



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 3 June 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Phillip Brett MLA

Mr Timothy Gaston MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Ms Áine Murphy MLA

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

Online:

Ms Claire Sugden MLA

Ms Deborah Erskine MLA

Apologies:

None

In Attendance: Mr Trevor Allen (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Feargal McGuinness (Assembly Clerk)
Aoife Keating-Fitzpatrick (Senior Assistant 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

There were no apologies

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

Stakeholder Panel Session – 27 May 2026

The Chairperson advised Members that during the course of its evidence session on 27 May 2026, the Committee heard oral evidence from Fidelma Fearon (representing Minority and Ethnic Support, Armagh). Following the conclusion of the formal session, and after the evidence session had ended, Ms Fearon used abusive language in reference to a Member of the Committee, Timothy Gaston MLA. It is accepted that the remarks were not heard by the Committee Members in the room at the time but were subsequently identified from the recording of the meeting.

The Committee notes the apology subsequently provided by Ms Fearon to the Committee in respect of this conduct, albeit not directed to the Member concerned. Notwithstanding that apology, the Committee considers such language to be wholly unacceptable and contrary to the standards expected of those who engage with

Assembly proceedings. While the Assembly does not possess a power to punish such conduct as contempt, the Committee regards this behaviour as falling below the level of respect properly due to the Assembly and its Members and will take it into account in assessing the weight to be attached to the evidence provided by Ms Fearon.

Stewart Dickson declared an interest as a Member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.02pm.

Proceedings resumed in public session at 2.11pm with the following Members present: Paula Bradshaw, Stewart Dickson, Phillip Brett, Timothy Gaston, Sinéad McLaughlin, Áine Murphy and Carál Ní Chuilín. Deborah Erskine and Claire Sugden online.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond to the individual's correspondence, advising that during the oral evidence session the language used by the witness was not heard in the room. Also, to advise that any complaints regarding a Member who is felt may have contravened the Members' Code of Conduct should be referred to the Commissioner for Standards, and that it is not within the remit of the Commissioner for Standards to investigate complaints in relation to witnesses who have appeared before a Committee of the Assembly.

The Committee noted correspondence from Edwin Poots MLA regards comments made in relation to him at the meeting of 27 May by the Director of the Committee on the Administration of Justice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond to Mr Poots MLA inviting him to provide a written statement for the Committee's consideration; and that the Committee formally notes Mr Poots correspondence, and any written statement that he may wish to provide.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chair in future relevant sessions will advise Hansard when an oral evidence session concludes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Clerk to raise the issue of Hansard and what appears in their final reports, at the monthly Clerks' meeting.

Carál Ní Chuilín put on record her concern regarding the treatment of some witnesses coming before the Committee.

Áine Murphy put on record her concern about the conduct of last week's Committee meeting.

Timothy Gaston put on record his concerns about the political nature of some witnesses at last week's Committee meeting.

Claire Sugden joined the meeting online at 2.15pm

Phillip Brett put on record his concern at the language used by Minority and Ethnic Support Armagh, and also the comments made by the Committee on the Administration of Justice about schools in his constituency.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence received from the Committee on the Administration of Justice in relation to comments made during the meeting and agreed to advise the individual that any complaints regarding a Member's comments in a meeting should be referred to the Commissioner for Standards.

Carál Ní Chuilín put on record that she did not hear about the comments made in the room during last week's meeting until Monday of this week.

The Chairperson advised Members that Minority Ethnic Support Armagh had contacted the Committee following the session and submitted an apology.

Deborah Erskine put on her record her concerns about the political nature of some witnesses at last week's Committee meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Clerk to check the relevant section of the Guide for Witnesses appearing before the Assembly Committees in relation to declarations of interest, particularly in regard to membership of a political party. The Clerk advised that it was not a requirement for the witness to declare an interest as they were not providing evidence in their political capacity but as a representative of the organisation for which they were invited to give evidence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee on Standards and Privileges regarding privilege when abusive language is used and to seek guidance in relation to witnesses becoming overly political.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Minority Ethnic Support Armagh to acknowledge their correspondence, to make them aware that the Committee is not accepting of the apology given, and to remind the group of the Guide for Witnesses appearing before Assembly Committees.

