Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 7 October 2026

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present:	Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA (Chairperson)
	Mr Phillip Brett MLA
	Ms Sinéad Ennis MLA
	Ms Deborah Erskine MLA
	Mr Timothy Gaston MLA
	Ms Carál Ní Chuilín MLA
	Ms Claire Sugden MLA
Online:	Mr Stewart Dickson MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Apologies:	Ms Sinéad McLauglin 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 2.00pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Informal Meeting with Voice & Justice Alliance Northern Ireland

The Chairperson advised Members that she and the Deputy Chair met with representatives from Voice & Justice Alliance Northern Ireland last Wednesday to hear about their work.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note a copy of the informal meeting note and agreed to forward the group's policy paper on Race Relations to the Department for its consideration.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 30 September 2026.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 Legal Advice - Attendance of First Minister and Junior Minister at Committee

The Chairperson reminded Members that at last week's meeting, it was agreed that the legal advice previously provided to the Committee regarding the questioning of the First Minister would be included in the meeting pack for today's meeting.

The Chairperson advised Members that, as per its decision last week, an invitation from the Committee to the First and deputy First Minister to attend today's meeting was issued on Thursday 1 October 2026. However to date, no substantive response has been received.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department again to request that an additional date is arranged within this session for the First Minister and deputy First Minister to attend the Committee to allow sufficient time to facilitate detailed scrutiny on TEO policies and priorities, as well as discussion regarding Drumcree.

5.2 Victims' Payment Board - Update on Applications to the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme

The Chairperson reminded Members that at last week's meeting the Committee agreed to recirculate the recent correspondence received from the Victims' Payment Board and to consider any further actions the Committee may wish to take.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Victims' Payment Board to ask for the following information:

- If victims and survivors support groups received any additional funding or funding in anticipation of the demand associated with applications to the scheme in the last week of it being opened to new applications.
- Details on the number of applications submitted during the final week before the scheme closed to new applications.

- To highlight concerns regarding the level of funding available to support victims and survivors on the ground, including through the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS).
- To ask if the Board can provide oral evidence to the Committee before Christmas recess.

5.3 The Dromore Group - Amendment to Written Briefing

The Chairperson advised Members that the Dromore Group had notified the Committee of an error in the written briefing considered at last week's meeting. The briefing has since been corrected and the updated version recirculated to the Committee for information.

The Committee noted this item.

6. Oral Briefing: Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill - Inquiry Rules and Regulations: Departmental officials

Agreed: The Committee agreed for Hansard to cover this session.

The officials joined the meeting at 2.21pm.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Martin Carey, Truth Recovery Director, TEO
- Francesca Murray, Head of Inquiry Team, TEO
- Stephanie Higbee, Truth Recovery Redress Team , TEO

The officials provided an oral briefing on Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill - Inquiry Rules and Regulations.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Phillip Brett left the meeting at 2.32pm and returned at 2.42pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The officials left the meeting at 3.53pm.

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

The meeting was suspended at 2:54pm.

Proceedings continued in open session at 3.01pm with the following Members present: Paula Bradshaw, Phillip Brett, Sinéad Ennis, Deborah Erskine, Timothy Gaston, Carál Ní Chuilín and Stewart Dickson (online).

7. Oral Briefing: Evolved framework for Good Relations – Departmental officials

The officials joined the meeting at 3.01pm.

Members received an oral briefing from:

- Chris Gardner, Director of Good Relations & T:BUC, TEO
- Gavin King, Head of District Councils, Camps and Interventions Branch, TEO
- Chris Kane, Head of Good Relations Outcomes Branch, TEO

The officials provided an oral briefing on the Evolved framework for Good Relations.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Stewart Dickson left the meeting at 3.13pm.

Claire Sugden joined the meeting at 3.21pm.

Sinéad Ennis left the meeting at 3.51pm and returned at 3.53pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The officials left the meeting at 4.01pm.

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

- If the Orange Order has been a recipient of funding through the Good Relations funding programme.
- A breakdown of all Good Relations funding provided through The Communities in Transition Programme, the Education Authority and to local councils, including recipient organisations and amounts awarded.
- Details of any review, evaluation or assessment undertaken in relation to these funding streams, and details of any actions or under consideration by Ministers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Community Relations Council (CRC) to ask for breakdown of the projects currently funded through CRC in North Belfast.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue a press release on women in public life in relation to Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, including condemnation of the recent abuse directed at political representatives.

8. Written Briefing: Maze Long Kesh Development Corporation

The Committee considered a written briefing from Maze Long Kesh Development Corporation (MLKDC).

