



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for The Executive Office

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Wednesday 24 June 2026**

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

**Present:**

Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Phillip Brett MLA

Ms Deborah Erskine MLA

Ms Áine Murphy MLA

Mr Timothy Gaston MLA

**Online:**

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Ms Claire Sugden MLA

**Apologies:**

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

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

*The meeting commenced at 2.00pm in public session.*

### **1. Apologies**

As indicated above.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

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

#### **3.1 Irish Language Commissioner**

The Chairperson advised Members that the Committee received correspondence from the Irish Language Commissioner regarding his previous correspondence to the Committee dated 30 April 2026 that was subsequently published on social media by an individual.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to respond to the Commissioner outlining the Assembly's Privacy Policy and to advise that, should they be dissatisfied with any aspect of the Committee's privacy notice, or with how their personal information is being processed, they may contact the Data Protection and Governance Officer.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask whether minutes are recorded at key meetings attended by the two Language Commissioners and the Office of Identity and Culture, including meetings held with the media.

### **3.2 NIPSO – Launch Event**

The Chairperson advised Members that she attended the launch event for NIPSO's new Model Complaints Handling Procedures this morning at the Stormont Hotel.

## **4. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meetings held on Tuesday 16 June and Wednesday 17 June 2026.

## **5. Matters Arising**

### **5.1 - 5.6 Draft Framework for Race Relations and Delivery Plan 2026-28**

The Chairperson advised Members that following the stakeholder panel sessions held at the meeting on 27 May 2026 a draft response on behalf of the Committee to the Draft Framework for Race Relations and Delivery Plan 2026–2028 was compiled by the Clerk.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response on behalf of the Committee to the Department.

### **5.7 - 5.9 Race Relations – Potential Committee Engagement**

The Chairperson reminded Members that at its meeting on Wednesday 10 June 2026, Members agreed that the Committee team should explore the feasibility of hosting roundtable events for those most affected, in relation to TEO initiatives.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask Departmental officials in the Race Relations Unit to provide an urgent oral briefing to the Committee at next week's meeting on the actions being taken by the Department; including any follow up actions for TEO following the meeting of the Racial Equality Subgroup and to request further detail on the planned interventions programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider the possibility of holding roundtable events with stakeholders in the next session following publication of the first annual report on the Refugee Integration Strategy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request details of the membership of the four governance structure groups within the Refugee Integration Strategy and to consider these memberships as a starting point for a potential roundtable engagement event following publication of the first annual report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the PSNI to seek an update on the recent incidents, community impact, and any preventative or support measures being taken (while respecting sub-judice constraints) and any contingency plans in place should further disorder arise over the summer.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to defer any further Committee consideration of these matters until after summer recess, when more comprehensive engagement may be facilitated.

### **5.10 Ending Violence Against Women & Girls (EVAWG) - Funding**

The Chairperson reminded Members that at last week's meeting, the Committee agreed to consider funding across the Department, including the Local and Regional Change Fund, and whether such funding might be more effectively allocated to the Departments of Education and Justice, as part of the potential Inquiry's Terms of Reference into EVAWG.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Derry City and Strabane District Council to request a breakdown of the budget allocated to the Local Change Fund to each District Electoral Area (DEA) within the council in tackling EVAWG.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite the eleven councils to discuss the Local Change Fund as part of any Inquiry into EVAWG.

### **5.11 Phoenix Law – Minority Ethnic Support Armagh**

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee wrote to Minority Ethnic Support Armagh on 11 June 2026 to invite Ms Fearon to return to the Committee to continue the conversation in relation to the Race Relations Framework and to reflect on the comments made in relation to Mr Gaston.

Phillip Brett put on record his concerns regarding the funding of the legal advice, noting that Minority Ethnic Support Armagh receives funding from TEO.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note this item and agreed to write to Minority Ethnic Support Armagh to express its disappointment that the witness did not provide an apology directly. The Committee also agreed to seek confirmation as to whether this reflects the organisation's position, and to request clarification on who funded the legal advice for Ms Fearon.

### **5.12 - 5.14 The Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalane Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill**

The Chairperson advised Members that the Bill Office provided a copy of the Annotated Marshalled List of Amendments and the Minutes of Proceedings from the Further Consideration Stage debate which took place on Monday evening.

The Chairperson thanked the Committee team and the Bill Clerk for their work.

The Committee noted this item.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to continue proceedings in closed session.

*The meeting moved into closed session at 2.33am.*

*Proceedings continued in public session at 2.34pm with the following Members present: Paula Bradshaw, Stewart Dickson, Phillip Brett, Debroah Erskine, Timothy Gaston, Áine Murphy, Sinéad McLaughlin and Claire Sugden online.*

### **5.15 First and Deputy First Minister – Oral Briefing**

The Chairperson advised Members that the First and deputy First Minister wrote to the Committee advising that they cannot attend the scheduled oral briefing with the Committee at next week's meeting due to diary availability.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the First and deputy First Minister to highlight the following:

- To place on record the Committee's disappointment at their inability to attend at one week's notice, particularly given that this date was first proposed to Ministers in April and to request that every effort is now made to facilitate the rescheduling of this evidence session.

- To request that this session take places at the earliest possible opportunity and to advise that Members are prepared to consider dates during the summer recess period to accommodate this.
- To request sight of the First Minister's and deputy First Minister's diaries for Wednesday 1 July 2026, in order to ascertain the nature of the competing commitments, when those engagements were scheduled and how they take precedence over attendance at the Committee, particularly given that initial correspondence regarding this request was issued in April.

## **6. Oral Briefing – Equality Commission: Supreme Court Judgement in ‘For Women Scotland Ltd’ v The Scottish Ministers**

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

The witnesses joined the meeting at 2.41pm.

