



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC)

Minutes of Proceedings

Tuesday 3 February 2026 at 9.30 a.m.

Meeting Location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Jonathan Buckley MLA (Chairperson)
Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Sinéad Ennis MLA
Michelle Guy MLA
Michelle McIlveen MLA
Matthew O'Toole MLA
John Stewart MLA

Apologies:

Gary Middleton MLA
Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

In Attendance:

Shane McAteer, Committee Clerk
Ashleigh Mitford, Senior Assistant Clerk



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Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Laura Gourley, Clerical Supervisor

Alison Ferguson, Clerical Officer

Clare Maguire, Public Engagement Manager (Agenda item 3)

Caroline Moore, Participation and Outreach Manager (Agenda item 3)

Ray McCaffrey, Assembly Research Officer (Agenda item 6)

Agreed: The Committee agreed to start the meeting in closed session.

The meeting commenced at 9.32 a.m. in closed session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Declaration of Interests

The Chairperson advised Members of the ongoing requirement to declare relevant financial or other interests, as and when they arise, and before taking part in any Assembly proceedings, including Committee proceedings, relating to that matter.

No interests were declared at this stage in the meeting.



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3. Designing a civic/citizen engagement exercise – follow-up preliminary briefing by the Assembly Engagement Office

The Committee Clerk introduced this agenda item to the Committee.

John Stewart joined the meeting at 9.38 a.m.

The following members of staff from the Assembly Engagement Office joined the meeting at 9.38 a.m.:

Clare Maguire, Public Engagement Manager

Caroline Moore, Participation and Outreach Manager

The Engagement Office staff briefed the Committee on the design of a potential civic/citizen engagement exercise. This was followed by a question and answer session.

Matthew O'Toole joined the meeting at 9.49 a.m.

Matthew O'Toole left the meeting at 10.15 a.m.

The Chairperson thanked the Engagement Office staff for their briefing.

Sinead Ennis declared an interest that she is a member of the Assembly Commission.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that a draft letter to the Assembly Commission will be prepared for consideration at the next meeting, which seeks advice on any budgetary constraints that would need to be considered before the Committee would decide on whether to undertake, or to recommend that its successor committee undertakes, a civic/citizen engagement exercise arising from the Review into Assembly and Executive Reform.

The meeting moved into open session at 10.21 a.m.

Michelle McIlveen left the meeting at 10.21 a.m.

Michelle McIlveen rejoined the meeting at 10.22 a.m.



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4. Draft minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2026.

5. Matters arising

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the briefing from the EU and Interparliamentary Affairs Office on the Review of the arrangements for Assembly Members' participation in interparliamentary and international bodies, which was due to be on the agenda today, has been rescheduled to the meeting on 24 March 2026.

6. Review into Assembly and Executive Reform – RalSe briefing on public opinion data on reform options

The Committee Clerk introduced this agenda item and outlined issue relating to the review evidence-gathering process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the format of future oral evidence sessions with the Assembly parties, in terms of individual or panel-based sessions, should be determined according to the preferences of the individual parties.

Noted: The Committee noted the scheduling of agreed evidence sessions and research briefings between February and April 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an individual oral evidence session with Paul Givan MLA, in his capacity as former First Minister, on a suitable future meeting date.

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence from Dr Peter Emerson from the de Borda Institute.



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Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence from Dr Jack Armstrong on his policy paper entitled 'Reform of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive', and agreed to add the policy paper to the evidence base for the review.

Noted: The Committee noted the follow-up information provided by Professors McEvoy and McCulloch on institutional rules pertaining to the role of the Assembly Speaker, and that it will be copied to RaSe for information.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence from Dr Maria Xiouri, Senior Lecturer in Law, University of Lincoln on her recently published journal article as part of a special issue of the Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly; the Committee agreed to invite Dr Xiouri and authors of the applicable papers in the cited Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly to an oral evidence panel session.

The Assembly Research Officer joined the meeting at 10.26 a.m. and briefed the Committee on his research paper on public opinion on the Assembly and Executive options for reform.

John Stewart left the meeting at 10.26 a.m.

Matthew O'Toole rejoined the meeting at 10.32 a.m.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission follow-up research on any available data/information relating to public service performance and civil service reform/performance in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson thanked the Research Officer for his briefing.

7. Correspondence

Noted: The Committee noted the correspondence from the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee on Participation in the European Committee of the Regions – UK Contact Group and noted that the issue will be considered on 24 March 2026 as part of a wider briefing.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence from Pivotal on a tracker report 'Two years of a restored Northern Ireland Executive' and agreed to seek an oral briefing from Pivotal on the report.



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8. Forward Work Programme

Noted: The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

9. AOB

None.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the AERC will take place on Tuesday 24 February 2026 at 9.30 a.m. in Room 21.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.41 a.m.

Jonathan Buckley MLA
Chairperson, Assembly and Executive Review Committee

24 February 2026