



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 13 May 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Phillip Brett MLA

Mrs Pam Cameron MLA

Mr Timothy Gaston MLA

Ms Áine Murphy MLA

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

Online:

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Apologies:

Ms Claire Sugden MLA

In Attendance:

Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Feargal McGuinness (Assembly Clerk)

Ms Sarah-Anne McKinley (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Mr Neil Porter (Clerical Supervisor)

Ms Andrienne Magee (Clerical Officer)

Mr Jonathan McMillen (Head of Legal Services) – item 9

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

Pam Cameron declared an interest in relation to items 7 and 8 having a family member who works for the Victim's Payment Board.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 The Katie Trust – Ending Violence Against Women & Girls

The Chairperson advised Members that she received correspondence from The Katie Trust requesting a meeting to discuss the Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy and the wider challenges surrounding long-term, sustainable funding and delivery across the sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to attend an informal meeting with The Katie Trust.

3.2 ICRIR: May Review Report

The Chairperson advised Members that the May Review of the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR) was published outlining concerns about ICRIR's corporate effectiveness and culture.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite representatives from the ICRIIR to discuss the report and its findings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland seeking his views on the report and its findings and details of the actions the Northern Ireland Office intends to take in its role as the sponsoring body for the ICRIIR.

3.3 Equality Commission – News Release & Response to Correspondence

The Chairperson advised Members that the Supreme Court’s judgement in the Dillon case was handed down on Thursday 6 May 2026.

The Committee noted that as related matters were now before the High Court, further discussion in relation to the Supreme Court’s judgment in respect of Article 2 of the Windsor Framework and the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation Act) 2023 would have to be postponed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a formal invitation to the Equality Commission to provide an oral briefing at its meeting on Wednesday 24 June 2026, subject to the conclusion of the High Court proceedings.

Phillip Brett joined the meeting at 2.06pm

Sinéad McLaughlin joined the meeting online at 2.08pm

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meetings held on Wednesday 6 May 2026 and Tuesday 12 May 2026.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 Politics in Action – Ballycastle Schools Report

The Chairperson reminded Members that at the meeting on Wednesday 29 April 2026, Timothy Gaston updated the Committee on a recent event in which he participated with Politics in Action and Year 14 students from his constituency on EVAWG.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send a copy of a related report to EVAWG officials in the Department and to also send a copy to the Committee for Education for its information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider including students who have participated in the Politics in Action programme as potential stakeholders in any future Inquiry into Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.

6. Oral Briefing – Victims’ Payment Board – Victims’ Payment Scheme

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

The witnesses joined the meeting at 2.09pm.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Justice McAlinden, Board President, Victims’ Payment Board
- Paul Bullick, Board Secretary, Victims’ Payment Board
- Anthony Bowman – Head of Business Transformation, Victims’ Payment Board

The witnesses provided an update on the Victims Payment Board.

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

Phillip Brett put on record his concerns regarding comments made by the Board President during the Committee’s previous briefing with the VPB in relation to the definition of victimhood and Troubles-related incidents.

Timothy Gaston declared an interest as being a party to a case currently before the VPB.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

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

Proceedings were suspended at 3.28pm.

Proceedings resumed in public session at 3:35pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the VPB to request further information: including details of the applicants that were excluded including particularly those excluded owing to Regulation 6 of the Victims' Payments Regulations 2020. The Committee also agreed to request further information in relation to the VPB's media strategy and whether it includes GB News.

7. Oral Briefing – Victims & Survivors Service and Commissioner for Victims and Survivors – Victims' Payment Scheme and Victims' Support Programme

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

The witnesses joined the meeting at 3.36pm.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Andrew Walker, CEO, Victims & Survivors Service
- Emma Dargan, Head of Community Partnership, Victims & Survivors Service
- Joe McVey, Commissioner, Commissioner for Victims and Survivors
- Tina McCann, Director of Policy Development, Research and Engagement, Commissioner for Victims and Survivors

The witnesses provided an update on the Victims' Payment Scheme, Do Not Attend Therapy Sessions and the Victims' Support Programme.

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

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their evidence.

The witnesses left the meeting at 4.39pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the VSS to ask for further information regarding its community and voluntary partners and details of related investigations and instructions from the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CVS to ask that his office engages with the Northern Ireland Office in order to seek further support for the Victims' Support Programme, particularly in light of the current funding shortfall.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to request further information on the funding allocation for the Regional Trauma Network and the need for its expansion should the current funding shortfall for the Victims' Support Programme not be addressed, given the potential impact this could have on victims and survivors.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to VSS, CVS, and the VPB to request information on the research they have used relating to the demographics of victims and survivors in Northern Ireland and their identification, including any augmented or additional research undertaken by other organisations that they may use.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request sight of the Government Actuary Department report on the Troubles Permanent Disablement Scheme and sight of the business case for the VSP including the modelling assumptions and options used and how these then informed the work of the VPB.

8. Retention and Disposal Schedule: TEO

The Chairperson reminded Members that at last week's meeting the Committee agreed to request a written briefing from PRONI to outline the changes to the Schedule since the last version in 2016 and the rationale for the timeframes for specific items.

The Chairperson advised Members that the response is currently with the DfC Minister for clearance.

Sinéad McLaughlin left the meeting at 4.50pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer the consideration of the Schedule until next week's meeting.

9. Oral Briefing: Assembly Legal Services

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

The official joined the meeting at 4.49pm.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Jonathan McMillan, Head of Legal Services, Assembly Legal Services

The official provided an oral briefing on Assembly Committee's ability to compel the provision of information under Section 44A of the Northern Ireland Act.

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

The Chairperson thanked the official for his evidence.

The official left the meeting at 5.05pm.

Proceedings continued in public session at 5.15pm

Timothy Gaston placed on record his view that the Irish Language Commission should apologise to the Belfast Telegraph and to Mr Bryson.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the summary of Committee correspondence.
- ii. The Committee considered a response from the Department to the Committee's correspondence of 9 October 2025 regarding the Castlereagh Foundation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression and to the Secretary of State to ask if any preparatory work has been undertaken regarding the establishment of the Castlereagh Foundation.

- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for the Economy in relation to the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation).

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

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for the Economy regarding the Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill.

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

- v. The Committee considered a response from TEO to the Committee's correspondence on 24 April 2026 in relation to the Criminal Justice (Sentencing) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Justice providing a nil response to the Call for Evidence for the Bill.

- vi. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health to the Committee's correspondence of 24 April 2026 regarding a Centralised Depository System.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the updated advice paper from COSICA when published before revisiting its original request with RaISe.

- vii. The Committee considered correspondence from the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding an update on the Race Relations Strategy and Racial Equality Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to postpone the oral briefing on Race Relations legislation until a decision has been made by Ministers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to request an update on the introduction of this legislation to the Assembly and to outline the reasons for the delay.

- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from Birth Mothers for Justice regarding a meeting with Timothy Gaston MLA in relation to the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Youth Assembly for Northern Ireland - Monthly Update April 2026
- x. The Committee noted an invitation from Children in Northern Ireland.
- xi. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from AERC regarding a Review of Assembly Committee engagement on Cross-Cutting Executive Strategies.
- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding the Management of the Vote on Account.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the draft forward work programme.

The Committee considered the scheduling briefings for 20 May 2026 from Departmental officials on the Response to the Module 2 Report of the Covid Inquiry.

The Committee noted a change of date regarding the concurrent meeting with the Committee for Justice, which will now take place on Tuesday 30 June 2026 at 9.30am in the Senate Chamber.

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

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 20 May 2026 at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.19pm.

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office

Wednesday 20 May 2026