



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 18 March 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mrs Pam Cameron MLA

Mr Timothy Gaston MLA

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

Mr Phillip Brett MLA

Online:

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Ms Claire Sugden MLA

Apologies:

Ms Áine Murphy MLA

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 2.02pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Phillip Brett declared an interest in relation to Item 6 concerning the Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and the Ulster British Tradition, who had previously acted as his election agent in 2022 and 2024 prior to taking up the post of Commissioner.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Individual - Terms of Reference for the Public Inquiry within the Truth Recovery Programme

The Chairperson advised Members that she was copied into correspondence to the First and deputy First Minister from a member of the Consultative Forum regarding the Terms of Reference for the Public Inquiry as part of the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed note this item.

3.2 Truth Recovery Independent Panel – Delay to Final Report

The Chairperson advised Members that Truth Recovery Independent Panel (TRIP) wrote to them advising that there is a delay with the publication of their final report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item.

3.3 Draft News Release – Historical Clerical Childhood Abuse

The Chairperson reminded Members that at last week's meeting the Committee heard from stakeholders on the TEO Research and Recommendations into Historical Clerical Childhood Abuse. A press release has been drafted on behalf of the Committee calling on TEO to publish the Research and the Recommendations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item and agreed to publish the news release subject to one addition relating to the three separate pieces of research and reports

3.4 Relatives for Justice – Conduct of Oral Evidence Session

The Chairperson advised Members that the Clerk received correspondence from Relatives for Justice regarding the conduct of their oral evidence session on 18 February 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session to discuss the item of correspondence further.

The Committee went into closed session at 2.07pm.

Stewart Dickson declared an interest as a Member of the Standards Committee and recused himself for this item of business.

The Committee moved into open session at 2.14pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Clerk to compile a draft response to Relatives for Justice, outlining that any complaint relating to a Member should, in the first instance be directed to the Commissioner for Standards.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 11 March 2026.

5. Matters Arising

There were no Matters Arising.

6. Oral Briefing - Director of the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression, Irish Language Commissioner and Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and the Ulster British tradition

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

The officials joined the meeting at 2.15pm.

Paula Bradshaw declared an interest for this item of business having a family member who is a member of the Ulster Scots Agency.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Dr Katy Radford, Director of the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression, TEO
- Pól Deeds, Irish Language Commissioner, TEO
- Lee Reynolds, Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and the Ulster British Tradition, TEO

The witnesses provided a introductory briefing on each of their respective offices.

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

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Phillip Brett left the meeting at 2.29pm and returned at 2.32pm.

Phillip Brett left the meeting at 3.20pm and returned at 3.29pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 3.35pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for the following information:

- When will the grant funding functions for the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression be implemented.
- How will these grants will be different to those good grants issued through Good Relations Fund, T:BUC and Communities in Transition.
- What are the current and projected funding arrangements for the three offices, including the anticipated requirements for infrastructure and resources.
- An update on the development of standards of best practice relating to the use of the Irish language and Ulster Scots by public authorities, including when these will be issued by the First Minister and deputy First Minister for consultation.
- An update on the draft Ulster Scots Strategy and draft Irish Language Strategy, as both are Executive priorities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Irish Language Commissioner to request a copy of the correspondence issued to the Belfast Telegraph in relation to the court action taken by individual citizens regarding Grand Central Station and to seek clarification on the authority under which legal advice was obtained, including the associated costs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Communities to request further information on the court action taken by the Department in relation to signage at Grand Central Station, and to seek clarification on the authority under which legal advice was obtained, including the associated costs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Communities to request an update on any information they have received from the Department for Communities regarding the draft Irish Language Strategy and the draft Ulster Scots Strategy.

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

The meeting was suspended at 3.43pm.

Claire Sugden left the meeting at 3.43pm.

The meeting resumed in open session at 3.50pm.

7. Oral Briefing - ‘Learnings from ‘Why Riot? The whys’ beneath youth violence’: Open University

The witnesses joined the meeting at 3.50pm.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Gabi Kent, LfWR Research Lead, Senior Knowledge Exchange Lecturer, Open University
- John D’Arcy, Director, The Open University in Ireland
- Stephen Hughes, LfWR Co-researcher, St Peter’s Immaculata Youth Centre

The officials provided a briefing on the ‘Learnings from ‘Why Riot? The whys’ beneath youth violence’ report.

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

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Sinéad McLaughlin left the meeting at 4.30pm.

Stewart Dickson left the meeting at 4.32pm and returned at 4.52pm.

Phillip Brett left the meeting at 4.35pm and returned at 4.46pm.

Carál Ní Chuilín left the meeting at 4.47pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 4.53pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to forward a copy of the report and to seek clarity on plans beyond April, including the decision regarding Local Growth Fund allocations, which will result in a reduction in funding for Northern Ireland’s community-led programmes. The Committee also agreed to ask what

alternative funding streams may be available to mitigate this gap, and to request further clarity on the application process and details of successful applicants for the Communities in Transition Programme, both for the current phase and future phases of the programme, including geographical coverage.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to forward a copy of the report and to ask what coordinated approach is being taken across Departments, given that this matter spans across number of Departments within the Executive.

8. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the summary of Committee correspondence.
- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from TEO regarding the launch of the Race Relations Framework Public Consultation.

The Chairperson advised Members that officials will brief the Committee on the draft framework and associated delivery plan at its meeting on Wednesday 22 April 2026. Members can send any comments to the Clerk to help form a response on behalf of the Committee by Thursday 30 April 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item.

- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from TEO in relation to the Spring Supplementary Estimates Memorandum 2025 – 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item and agreed for the Committee team to liaise with the DALO to arrange an oral briefing with TEO officials on the on the Memorandum.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Head of the Civil Service regarding the Strategy for Victims and Survivors of the Troubles / Conflict 2024-2024 – Memorialisation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item and agreed to write to the Head of the Civil Service requesting that the Committee is kept updated as this work progresses, including feedback received from stakeholders and details of those who have been engaged as part of the process.

- v. The Committee noted a news release from TEO – Minister’s launch public consultation on Draft Framework for Race Relations.
- vi. The Committee noted a response from the Committee for the Economy to the Committee’s correspondence on 27 February 2026 in relation to the Windsor Framework and wider EU issues.
- vii. The Committee noted a response from the Committee for Finance to the Committee’s correspondence on 27 February 2026 regarding the Windsor Framework and wider EU issues.
- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from Legal Services - The fifty-ninth report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules. There are no rules for the attention of this Committee.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from Independent Monitoring Authority for Citizens' Rights Agreements - An Inquiry by the IMA into Delays in Issuing Decisions on Applications to the EU Settlement Scheme.
- x. The Committee noted report from the Official Report (Hansard) – Commissioner for Victims and Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse – 4 March 2026.
- xi. The Committee noted report from the Official Report (Hansard) - Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework and Delivery Plan: TEO – 4 March 2026.
- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from Ofcom regarding action from social media firms to protect children.
- xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance – Department of Finance: Outworkings of Chancellor’s Spring Statement Summary.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the draft forward work programme.

The Committee noted an update from the Assistant Clerk in relation to next week’s meeting where the Committee will receive an oral briefing from Assembly Legal

Services on the Supreme Court Judgement on religious education in Northern Ireland. The Committee will also hold a training session on the New Delegated Legislation process.

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

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 25 March 2026 at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.02pm.

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office

Wednesday 18 March 2026