*Áine Murphy left the meeting at 2.57pm and returned at 2.59pm.*

The Committee noted advice from Assembly Legal Services on the appropriateness of proposed questions to be asked of Equality Commission witnesses.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Geraldine McGahey OBE, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- Louise Conlon, Chief Executive, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- Mr Neil Anderson, Deputy Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the Supreme Court Judgement in ‘For Women Scotland Ltd’ v The Scottish Ministers.

*Phillip Brett left the meeting at 3.30pm and returned at 3.40pm.*

Claire Sugden declared an interest, as she is currently in the process of developing a Private Member's Bill on equality law.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

Phillip Brett put on record his thanks to the Equality Commission for its support in assisting an individual with their case.

The officials left the meeting at 3.52pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Equality Commission to ask whether there had been any engagement from the Head of the Civil Service regarding the decision for NICS staff not to formally attend Pride events.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the Committee's Inquiry into gaps in equality legislation until January 2027, following the Leave Stage hearing.

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

*The meeting was suspended at 3:54pm.*

*Phillip Brett left the meeting at 3.54pm.*

*Proceedings continued in open session at 4.02pm with the following Members present: Paula Bradshaw, Stewart Dickson, Deborah Erskine, Áine Murphy and Timothy Gaston, Sinéad McLaughlin and Claire Sugden online.*

## **7. Oral Briefing: Programme for Government First Annual Report Update – Departmental Officials**

The officials joined the meeting at 4.03pm.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Ms Jaclyn Richardson, Interim Director of Programme for Government, TEO
- Mr Patrick Gallagher, Head of Delivery Unit, TEO

The witnesses briefed the Committee on the Programme for Government First Annual Report Update.

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

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Sinéad McLaughlin left the meeting at 4.32pm.

Áine Murphy left the meeting at 4.44pm and joined online at 4.56pm.

The witnesses left the meeting at 4.56pm.

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

- The impact on Programme for Government (PfG) priorities in the absence of an agreed budget.
- The impact on transformation funding projects within the Delivery Unit once funding ceases in 2029, including arrangements for sustainability.
- How progress on climate change is measured in line with the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 targets for 2030, and the impact of relevant projects to be included in the next progress update to the Committee.
- Details of the Enhanced Support Model for Special Educational Needs (SEN), including when consultation responses will be analysed and published.
- Whether current approaches to reducing waiting lists represent short-term initiatives or if these are also part of a longer-term approach.
- Clarification on the £7 million allocated to meet the full cost of Year 1 of the PSNI Workforce Recovery Plan, including how many officers this funding will support.
- Information on the funding allocated to net zero initiatives within the Building New Foundations programme.
- Details of the location of slurry farms and anaerobic digestion plants across Northern Ireland.
- Information on plans to address the ongoing wastewater infrastructure issues, particularly in relation to new-build housing.

- Details of Northern Ireland Water's financial contribution to the Lough Neagh Action Plan.

## **8. Written Briefing: Budget – TEO Contingency Planning Envelope**

The Chairperson advised Members that the Department has advised that options are still under consideration by Ministers and they aim to provide a paper as soon as possible.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to highlight its concern regarding the failure to provide the written briefing and to ask that it be provided as a matter of urgency.

## **9. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted the summary of Committee correspondence.
- ii. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence to the Committee for Communities from the Head of the Civil Service regarding Child Rights Impact Assessments and Equality Impact Assessments.

The Committee noted this item.

- iii. The Committee considered a response from the Secretary of State to the Committee's correspondence of 18 May 2026 regarding the establishment of the Castlereagh Foundation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note this correspondence and to write to the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression (OICE) to confirm that they are responsible for taking forward the necessary preparatory work for the establishment of the Castlereagh Foundation. Members also agreed to invite OICE to provide an oral briefing on the Castlereagh Foundation to the Committee in advance of its already scheduled attendance in March 2027. If not possible to attend a committee meeting before March 2027 the Committee agreed to receive a written briefing on the issue.

- iv. The Committee considered further correspondence from the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) in response to the Committee's

correspondence of 4 June 2026, seeking an update on when the third report referenced during its oral evidence session on 27 May 2026, regarding activity in Newry, is expected to be published.

The Committee agreed to note this item.

- v. The Committee noted a Hansard Report – Truth Recovery Independent Panel Final Report: 10 June 2026
- vi. The Committee noted a Pivotal Report - Suggested Reforms to the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive.
- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council - Sustainability Report 2026.
- viii. The Committee noted a TEO news release – Junior Minister launch Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes Coercive Control Awareness Campaign.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance – Cash Profiles and use of Vote on Account.
- x. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance – April Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn.
- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly’s Legal Services and the 69th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules. There are no rules in the report for the attention of this Committee.

## **10. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the draft forward work programme.

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to receive an additional oral briefing from TEO’s Race Relations Unit, at next week’s meeting, on the actions being taken forward by the Department following the recent disorder.

## **11. Any Other Business**

The Chairperson advised Members that it is standard practice to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, during periods of recess, to submit views on the releasing or withholding of information in any non-routine or contentious Freedom of Information requests received by the Committee; and that any such views expressed would be brought to the attention of the Committee at the first meeting after summer recess.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to submit views on the releasing or withholding of information in any non-routine or contentious Freedom of Information requests received by the Committee.

The Chairperson advised Members that, as the Committee will continue to receive correspondence over the summer period, it is standard practice that the Committee team include such items for consideration at the Committee's first meeting of the new session in September 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that if urgent correspondence is received during the recess period, they wish to deal with it via correspondence.

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

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on Wednesday 1 July 2026 at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 5.03pm*

**Paula Bradshaw MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for The Executive Office**

**Wednesday 1 July 2026**