

Committee on Procedures End of Session Report 2025 – 2026

Remit and Powers

1. The Committee on Procedures is a Standing Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly established in accordance with paragraph 10 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement and under Assembly Standing Order 54.
2. The Committee has power to:
 - Consider and review, on an ongoing basis, the Standing Orders and procedures of the Assembly;
 - Initiate inquiries and publish reports; and
 - Call for persons and papers.

Membership

3. The Committee has nine Members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of five Members. The membership of the Committee is as follows:

Ms Kellie Armstrong (Chairperson)
Miss Órlaithí Flynn¹ (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Danny Baker²
Ms Cheryl Brownlee³
Mr Robbie Butler⁴
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr Danny Donnelly
Ms Cara Hunter⁵
Mr Philip McGuigan⁶

¹ Órlaithí Flynn replaced Sinéad Ennis as Deputy Chairperson on 3 February 2025

² Danny Baker replaced Aoife Finnegan as a Member on 20 January 2026, Aoife Finnegan replaced Sinéad Ennis as a Member on 17 February 2025

³ Cheryl Brownlee replaced William Irwin as a Member on 23 September 2025, William Irwin replaced Gary Middleton as a Member on 8 April 2024

⁴ Robbie Butler replaced John Stewart as a Member on 5 March 2024

⁵ Cara Hunter replaced Matthew O'Toole as a Member on 28 May 2024

⁶ Philip McGuigan replaced Maolíosa McHugh as a Member on 24 November 2025

End of Session Report

4. This report details the work of the Committee on Procedures for the period 1 September 2025 to 31 August 2026.

Meetings

5. The Committee met on nineteen occasions during the period of this report. All the meetings were held in part public/part closed session. The Committee met in closed session to receive legal advice and to discuss policy options on a wide range of issues.
6. The Committee held an informal strategic planning session in September 2025 to review progress to deliver the priority areas of work identified in September 2024 and agree the key issues to be taken forward during the remainder of the mandate. In April 2026 the Committee assessed the progress that had been made and the work still to be completed within the available time and agreed the way forward in relation to those areas of work that had not yet commenced.

Key Activities, Outputs and Achievements 2025-26

7. In accordance with its agreed work programme, the Committee reviewed a range of Standing Orders and procedures of the Assembly, and brought two motions to the Assembly to make changes to Standing Orders during the period covered by this report. Both motions were approved, as required, by a cross-community vote.
8. The main items of business considered by the Committee are summarised below.

Scrutiny of Delegated Powers in Bills – Standing Order 43A

9. The Committee considered how delegated powers in Bills are scrutinised and whether the role undertaken by the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules (ESR) in the process should be formally set out in Standing Orders. The Committee reviewed the process following a recommendation in the Chairpersons' Liaison Group 2020 Report '[Strengthening Committee Scrutiny](#).'

10. Assembly Committees scrutinise delegated powers in Bills with technical support from the ESR and the use of a Delegated Powers Memorandum (DPM) that Departments normally provide for most Executive Bills apart from those subject to the accelerated passage process. This procedure, which takes place during the committee stage of a Bill, was not formally set out in Standing Orders but had operated by convention since 2007. The benefits to scrutiny of the delegated powers in Bills by committees include facilitating detailed analysis of:

- What the delegated power does;
- Whether it is appropriate for the power to be left to delegated (subordinate) legislation rather than included in the Bill itself; and
- Whether the choice of Assembly control provided for each power (i.e. confirmatory, affirmative, negative or none) is the most appropriate.

11. Following briefings by the ESR and the Head of the Assembly Bill Office the Committee concluded that the current system was generally effective but lacked transparency as it did not allow for the publication of the ESR reports. The Committee therefore agreed to formalise the role of the ESR with regard to the scrutiny of delegated powers in Bills, including the publication of her reports, in Standing Orders.

12. [Standing Order 43A](#) Scrutiny of Delegated Powers in Bills, brought forward by the Committee and approved by the Assembly on [29 June 2026](#), formalises the current role of the ESR in the scrutiny of delegated powers in Bills and provides for the publication of her reports. It applies to all Bills introduced to the Assembly including Private Members' Bills with the exception of those subject to accelerated passage as these are not referred to a committee. The new Standing Order increases the information available and improves transparency for Departments, stakeholders and the public regarding the scrutiny of and conclusions reached by a Committee on the delegated powers in a Bill.