Agreed: The Committee agreed write to MLKDC to ask for a copy of any current or draft master plan relating to the regeneration and development of the site, including any plans referenced within the Corporation's forthcoming priorities and if these have been submitted to Ministers.

9. Correspondence

i. The Committee noted the summary of Committee correspondence.

ii. The Committee considered correspondence from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council regarding their Rural Affairs Research.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Clerk to liaise with council officials on the feedback received from other Assembly Committees

iii. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Communities in relation to Rural Affairs Research.

The Committee noted this item.

iv. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding a perceived complaint about the Ministry of Defence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Committee for Justice for consideration.

v. The Committee considered a response from the First Minister and deputy First Minister to its correspondence of 11 June 2026 regarding disorder across Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request further information on the funding provided on the Planned Interventions Programme and the seventy one groups in receipt of this funding.

Phillip Brett left the meeting at 4.21pm and returned at 4.25pm.

vi. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the Committee for the Economy in relation to the Regional Balance Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask that they respond to the Committee for the Economy should there be any issues that the Bill would place on certain obligations on their departments which may interact with existing duties.

vii. The Committee considered correspondence from Co-operation Ireland regarding their Future Leaders Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an informal meeting with the Chair and deputy Chair in the first instance to hear further about the programme.

viii. The Committee considered a response from the First Minister and deputy First Minister to its correspondence of 10 September 2026 in relation to The Dromore Group.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ask that they provide the information regarding the proposed arrangements for the working group and to provide an update on this work.

ix. The Committee considered a response from Goggleminds to its correspondence of 24 September 2026 requesting further information on the hundred participants piloting AVA through the Open University and how many of those participants are based in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to highlight concerns that participants from Northern Ireland are not currently included within the Open University programme and that any plans to include them would represent only 25% of the programme. The Committee also agreed to ask a copy of the information contained within Goggleminds' funding application which supported their successful funding award and whether Goggleminds has received funding from any other Departments.

x. The Committee noted correspondence from The Executive Office - Investment Strategy NI – Investing Activity Report.

xi. The Committee noted a response from The Executive Office to its correspondence 10 September 2026 asking that the TEO Permanent Secretary provides an oral briefing to the Committee on the updated 5-Year Sustainability Plan.

xii. The Committee noted a response from The Executive Office to its correspondence of 9 September 2026 requesting an oral briefing from Departmental officials regarding the TEO Contingency Planning Envelope.

xiii. The Committee noted a response from The Head of the Civil Service (HOCS) to its correspondence of 24 September 2026 requesting further detail on the independent person appointed to conduct the Scoping and Assurance Exercise within NICS following the conviction of Jeffrey Donaldson.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to HOCS to ask how the individual was selected for the role of the external critical friend, including details of any appointment process.

xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Welsh Government and the Senedd regarding the Inter-institutional Relations Agreement.

xv. The Committee noted A Written Ministerial Statement from the First Minister and deputy First Minister - Appointment of the Chair Designate of the Truth Recovery Public Inquiry.

xvi. The Committee noted a news release from The Executive Office - First Minister and deputy First Minister appoint Rachel Langdale KC as Truth Recovery Public Inquiry Chair.

xvii. The Committee noted a response from the First Minister and deputy First Minister to its correspondence of 10 September 2026 following the Northern Ireland Survivor Council oral briefing on 9 September 2026.

xviii. The Committee noted a response from the First Minister and deputy First Minister to its correspondence of 19 June 2026 regarding access to records in relation to the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill and the future Inquiry and Redress arrangements.

xix. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence sent from the Committee for Communities to all Departments to seek details of any financial bids made, or intended, in relation to each Department's planned actions associated with the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

xx. The Committee note an invitation from the NIA Public Engagement Team to the Older People's Parliament.

xxi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Executive Office - Ebrington: Public Consultation on Proposed Student Accommodation.

xxii. The Committee noted an invitation from CILIP Ireland.

xxiii. The Committee noted a response from COSICA to its correspondence of 14 September 2026 regarding COSICA's Child Abuse Prevalence Study Working Paper.

xxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly – September 2026 update.

xxv. The Committee noted correspondence from the NIA Business Office Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Commission for Victims' and Survivors the year ended 31 March 2026.

xxvi. The Committee noted a response from the Minister for Education to its correspondence of 10 September 2026 requesting further information on the department's work relating to Relationships and Sexuality Education.

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 14 October 2026 at 2.00pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.32pm

13. Strategic Planning

The Committee held an informal Strategic Planning session follow the adjournment of the formal meeting.

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Chairperson, Committee for The Executive Office

Wednesday 7 October 2026