



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

Tuesday 17 February 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 Caroline Moore, Participation & Outreach 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: Dr Steve Aiken MLA

Seconded by: Miss Michelle McIlveen MLA

4. CPA CONFERENCES/SEMINARS/WEBINARS

Artificial Intelligence Conference - The Role of Parliament in Shaping the Future of Responsible AI, 28-30 November 2025, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The Chair stated that Dr Steve Aiken had attended the conference on 'The Role of Parliament in Shaping the Future of Responsible AI', held from 28-30 November 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

He advised Members that Dr Aiken's report was in their meeting packs and then asked Dr Aiken to provide some feedback on the conference.

Dr Aiken stated that the main takeaway from the conference was that AI is starting to shape democracy. They discussed the future of AI and how deep fakes are affecting the political environment.

Dr Aiken also stated that he would be happy to be involved in any follow up opportunities and that his report be circulated within the Assembly and sent to the Assembly Library. He also advised that the Welsh Parliament are doing very good work on AI and that we may wish to consider partnering with them on AI matters.

The Chair advised all Members that there must be reports written following any attendance at future conference and the Secretary stated that there is now a template for reports which was used for Dr Aiken's report.

ACTION: Dr Aiken's report to be sent to the Library.

74th Westminster Seminar on Effective Parliaments, 9-13 March 2026, London.

The Chair advised 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). Each legislature was able to apply for a maximum of three places: two for parliamentarians and one for a parliamentary clerk/official and including at least one female.

He stated that, as discussed at the last meeting no Members applied to attend the seminar, but Stephen Orme, one of the newer Assembly Clerks, did apply and his nomination was successful. It was agreed at the last meeting that CPA HQ should be approached to see if there was still an option to send a Member to attend the seminar.

The Chair advised that CPA HQ were contacted and confirmed that they were at full capacity, with a reserve list in operation, for the seminar. They advised that any further nominee would be added to reserve list and allocated a place based on nomination criteria should one become available.

He stated that, as a result, we did not write out to Members to encourage them to apply for a place, given none are available.

Members were content with this.

16th Canadian Parliamentary Seminar, 25-28 May 2026, Ottawa.

The Chair advised that an invitation has been received from the Parliament of Canada to apply for selection to participate in the 16th Canadian Parliamentary Seminar, to be held in Ottawa, Canada, from 25 to 28 May 2026.

He stated that we have registered our interest in attending and if successful we will receive an official invitation to attend. If an official invitation is received, Members will be asked if they wish to accept the invitation to attend the seminar.

Members were content with this.

CPA Forum for Parliamentarians with Disabilities, 26-28 May, Cape Town

The Chair advised that an invitation has been received for the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) Forum 2026 taking place from 26-28 May in Cape Town, South Africa. We have been asked to nominate Members to attend, and an email was issued to all CPA Members requesting applications on Monday 2 February. The organisers stated that their primary

goal is to engage parliamentarians with lived experience of a disability to attend the forum.

The Chair stated that two applications had been received, from Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA and Mr Andy Allen MLA.

Members then discussed each application and decided that on this occasion Mr Allen should attend the conference and that Ms Armstrong would be the reserve.

5. CWP BIMR CONFERENCE

The Chair stated that the annual CWP BIMR Conference was held in Belfast for the first time the previous week. 30 delegates from across the British Isles and Mediterranean region attended the conference along with Ms Catherine Fife, newly appointed Chair of the international CWP Steering Committee. He then asked Miss Michelle McIlveen MLA, the CWP Steering Committee Member, to give an update on the conference.

Miss McIlveen thanked staff from the Participation and Outreach Team and advised that there had been phenomenal work behind the scenes to organise the conference. She stated that they had taken a chance on the format and it had paid off, stating that the conference couldn't have went better. Miss McIlveen advised that the external speakers were excellent and that positive feedback had been received from all those who attended.

The Secretary then thanked Miss McIlveen, stating that the conference was done differently and was more outcome focused due to her input and vision.

6. COMMONWEALTH DAY 2026

The Chair stated that Commonwealth Day 2026 will take place on Monday 9 March with this year's theme being 'unlocking opportunities together for a prosperous Commonwealth'.

He advised that in previous years, the Speaker had hosted events to celebrate and strengthen our connections with Commonwealth countries. Executive Committee Members have attended and participated in many of those events.

The Chair stated that we are currently liaising with the Speaker's Office about how we as a Branch can mark this important occasion and that we will be in touch with Members by email when further details are available.

Dr Aiken MLA asked if Mr Stephen Twigg would be available to visit Belfast.

ACTION: Availability of Mr Stephen Twigg to be investigated and discussed with Speakers Office who are leading on Commonwealth Day.

7. MEETINGS WITH UK & BRITISH ISLES CPA 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 it has been suggested that a date be sent to the Branches, and they will advise if they are able to attend.

Members were content.

8. PARTNER COUNTRY

The Chair stated that Speaker Skelly from Ontario had visited the Assembly last week. He advised that the Speaker's Office had arranged a comprehensive programme for Speaker Skelly, which included lunch with some Members of our Executive Committee. He thanked those Members that had attended the lunch and stated that it had been a very good event.

He also stated that there will be a reciprocal visit to Ontario which will be arranged by the Speaker's Office and that they will choose an appropriate delegation to attend.

Members were content.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(i) Members' Survey Results

- The Chair stated that it had been agreed at the last meeting that, due to the low number of responses, the survey will be re-issued along with a letter from the Chair. The letter was in Members' meeting packs, and they were content for it to be issued.

ACTION: Survey to be reissued with letter from the Chair.

(ii) Women's Caucus Gender Sensitive Audit

- The Chair advised that we have received an update about some work being undertaken by the Northern Ireland Assembly Women's Caucus.
- The Women's Caucus is working to finalise arrangements for a Gender Sensitive Audit in partnership with CPA UK, with a view to work commencing shortly and taking approximately 6 months to complete.
- There is an understanding that there are multiple aspects to most institutional and procedural issues and that there may well be a range of different views on issues that arise in the course of the audit, and that any recommendations made are likely to come within the responsibility of different Assembly bodies and the parties.
- For this reason, the Women's Caucus is planning to engage across the Assembly on the draft report, including with the Speaker, as well as with the Commission and other relevant Assembly bodies, the political parties, relevant parliamentary staff /officers of the Assembly, and others, as part of the recommendation and report finalisation process.
- Members were content.

(iii) Bermuda Post-Election Seminar 2026

- Dr Aiken advised Members that he had participated in a post-election seminar for the Parliament of Bermuda. He stated that it had went very well and had received positive feedback.

10. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 10 March at 1:15pm (plenary business permitting) in the Private Dining Room.

The Chair adjourned the meeting.