13. The Committee will give further consideration to the possible codification of the provision by Departments of DPMs following discussions between Assembly Bill Office officials and appropriate officials in the Northern Ireland Civil Service on the current protocol. The Committee also intends to recommend that the issue of scrutiny of delegated powers in Bills subject to the accelerated

passage procedure should be considered by its successor Committee in the next mandate.

Repeal of Standing Order 70 and Consequential Amendments to Standing Orders

14. Standing Order 70 covered how matters of privilege could be raised by Members and dealt with by the Speaker. The need for a review of Standing Order 70 was initially identified following a [‘Review of the Code of Conduct’](#) by a previous Committee on Standards and Privileges and the current Committee took on that work.
15. That Committee undertook detailed consideration of a range of policy options, including whether the introduction of Rules 12 and 13 into the Assembly Code of Conduct negated the basis for Standing Order 70 and, as such, it should be removed or whether it should be amended to reflect the introduction of those Rules and the limitations of the Assembly’s privilege as provided for in the Northern Ireland Act 1998. It decided that the most appropriate course of action was to repeal Standing Order 70 and asked the Committee on Procedures to undertake the work necessary to make this change and consequential amendments to Standing Orders.
16. The Committee on Procedures, having considered the information provided on the policy review undertaken by the Committee on Standards and Privileges, sought legal advice on the procedural aspects of making the proposed changes to Standing Orders. Following receipt of the advice and consultation with the Speaker and the Business Committee on one specific aspect of the proposed changes, the Committee brought forward a motion to the Assembly to repeal Standing Order 70 and make the consequential [amendments to Standing Orders](#).
17. The motion, approved by the Assembly on [29 June 2026](#), addressed an anomaly in Assembly procedures by removing a provision that suggested powers that, in practice, the Assembly could not properly exercise and made other related changes including renaming the Committee on Standards and Privileges as the Committee on Standards.

Inquiry into the Extension of Standing Order 27A Voting by Proxy

18. The Committee continued work on its [Inquiry into the Extension of Standing Order 27A Voting by Proxy](#) and the potential provision of proxy voting for serious long-term illness or injury, bereavement and absence on official Assembly business.
19. Having agreed that proxy voting should be extended to cover all three additional categories, detailed work, informed by research papers and legal advice, has been undertaken to develop policy positions on each, the principles to be included in the amended Standing Order and the practical arrangements to be covered in the Speaker's Scheme. These policy positions are currently being finalised following consultation with the Speaker and the political parties in the Assembly.
20. The Committee will present its findings, recommendations and proposed changes to Standing Order 27A to the Assembly in autumn 2026.

Northern Ireland Act 1998 Section 42 – Petitions of Concern

21. [Standing Order 28](#) currently makes provision for procedures to be followed in respect of the tabling of a Petition of Concern (PoC). However, it does not comply with the new provisions of [Section 42 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998](#) (as amended by the Northern Ireland (Ministers, Elections and Petitions of Concern) Act 2022). As a result, the Committee on Procedures needs to bring forward a new or an amended Standing Order to reflect these provisions for agreement by the Assembly.
22. During this session the Committee continued its extensive, detailed discussions on the policy issues in relation to the development of a new or amended Standing Order, including consideration of required provisions and of optional/supplementary provisions. The discussions have been informed by written and oral briefings by Assembly officials, comprehensive legal advice and the views of the Speaker and the political parties in the Assembly.
23. Final versions of draft Standing Orders have been prepared based on these discussions and will be considered by the Committee at the first meeting of the new session.

Standing Order 42A: Legislative Consent Motions

24. The previous Committee on Procedures, in its [Report on its Inquiry into Legislative Consent Motions](#) (LCMs), which was approved by the Assembly on 14 March 2022, made seven recommendations to amend both the practice and the arrangements for managing LCMs in the Assembly. The recommendations aimed to enhance the ability of the Assembly to carry out its scrutiny and bring more transparency to the process. A number of the recommendations required changes to Standing Order 42A.