Carál Ní Chuilín put on record that the apology was not acceptable, as it was made on behalf of Ms Fearon and did not come directly from the witness herself.

The Chairperson advised Members that Phillip Brett had forwarded correspondence to the Committee from the Principal of Belfast Model School for Girls in relation to comments made by the Committee on the Administration of Justice.

The Committee noted this item.

Claire Sugden proposed that Ms Fearon (Minority Ethnic Support Armagh) should be invited to return to the Committee to reflect on the events of the panel session.

The Chair then put the question to the Committee that the proposal be agreed.

The Committee divided: Ayes 7; Noes 2; Abstain 0

Ayes: Paula Bradshaw; Stewart Dickson; Sinéad McLaughlin; Phillip Brett, Timothy Gaston, Deborah Erskine and Claire Sugden

Noes: Carál Ní Chuilín and Áine Murphy

The proposal was agreed.

3.1 Anaka Women's Collective – Education Project

The Chairperson advised Members that they received correspondence from Anaka Women's Collective regarding English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and education access for refugees and asylum seekers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for its consideration.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 27 May 2026.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

The Chairperson reminded Members that at last week's meeting the Committee discussed how For Women Scotland vs Scottish Ministers proceedings in Northern Ireland remain ongoing. A hearing date has now been scheduled for the first two weeks of December before Mr Justice McAlinden.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek legal advice on suggested areas of questioning ahead of the oral evidence session with the Equality Commission on Wednesday 24 June 2026.

5.2-5.4 Programme for Government Annual Report

The Chairperson advised Members that the First Minister and deputy First Minister published the first Programme for Government Annual Report 2025-26 on 27 May 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to follow up with the Department on correspondence sent on 18 May 2026 regarding the delay to Race Relations legislation.

5.5 Committee on the Administration of Justice – Reports

The Chairperson advised Members that at last week's meeting the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) in the course of their oral evidence session, referred to two reports published by the CAJ; 'Mapping Far Right Activity Online in Northern Ireland Project Report' and 'Social Media and the Racist Disorder in Ballymena and Beyond During Summer 2025'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CAJ to ask when the third report, as referenced in their oral evidence session on 27 May 2026, will be published, and to

invite the authors of the reports to provide evidence to the Committee following publication.

6. Oral Briefing – Delegated Legislation and Shadow Redress Service – The Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill: Departmental officials

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

The officials joined the meeting at 3.00pm.

Phillip Brett left the meeting at 3.00pm and returned at 3.07pm

Carál Ní Chuilín left the meeting at 3.01pm and returned at 3.04pm

Áine Murphy left the meeting 3.09pm and returned at 3.20pm

Sinéad McLaughlin left the meeting at 3.13pm and returned at 3.21pm

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Martin Carey, Truth Recovery Programme Director, TEO
- Francesca Murray, Inquiry Team, TEO
- Elaine Allen, Redress Team, TEO
- Angela Stevens, Secretary-designate for Truth Recovery Redress Service, DOJ

The officials briefed the Committee on Delegated Legislation and Shadow Redress Service in relation to the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The officials left the meeting at 3.36pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request that it provide the final wording of amendments, and to work together on a possible amendment regarding the posthumous date ahead of Further Consideration Stage of the Bill.

7. Oral Briefing: Immigration Raids – Northern Ireland Migrants’ Rights Network

The witness joined the meeting at 3.37pm.

Timothy Gaston left the meeting at 3.37pm and returned at 3.39pm

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Lauren Fernandes, Policy and Campaigns Officer, Migrants' Rights Network

The witness briefed the Committee on the Northern Ireland Migrants’ Rights Network’s report regarding immigration raids in Northern Ireland.

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

Stewart Dickson declared an interest as Larne House short-term holding facility is in his consistency.

The Chairperson thanked the witness for her attendance.

