



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 23 September 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present:

- Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Ms Sinéad Ennis MLA
- Ms Deborah Erskine MLA
- Mr Timothy Gaston MLA
- Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

Online: Ms Claire Sugden MLA

Apologies:

- Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)
- Mr Phillip Brett MLA
- Ms Sinéad McLauglin MLA

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

The meeting commenced at 2.02pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Deputy Chairperson advised Members that the Chairperson received an invitation from TEO and Queen's University to the launch of the research report, 'Understanding Masculinities and Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women and Girls in Northern Ireland.'

The Committee noted this item.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 16 September 2026.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 TEO – Appearance of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Deputy Chairperson advised Members that the Department responded to the Committee's correspondence of 10 September 2026 regarding the appearance of the First Minister and deputy First Minister before the Committee. Ministers are available to attend the Committee meeting on Wednesday 21 October 2026.

The Committee noted this item.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that RalSe commission a piece of work looking at attendance rates, including any comparative information on the frequency and timing of appearances by the First Ministers before scrutiny Committees in Scotland and Wales. Also for RalSe to examine the appearance rates of other Ministers before Statutory Committees within the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would liaise with the DALO to ask whether additional time could be made available for the scheduled oral briefing with Ministers at the Committee meeting on 21 October, and to seek information on any diary commitments that may restrict the availability of the Ministers on that date.

The Deputy Chairperson reminded Members that at last week's meeting the Committee agreed to seek legal advice from Assembly Legal Services regarding the application of Section 44 in relation to the appearance of the First Minister and deputy First Minister before the Committee and that this request has now been submitted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to proceed with the request for legal advice and that in the first instance for this to be provided as a written briefing.

6. Oral Briefing – Head of Civil Service: Equality Impact Assessments and Cross Departmental Working

The officials joined the meeting at 2.15pm.

Claire Sugden joined the meeting online at 2.15pm.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Jayne Brady, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service
- Moira Doherty, Permanent Secretary, TEO
- Carolyn Mada, Interim Director Equality, Rights and Identity, TEO

The officials provided an oral briefing on Equality Impact Assessments and cross departmental working.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Carál Ní Chuilín left the meeting at 3.20pm and returned at 3.23pm.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The witnesses left the meeting at 3.30pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service to ask for the following information:

- An update on the Testing and Learning Project in rural areas being undertaken as part of Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.
- Further detail on the independent person appointed to conduct the Scoping and Assurance Exercise within NICS following the conviction of Jeffrey Donaldson.
- Information on the level of access to multi-disciplinary services and support teams in North Belfast particularly within areas of highest need.
- Clarification on the Legislative Consent Motion relating to the Armed Forces Covenant, including the reasons why this has not come before the Assembly.
- Whether issues relating to Historical Clerical Childhood Abuse (HCCA) are being considered under a similar approach to that adopted for the Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses Inquiry.
- Further detail on the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) process, to include further detail than provided in the written briefing and to ask in terms of progress whether there is any traffic light monitoring system used to track progress on Assessments.

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

The meeting was suspended at 3:34pm.

Proceedings continued in open session at 3.41pm with the following Members present: Stewart Dickson, Sinéad Ennis, Deborah Erskine, Timothy Gaston, Carál Ní Chuilín and Claire Sugden online.

7. End of Session Report: September 2025 - July 2026

The Committee considered its End of Session Report: September 2025 to July 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that they are content with the Title Page, Contents Page, Remit, Powers and Membership section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that they are content with the Introduction and Key Activities section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that they are content with the Likely priorities for the next session and Expenditure section as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that they are content to agree the Committee for the Executive Office End of Session Report September 2025 to July 2026 and for this to be the third report of the Committee and published on the Committee webpage.

8. Strategic Planning

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer the Strategic Planning session until the meeting on Wednesday 7 October 2026.

9. Correspondence

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

- ii. The Committee considered a response from Goggleminds to its correspondence of 10 September 2026 regarding organisations piloting the AVA programme, as part of its funding from TEO.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this correspondence and agreed to write to Goggleminds to ask for further information on the participants who will be piloting AVA through the Open University and specifically how many of those participants are based in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department to ask why the Small Business Research Initiative funding provided by TEO is being used to pilot the AVA programme to organisations outside Northern Ireland.

- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the importance of survivor-led work and spiritual abuse in independent churches.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item and agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for consideration. Also to write to the individual to request copies of the supporting documentation referenced in their correspondence for the Committee's consideration.

- iv. The Committee considered a response from the Victims' Payment Board to its correspondence of 11 September 2026 in relation to applications to the Victim's Payment Scheme following its closure to new applications.

The Committee noted this item.

- v. The Committee considered correspondence from We Deserve Better Northern Ireland regarding access to rights education, specialist training and capacity-building for people with lived experience.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this item and agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department for Economy and the Department for Health for consideration.

- vi. The Committee considered correspondence NIA Legal Services – the 73rd report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules. The Committee's S.R. 2026/138: The Salaries (Public Services Ombudsman) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 is included within the Report and the Examiner of Statutory Rules has reported no issues.

The Committee noted this item.

- vii. The Committee considered a response from the Minister for Communities to its correspondence of 10 September 2026 in relation to files from the Down and Connor Diocese relating to the St Joseph's Children's Home.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this correspondence and agreed to write to the Minister for Communities to ask that the Committee is kept updated on progress and notified upon completion on the transfer of these files.

- viii. The Committee noted a Hansard Report – “Nothing About Us Without Us” – Report Findings: Northern Ireland Survivor Council – 9 September 2026.
- ix. The Committee noted a response from The Executive Office to its correspondence of 25 June 2026 requesting the membership details of the four governance structure groups of the Refugee Integration Strategy.
- x. The Committee noted a response from the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression to its correspondence of 11 September 2026 regarding the Castlereagh Foundation.
- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee in relation to a review into the development and guidance on the handling of Westminster Statutory Instruments.
- xii. The Committee noted a response from The Executive Office to its correspondence of 4 June 2026 regarding the Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn – April Position.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for further information regarding the supplier procurement issues relating to the £0.2 million easement relating to Period Products.

Deborah Erskine put on her record her concerns regarding an item of correspondence discussed under Matters Arising relating to the attendance of the deputy First Minister at the 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.

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date and Time of Next Meeting

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

The meeting was adjourned at 4.03pm

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Chairperson, Committee for The Executive Office

Wednesday 23 September 2026