25. More recently concerns and issues with the current LCM process and the need to review Standing Order 42A have been raised with the Committee by the Speaker, the Chairpersons' Liaison Group and several statutory committees.

26. The Committee commenced consideration of potential changes to Standing Order 42A in February 2026. These changes included:

- Provision for a Minister to lay an indicative memorandum where the Minister has not yet taken any decision to ask the Assembly to give its consent;
- Provision of more flexibility in relation to the timescales for the production of a committee report on the LCM memorandum and revisions to the timescales for moving a consent motion to accommodate this change; and
- A change to the definition of "relevant day" in relation to an amendment to a Bill to enable earlier consideration.

27. The Committee is in the process of finalising the revisions to Standing Order 42A and intends to bring it to the Assembly for debate and approval early in the next session.

Review of Assembly Oral Questions

28. At the informal strategic planning session in September 2025 the Committee agreed that a review of Assembly Oral Questions (AQOs) should continue to be a priority issue to be taken forward and noted the initial work that had been undertaken on this in the previous session.

29. To progress this work further the Committee scheduled a briefing by Assembly officials on the Guidance for Members on Assembly Questions and issues raised by Members, Ministers and Departments. It also commissioned additional research on the procedures and issues relating to oral and written questions in comparable legislatures.
30. The Committee will consider this research and decide what further work it will undertake on this issue in the next session.

Assembly Written Questions

31. The Committee had previously indicated that issues in relation to Assembly Written Questions (AQWs) could be considered either with the review of AQOs or following on from it. To inform the discussions a research paper on the cost of answering Assembly written questions and written questions in other legislatures was requested.
32. The [research paper](#), considered at the meeting on 25 January 2026, indicated that the Northern Ireland Executive does not routinely publish information about the cost to departments of answering AQWs and there is scarce information available regarding the cost of answering written questions in other legislatures. The Committee noted the information for future reference when considering AQWs further.
33. The Committee also agreed to request clarification regarding the procedure for answering written questions to the Assembly Commission. The current process requires answers to written questions to the Assembly Commission to be published in the name of the Commission Member and stipulating that they are answering as a representative of the Commission. Noting that the Commission is a Corporate Body the Committee decided to explore whether such answers should be published by “the Assembly Commission” rather than in the name of the individual Commission Member and if this would require a change to Standing Orders or could be done administratively.
34. The Committee requested information on the practical and operational arrangements for the publication of such answers from Assembly officials and wrote to the Commission seeking its views on the issue.

35. The Committee will consider what action, if any, it will take on this issue in the next session.

Anomalies and Technical Issues with Standing Orders

36. A number of anomalies and technical issues with Standing Orders have been identified over a period of time and the Committee agreed that consideration should be given to addressing these to ensure consistency, correct outdated references to legislation etc.

37. The issues were grouped under common themes and the Committee decided to request an oral briefing from Assembly officials and Legal Services on what the issues are and possible solutions for the first two groups relating to Ministerial Appointments and to the Opposition. The briefing is scheduled to take place in autumn/winter 2026.

38. The Committee also wrote to the Assembly Commission seeking its views on whether a change should be considered in relation to an anomaly concerning Standing Order 79(2) which provides for appointments to the Commission and the time period for these appointments after an election. The Committee will consider this issue further in the next session.

Review of the operation of Standing Order 59A Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee

39. [Standing Order 59A](#), to provide for the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (DSC) in Standing Orders, was agreed by the Assembly on 26 November 2024. Given the statutory functions of the DSC and the very strict timeframes within which these must be fulfilled, which is unique to that Committee, the Standing Order also provided for the use of substitute members.

40. When developing the Standing Order the Committee on Procedures agreed to undertake a review in autumn 2025, in conjunction with the DSC, of the operation of the Standing Order including the provision of substitute members. The review would assess whether these arrangements, together with the availability of remote attendance facilities for committee meetings, were sufficient to enable the DSC to effectively discharge its statutory functions.

41. A short review was undertaken in December 2025 and the information provided by the DSC indicated that the provisions in the Standing Order were sufficient to enable it to effectively discharge its statutory functions and that no further changes were required. The Committee on Procedures therefore decided that no further review of the Standing Order needed to take place at this time.

