



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee on Procedures

Minutes of Proceedings

26 February 2025

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings

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

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Robbie Butler MLA
Cara Hunter MLA
William Irwin MLA
Maolíosa McHugh MLA

Apologies: Danny Donnelly MLA

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

The meeting started at 10.06 a.m. in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

The Chairperson welcomed Aoife Finnegan MLA to the Committee.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2025.

3. Matters Arising

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the Speaker had written regarding the proxy voting scheme to be published in relation to Standing Order 27A.

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

The meeting moved into closed session at 10.09 a.m.

Robbie Butler joined the meeting at 10.10 a.m.

The Committee considered the letter from the Speaker on the development of the Proxy Voting Scheme and his offer to meet with the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the Speaker's letter at its meeting on 12 March 2025 and to invite a representative from the Speaker's Office to attend on that date to provide further information to assist the discussions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Speaker's proposal to publish an interim Scheme covering maternity leave (including for stillbirth and baby loss) and adoption leave followed by an updated Scheme given the time pressures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the meeting between the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson and the Speaker should be scheduled after the meeting on 12 March 2025 to enable the views of the Committee to be shared with him.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson should write to the Speaker outlining the approach it is taking on this matter.

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

The Chairperson welcomed Ms Helen Smyth, Assembly Legal Adviser, to the meeting. Ms Smyth outlined further legal advice on Section 42 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 Petitions of Concern and the requirements placed upon the Committee.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Cara Hunter left the meeting at 11.15 a.m.

Trevor Clarke left the meeting at 11.20 a.m.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Smyth and she left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request additional legal advice on Section 42 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – Petitions of Concern.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to undertake consideration of the policy issues relating to a potential new or amended Standing Order for Petitions of Concern at the next meeting on 12 March 2025 and that relevant Assembly officials should be invited to attend to assist the discussions.

The meeting moved into public session at 11.48 a.m.

5. Inquiry into an Extension of Standing Order 27A Voting by Proxy – Research Paper – Proxy Voting - Bereavement and Parliamentary Business

The Chairperson welcomed Mr Ray McCaffrey, Assembly Researcher, to the meeting.

Mr McCaffrey briefed the Committee on his Research Paper on Proxy Voting – Bereavement and Parliamentary Business.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Mr McCaffrey and he left the meeting.

The Committee noted that consideration of the policy/principles relating to the potential extension of Standing Order 27A to cover bereavement and absence on official Assembly business was currently scheduled to take place at the meeting on Wednesday 12 March 2025 but this may have to be rescheduled given the number of substantive issues for consideration at that meeting.

6. Correspondence

The Committee considered a letter from the Chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Northern Ireland Assembly Branch Executive Committee asking the Committee to consider, as part of its Inquiry into an Extension of Standing Order 27A Voting by Proxy, to allow Members to use proxy voting arrangements while away from Parliament Buildings on Commonwealth Parliamentary Association business.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this request when it undertakes its deliberations on the potential to extend proxy voting in Plenary to cover absence on official Assembly Business and inform the Chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Northern Ireland Assembly Branch Executive Committee accordingly.

Robbie Butler left the meeting at 12.00 noon.

The Committee noted an invitation from the Assembly Engagement Team to Members to attend a roundtable event in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings, on Friday 28 February 2025, prior to the Women's Parliament taking place later that day.

7. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme which would be revised to take account of the additional item to be included on the agenda for the meeting on 12 March 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerks should revise the Forward Work Programme and the Chairperson should approve the items to be scheduled on the agenda for the meeting on 12 March 2025.

8. Chairperson's Business

None.

9. Any Other Business

None.

10. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 12 March 2025 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 21, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.04 p.m.

Kellie Armstrong MLA

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

12 March 2025