 4.53pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 5.46pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the groups to thank them for their evidence sessions and to request further information on what they believe should be

included in the list of prescribed institutions and the list of relevant persons, including orphanages in relation to the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an urgent oral briefing from officials in relation to the Bill, and to seek further information on the following issues:

- The joint-working of institutions in relation to forced adoptions – what information is available in relation to this.
- Legal representation – provision for individuals appearing before the Inquiry, and what is set out in the Bill.
- Cross-border movement of children – what information is available, or has this issued been considered following the Departments consultation.
- Whether officials have considered the Omagh Inquiry Memorandum of Understanding with the Irish Government in relation to considering the cross-border movement of children.
- What work has been carried out regarding the ability to compel institutions to make payments to the Redress Scheme.
- Access to information – powers to compel disclosure, provisions in the next piece of legislation, and the individualised payment scheme.
- Definition of ‘relevant person’ versus ‘eligible person’ – consideration of victims rather than institutions, forced adoption cases, deceased babies, and potential impacts on birth mothers.
- Terms of Reference and scope of the Inquiry – including the treatment of burial sites and unmarked graves, which are not mentioned in the Bill, and the need for institutional pathways to include places of burial.
- What evidence is available regarding young girls giving birth? Including further information on the number of birth mothers who were under 16 at the time when in an institution.
- Clause 31 – posthumous cases and the standardised payment, including clarification of eligibility.
- State and religious orders – how stakeholders worked together on the pathways of children, and whether this was taken into account when drafting

the Bill and how the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry should also take this into consideration.

- Foster care – identification of gaps in the Bill.
- Birth fathers – consideration of their inclusion as eligible family members where applicable.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that any Member with any further queries in relation to the Bill should email the Clerk by 12 noon on Friday 19 September.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the draft forward work programme.

The Committee noted an update from the Assistant Clerk in relation to forthcoming stakeholder roundtable events, as part of the Committee Stage of the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill. The events will take place at Hill of The O'Neill, Dungannon, at 10.30am and at the WAVE Trauma Centre, Omagh, at 1.30pm on Wednesday 15 October, and at the Europa Hotel, Belfast, at 10.00am on Wednesday 22 October.

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

12. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed that any Member with any additions to the media outlets for the Call for Evidence regarding the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill should email the Clerk by 12 noon on Friday 19 September.

13. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 24 September at 2.00pm in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.16pm.

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office

Wednesday 17 September 2025