Assembly Sitting Days

42. The structure of the business week in the Assembly and, in particular, the days on which Plenary sits, was discussed during the informal strategic planning session in September 2025. To inform consideration of whether this was an issue that merited further consideration during this mandate the Committee requested information on work previously carried out during the 2017-22 mandate including the issues relating to Plenary sitting days that had been considered by the Business Committee.

43. Following receipt of the information, the views of the Speaker, the Executive, the Business Committee, the political parties in the Assembly and the independent MLA were sought on the Committee undertaking an inquiry on changing the days on which Plenary sits.

44. Noting that the majority of the responses were in favour of maintaining the current arrangements for Plenary sitting days the Committee agreed not to include this issue on its list of priority work areas to be undertaken during this mandate but to include it in the Legacy Report for consideration by the next Committee in the new mandate.

Costing Requirements of Private Members' Bills

45. To assist consideration of the merits of a proposal that there should be a requirement for fully costed Private Members' Bills (PMBs) with the financial impact of a PMB clearly articulated by the Member, the Committee commissioned research on the costing requirements of PMBs in the Assembly and other legislatures.

46. The first [research paper](#) provided a detailed comparative perspective of the relevant legislative procedures specified in Standing Orders and the related

PMB processes set out in guidance in the Assembly, the UK House of Commons, the Scottish Parliament and the Senedd Cymru with a focus on the financial considerations to be met. The [second paper](#) provided similar information on the Oireachtas.

47. The Committee noted the different approaches adopted by the various legislatures in relation to costing requirements and PMBs. The issue will be highlighted in the Committee's legacy report as one the next Committee may wish to consider further in the new mandate.

Assembly Bills – Provision in Standing Orders for Corrective/Tidying Up Amendments by the Executive

48. The Committee considered whether Standing Order 37 (Public Bills: Further Consideration Stage) should be amended to formalise the current convention and require Ministers to bring forward necessary corrective/tidying up amendments to Bills at Further Consideration Stage.
49. A [research paper](#) on the treatment of corrective amendments to Bills in other jurisdictions was commissioned and the Head of the Assembly Bill Office provided written and oral briefing on parliamentary convention on corrective amendments generally and the current specific Assembly convention and practice.
50. Having considered the information provided the Committee decided that it would be more appropriate to consider this issue in the context of a full review of the Assembly's legislative process and procedures in the next mandate and would recommend this approach in its Legacy Report. The Committee also asked the Assembly Bill Office to ensure that Members and Committees sponsoring a Bill are aware of the existing provision in the Bill Office drafting contract to make corrective/tidying amendments.

Electronic Voting in Plenary

51. Having undertaken some initial work in relation to the potential provision of electronic voting in Plenary in the previous session, including commissioning relevant [research](#) and examining the system used in the Scottish Parliament

during a study visit, the Committee revisited this issue at its informal strategic planning session in September 2025.

52. While Committee Members were aware that some MLAs supported the introduction of electronic voting, others did not and there were also concerns regarding the potential cost of providing the necessary infrastructure if such a change was introduced. The Committee discussed the likelihood of achieving the required cross-community support in the Assembly for changes to Standing Orders to provide for electronic voting and decided that work to progress this issue further would not be taken forward as a priority in this mandate.

Expenditure

53. Details of the Committee expenditure is attached at Annex A. It includes the cost of redesigning relevant sections of Standing Orders to reflect the changes agreed by the Assembly during the period covered by this report.

Key Priorities for the next Assembly Session

54. The Committee will continue to progress work on:

- The Inquiry into the Extension of Standing Order 27A Voting by Proxy
- The Northern Ireland Act 1998 Section 42 – Petitions of Concern
- Standing Order 42A Legislative Consent Motions
- Review of Assembly Questions
- Anomalies and Technical Issues with Standing Orders

ANNEX A

Committee on Procedures

Expenditure for the period 1 September 2025 – 31 August 2026

Budget area	Details	Expenditure
Redesign of Standing Orders	The cost of redesigning sections of Standing Orders in connection with amendments made by the Assembly in preparation for printing	£ 123.75
Refreshments & Hospitality	Committee Meetings / Strategic Planning Sessions	£ 944.50
Total Expenditure		£ 1068.25