



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Procedures

Minutes of Proceedings

12 March 2025

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present: Kellie Armstrong MLA (Chairperson)
Órlaithí Flynn MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Trevor Clarke MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Robbie Butler MLA
Danny Donnelly MLA
Aoife Finnegan MLA
Cara Hunter MLA
William Irwin MLA
Maolíosa McHugh MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Stella McArdle, Assembly Clerk
Christine Darrah, Assembly Clerk
Michael Best, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Veronica Lo Pinto, Clerical Officer

The meeting started at 10.02 a.m. in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2025.

3. Matters Arising

None.

4. Standing Order 27A – Voting by Proxy – Proxy Voting Scheme

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the meeting should move into closed session.

The meeting moved into closed session at 10.04 a.m.

William Irwin joined the meeting at 10.04 a.m.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that further correspondence had been received from the Speaker regarding the proxy voting scheme for Standing Order 27A.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr Paul Gill, Assembly Clerk Assistant, to the meeting.

Mr Gill briefed the Committee on the proxy voting scheme to be published by the Speaker

Robbie Butler joined the meeting at 10.31 a.m.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Gill and he left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Speaker's proposed approach in relation to the Proxy Voting Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Speaker to publish the Scheme as soon as possible and provide a copy to all Members.

Agreed: The Committee supported the Speaker's intention to identify a single point of contact to assist Members with wider welfare issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson should meet with the Speaker when he reviews the category covering complications arising from pregnancy to discuss his intended approach at that stage.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should write to the Speaker informing him of its position.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information on the services provided by Inspire to support MLAs and on what similar services are available in other legislatures.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that she would place on record the Committee's agreed position when the meeting moved into public session.

5. Annual Debate on the Executive's Legislative Timetable – Legal Advice

The Chairperson welcomed Mr Adam Leitch, Assembly Legal Adviser, to the meeting.

Mr Leitch outlined a draft Standing Order and associated legal advice for the provision of an annual debate on the Executive's legislative timetable.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Leitch and he left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a revised draft Standing Order and further legal advice from Assembly Legal Services on the issues discussed.

6. Northern Ireland Act 1998 Section 42 – Petitions of Concern – Legal Advice

The Chairperson welcomed Mr Paul Gill, Assembly Clerk Assistant, Ms Liz Marsh, Assembly Clerk, Bill Office, and Ms Helen Smyth, Assembly Legal Adviser, to the meeting.

The officials provided further information on a number of issues during the discussions.

The Committee considered issues relating to a minimum time period between the presentation of a petition and the time when the vote on the matter to which it relates would take place if not postponed by the petition.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Speaker on the minimum time period to undertake the checks required to validate a petition of concern.

Cara Hunter left the meeting at 11.28 a.m.

The Committee considered whether an 'exceptional circumstances' provision as currently provided for in Standing Order 28(2) should be retained in any new Standing Order.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Speaker on retaining an exceptional circumstances provision in any new Standing Order.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer writing to the Speaker until it had discussed all the issues related to petitions of concern.

Maolíosa McHugh left the meeting at 11.48 a.m.

Robbie Butler left the meeting at 11.53 a.m.

The Committee noted an indicative position that it would, in due course, consider amendments to Standing Order 28(1) to reflect the new provisions in Section 42 Paragraph 1 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 for when a vote may take place.

Ms Smyth outlined further legal advice on the Northern Ireland Act 1998 Section 42 - Petitions of Concern.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Smyth, Mr Gill and Ms Marsh and they left the meeting.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the discussion on the issues relating to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 Section 42 Petitions of Concern would continue at the next meeting.

The meeting moved into public session at 12.44 p.m.

7. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered an updated Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

8. Correspondence

None.

9. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson placed on record the position agreed by the Committee in relation to Agenda Item 4.

10. Any Other Business

None.

11. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 26 March 2025 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.47 p.m.

Kellie Armstrong MLA

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

26 March 2025