The witness left the meeting at 4.29pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to review previous actions carried out by the Committee following the PSNI Race Action Plan oral briefing on 12 November 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Migrants’ Rights Network to ask for further information regarding their engagement with politicians and parties, as referenced in their paper, including clarification on references to PSNI and loyalist parliamentary groups, and further detail on loyalist parliamentary figures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the Migrants’ Rights Network report to the PSNI seeking comments on the report, and to ask whether there has been any discussion regarding immigration raids being approached solely by the PSNI without assistance from the Home Office.

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

The meeting was suspended at 4:41pm.

Proceedings continued in closed session at 4.51pm with the following Members present: Paula Bradshaw, Stewart Dickson, Phillip Brett, Timothy Gaston, Sinéad McLaughlin, Áine Murphy and Carál Ní Chuilín. Deborah Erskine and Claire Sugden online.

8. Oral Briefing: Assembly Legal Services: FOI

Agreed: The Committee agreed to postpone this oral briefing from Assembly Legal Services until next week's meeting.

9. Oral Briefing: Assembly Legal Services: The Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill

The official joined the meeting at 4.51pm.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Helen Smyth, Legal Advisor, Northern Ireland Assembly

The official briefed the Committee on legal advice in relation to the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the official for her attendance.

The official left the meeting at 5.08pm

Áine Murphy left the meeting at 5.09pm

Proceedings continued in public session at 5.12pm with the following Members present: Paula Bradshaw, Stewart Dickson, Phillip Brett, Timothy Gaston, Sinéad McLaughlin and Carál Ní Chuilín. Deborah Erskine and Claire Sugden online.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold an additional meeting on Tuesday 9 June at 10.00 am to consider final amendments ahead of Further Consideration Stage of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department advising that, having taken legal advice regarding the posthumous date, changing the date to 28 April 1953 would be legally sound, and to allow TEO the opportunity to bring forward an alternative date at clause 32(6)(b) of the Bill.

Phillip Brett and Deborah Erskine put on record that they both oppose this potential amendment.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the summary of Committee correspondence.
- ii. The Committee considered a response from the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors (CVS) to the Committee's correspondence of 15 May 2026 requesting information on the research CVS has used relating to the demographics of victims and survivors in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item and to write to the Department on resources that could be made available to CVS regarding research relating to the demographics of victims and survivors in Northern Ireland or if TEO have any plans to commission such research that groups could avail of.

- iii. The Committee considered a response from the ICRIR to the Committee's correspondence of 14 May 2026, requesting that representatives from the ICRIR attend a meeting of the Committee to provide oral evidence on the findings of the May Report. The Chairperson reminded Members that this oral briefing will take place at the meeting on Wednesday 17 June 2026.

The Committee noted this item.

- iv. The Committee considered a response from NIO to the Committee's correspondence of 1 May 2026, in relation to grant making functions for the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression (OICE).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item and agree to write to the Department again highlighting that the NIO has advised that responsibility for commencing further provisions for OICE rests solely with TEO and that they should take the necessary steps to progress this.

- v. The Committee considered a response from the Victims Payment Board to the Committee's correspondence on 18 May 2026 regarding further information following their evidence session at the meeting on Wednesday 13 May 2026.

The Committee noted this item.

- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding the Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn April position.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item and to write to the Department asking for a breakdown in relation to the DEL Underspend easement of £2.2 million and the easement of £0.2 million regarding Civil Contingencies and procurement delays.

- vii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from TEO to the Committee for the Economy regarding the Public Sector AI Strategy.
- viii. The Committee noted a Hansard Report of 20 May 2026 on the COVID-19 Inquiry Module 2 - Response.
- ix. The Committee noted an invitation from the North West Migrants Forum - Race, Gender and Justice Discussion.
- x. The Committee noted the 66th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules and that there are no rules for the attention of this Committee.

- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities regarding Retention and Disposal Schedules.
- xii. The Committee noted the Youth Assembly for Northern Ireland's May 2026 update.
- xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding the National Population Projections for Northern Ireland.
- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee to the Committee for Finance in relation to the absence of an agreed Executive Budget.

Phillip Brett left at 5.17pm

11. 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.

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meetings of the Committee will be held on Tuesday 9 June at 10.00am and Wednesday 10 June 2026 at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.21pm.

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Executive Office

Wednesday 10 June 2026