



**COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION  
NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY BRANCH – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Tuesday 13 January 2026**

**Present:**

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA, Chair  
Dr Steve Aiken MLA  
Mr Keith Buchanan MLA  
Mr Paul Frew MLA  
Miss Michelle McIlveen MLA

**Apologies:**

Mr Trevor Clarke MLA  
Mr Stewart Dickson MLA

**Also In attendance:**

Mrs Lesley Hogg, Clerk/Chief Executive  
Ms Stephanie Mallon, Clerk Assistant  
Mrs Clare Maguire, Public Engagement Manager  
Mrs Nicola Crawford, Parliamentary Engagement Co-ordinator (minutes)

**1. WELCOME**

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA, Chair, welcomed Executive Committee Members of the CPA NI Assembly Branch to the meeting.

**2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from the following:

- Mr Trevor Clarke MLA
- Mr Stewart Dickson MLA

### **3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes were agreed.

Proposed by: Mr Keith Buchanan MLA

Seconded by: Miss Michelle McIlveen MLA

### **4. CPA CONFERENCES/SEMINARS/WEBINARS**

#### **LGBT+ Forum and Networking Reception, 24 November 2025, Westminster**

The Chair stated that an invitation was received to attend the first LGBT+ Forum and Networking Reception on 24 November in Westminster and that John Blair MLA represented the Branch at the event.

He advised that the invitation to attend the event also asked for consideration of membership of the LGBT+ Steering Committee and that Mr Blair is currently considering this option.

The Chair asked Members if, as representation on sub-committees hasn't been a regular feature previously, they would be content that representation on any subgroup in the future is managed in the same way that conference opportunities i.e. that all such opportunities are forwarded to CPA Members and expression of interest requested. In addition, the Chair asked that a written report is submitted to the Executive Committee by Members after each participative event.

Members were content with this suggestion.

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) Forum for the British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR), 20 February 2026, Edinburgh**

The Chair stated that an invitation was received to nominate delegates to represent our legislature at the first Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) Forum for the British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) on 20 February 2026 in Edinburgh.

He advised that the invitation was issued to the CPA Membership and one Member applied, Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA and that Ms Armstrong will attend the forum in February.

The Chair then asked Members if, as this is the first such event and the invitation is for two attendees, a member of the Executive Committee would be willing to attend the forum?

Dr Aiken stated that he would be happy to attend the forum.

### **74<sup>th</sup> Westminster Seminar on Effective Parliaments, 9-13 March 2026, London**

The Chair stated that an invitation was received to nominate delegates to represent our legislature at the 74th Westminster Seminar on Effective Parliaments, in London, from 9 - 13 March (inclusive).

This annual event, intended for parliamentarians and parliamentary clerks who are relatively new in their role, provides space for delegates to fully immerse themselves in discussions and reflections on the characteristics of effective parliaments. Each legislature was able to apply for a maximum of three places: two for parliamentarians and one for a parliamentary clerk/official. One nomination must be female.

The Chair advised that the invitation was issued to the CPA membership and newly appointed Clerks. Unfortunately, no relatively new parliamentarians applied to attend but we did receive an application from Stephen Orme, one of the newer Assembly Clerks, and his nomination has been successful.

Members stated that it was disappointing that Members would not be attending and asked that the invitation be circulated again. The Secretary advised that the deadline for applications has passed but the organisers would be contacted to see if there are any available places left.

**ACTION: Contact Seminar organisers re any available places.**

## **5. CWP CONFERENCE UPDATE**

The Chair advised Members that the annual CWP Conference will be held in Belfast for the first time next month, 8 – 10 February. He also advised them that, as previously discussed, Ms Catherine Fife, newly appointed Chair of the international CWP Steering Committee, was invited to the conference and that she has now accepted the invitation.

The Chair then passed over to the Secretary who updated Members on the plans for the Conference and went through the draft programme with them.

The Chair stated that the programme has excellent content and will bring positive outcomes.

Miss McIlveen, the CWP Steering Committee member, thanked Engagement staff for all their work so far organising the conference.

There was then a discussion between Members on whether the Executive Committee should attend any of the conference events. It was agreed that the Chair should attend the opening of the conference on Monday 9 February.

## **6. MEETINGS WITH CPA-UK BRANCHES**

The Chair stated that, as discussed at the last meeting, a request for a virtual meeting has been sent to each of the UK and British Isles Branch Chairs.

He advised that we are slowly receiving responses from the Branches and are still trying to work out the most suitable date for everyone.

## **6. REVIEW OF THE BRANCH RULES**

The Chair advised Members that at the last meeting they had discussed the suggested changes to the current Branch rules. He stated that further suggested amendments were made at the meeting, and that the newly updated rules were in their packs for their information.

Mr Buchanan asked if there should be a provision in the rules for a regular review of the rules rather than just when a Member suggested a change. The Secretary advised that there has never been such a provision and this allows for flexibility to review the rules when necessary.

Members were content with this and the final amended rules.

## **7. PARTNER COUNTRY**

The Chair advised that it had been agreed at the last meeting to send a follow up letter to the Ontario Speaker regarding the partnership and how we can move it forward. He stated that the letter had been sent and that we had now had a response to the correspondence and that Speaker Skelly has accepted the invitation to visit the Assembly and is planning a visit in May.

The Chair stated that it will be a 'Speaker to Speaker' visit but that the Executive Committee will be involved and that the special occasion should be properly marked. The Chair suggested commissioning RaiSe to put together a history of the relationship between Northern Ireland and Canada and presenting a bound copy to Speaker Skelly as a gift.

Miss McIlveen suggested contacting the Ulster Scots Agency to see if they might have already produced something similar.

Dr Aiken suggested taking Speaker Skelly to a Belfast Giants game, due to the number of Canadian players in the team. The Chair suggested that she could be invited to 'drop the puck' at the game.

Mrs Hogg stated that areas of interest between the two legislatures would need to be identified and discussed with the Speaker.

The Chair stated that he is aware that Speaker Skelly is very interested in human trafficking and that is an area that can be discussed during the visit.

The Chair advised that Engagement staff will take forward the arrangements for the visit.

#### **ACTIONS:**

- Engagement staff to liaise with the Speaker's Office regarding Speaker Skelly's visit and pass on the ideas for suggested activities from the Executive Committee (Ulster Scots Agency literature, RaISe research paper, and Belfast Giants game).

#### **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

##### **(i) Members' Survey Results**

- The Chair advised that, as per the action plan, the survey to identify areas of interest to explore with the other CPA Branches was issued to all CPA Members, but only four responses were received.
- He stated that, due to the low number of responses, the results do not provide the level of insight they had hoped for. He then proposed that the survey be re-issued, and Branch Members encouraged to respond.
- The Secretary suggested that the Chair write to Members to encourage them to complete the survey.
- Members were content with this.

**ACTION: Letter to be written from the Chair to accompany the reissued survey.**

## **9. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 17 February at 1:15pm (plenary business permitting) in the Private Dining Room.

The Chair adjourned the meeting.