



Northern Ireland
Assembly

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Annual Report 2008-09



Working for You

Contents

Foreword from the Speaker	3
Our Values	5
The Assembly Commission	6
Membership	6
The Work of the Assembly Commission	7
The Commission's Strategic Priorities	9
A Working Assembly	11
Business Office	11
Bill Office	13
Office of the Official Report	15
Committee Office	17
Statutory Committees	20
Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development	20
Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure	22
Committee for Education	25
Committee for Employment and Learning	28
Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment	30
Committee for the Environment	33
Committee for Finance and Personnel	35
Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety	40
Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	43
Committee for Regional Development	45
Committee for Social Development	48

Standing Committees	51
Assembly and Executive Review Committee	51
Audit Committee	53
Committee on Procedures	54
Committee on Standards and Privileges	56
Public Accounts Committee	58
An Engaging Assembly	62
Events: Welcoming People from Home and Abroad	63
Education Service	66
External Liaison	68
An Evolving Assembly	72
Accommodating the Assembly	73
Operating Cost Statement April 2008 – March 2009	74

Foreword from the Speaker



The Speaker, William Hay MLA.

On behalf of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission I am pleased to present the Annual Report for the 2008-2009 Session. It has been a year full of many changes, achievements and challenges. One of our main achievements has been the implementation of the recommendations arising out of the review of the Assembly Secretariat. Additionally we welcomed a new Clerk/Director General supported by a new team of Directors that will lead the Secretariat and support the Commission in the delivery of its vision. To drive this work, we have also agreed a revised Corporate Plan for 2008-11, which develops and advances the initial business objectives for excellence within the Secretariat.

In relation to the continued provision of high quality services to Members, a survey of Members and their staff was undertaken to gain the views and opinions of the services provided by the Secretariat. Overall, the results of the survey were positive, with high levels of satisfaction in relation to the services and facilities provided for Members and their support staff. In supporting procedural matters, the Business Office carried out a considerable body of work, with 69 sittings of Plenary and over 13,000 written and oral questions tabled for answer. The Bill Office handled 10 Executive Bills, nine of which have become Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Committee Office provided support for 522 meetings, of which 42 took place outside of Parliament Buildings. On behalf of the Commission, I pay tribute to the dedication and professionalism demonstrated by all Secretariat staff in ensuring that the Assembly, Plenary sittings and committees are properly supported and ensuring that all Members have access to high-quality and responsive services to assist them to carry out their duties effectively.

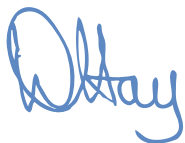
The Commission is committed to providing the necessary accommodation to meet the needs of the Assembly, its staff and its visitors. We have begun the process of exploring improvements to facilities for Members, their staff, staff of the Secretariat and visitors

Foreword from the Speaker

to Parliament Buildings, with the undertaking of an accommodation audit. We have already agreed enhancements to Committee meeting and visitor/educational facilities and will continue to explore further improvements for all users of the Building.

We continue to conduct our business in an open manner and are committed to managing our resources effectively with a view to securing value for money through sound and appropriate financial and governance arrangements. To increase public confidence and transparency, we have also agreed to the publication of historic data relating to Members' expenses.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the hard work and dedication of past and current Members of the Assembly Commission who have worked to develop the necessary corporate infrastructure and governance arrangements to support a fully functioning legislative Assembly.



The Speaker, William Hay



Speaker William Hay with MEPs Jim Nicholson and Bairbre de Brún and Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament.

Our Values

Professionalism

Reflected by a commitment to excellence, team working and a focus on meeting the needs of elected Members and the public whom the Assembly serves.

Integrity

Reflected by political impartiality, honesty, discretion and respect for diversity.

Accountability

Reflected by each member of staff taking responsibility for individual, team and corporate performance, and openness and transparency towards the public.

The Assembly Commission

Membership



Mr William Hay
*The Speaker/
Chair of the Assembly Commission*



Mr Stephen Moutray
9 May 2007 – present



Mr Paul Butler
9 May 2007 – present



Rev Dr Robert Coulter
9 May 2007 – present



Mr Alban Maginness
9 May 2007 – 29 June 2009



Mr Sean Neeson
9 May 2007 – present



Mrs Carmel Hanna
29 June 2009 - present

The Work of the Assembly Commission



Speaker William Hay with John O'Donoghue TD, Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann.

The Assembly Commission (the Commission) is the corporate body of the Northern Ireland Assembly, established under section 40 and schedule 5 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Commission comprises of the Speaker and five other elected Members. The Commission ensures that the Assembly has the adequate property, staff and services to work effectively. The Commission's purpose is to support the Assembly and its Members in their role as elected representatives and legislators and to facilitate engagement between the Assembly and the public. During the period of this report, the Commission met on 16 occasions to progress corporate matters on behalf of the Assembly. In addition the Commission also held a planning workshop in November 2008, outside of Parliament Buildings, to explore governance and strategic matters affecting the effective operation of the Assembly Secretariat.

The Commission advanced many new strategies in this Parliamentary Session. In line with our vision of an Assembly that strengthens democracy and engages the people in creating a better future for all, the implementation of the Engagement Strategy continues to improve arrangements and outreach services provided to increase the public's understanding of the Assembly. Statistics indicate that we had over 65,500 guests visiting Parliament Buildings within the Session and nearly 14,000 individuals taking part in the Education Service programme. As part of the Engagement Strategy, nine road shows also took place in urban and rural venues across Northern Ireland, with an attendance of over 500 members of the public. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive and the Commission agreed to deliver a further ten events over the coming months.

The Commission made significant advancement on a range of Human Resource matters during this reporting period. In carrying out its work, the Commission is supported by a Secretariat, that provides a wide range of practical and administrative support for Members of the Legislative Assembly. We are fully committed to the creation of an independent and distinct parliamentary service by March 2010 and as part of this work we continue to progress with a major recruitment programme across the Secretariat. In addition, we approved the

The Work of the Assembly Commission

creation of a project entitled “Advancing the Assembly – The Genesis Project” which will develop new or revised Human Resources policies over the coming months.

The Commission continues to engage with other legislatures on corporate matters, and hosted a visit by the Commission Secretariat from the Houses of the Oireachtas in Parliament Buildings in November 2008. This proved to be an excellent opportunity to share experiences and discuss matters of mutual interest.

The Commission is firmly committed to implementing the objectives set out in our Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plan. In fulfilling the obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Commission received 115 Freedom of Information requests up until the end of the Parliamentary Session. The requests covered a wide range of subjects relating to Members’ expenses, Committee business, environmental issues and the current catering contract.

As the corporate body of the Assembly, the Commission is also responsible for providing the services required for a fully functioning legislature. This unique role is scrutinised in many ways, including answering Assembly questions. Over the period of this report, the Commission answered 12 oral questions on the Floor of the House and 95 questions by written answer. These questions related to a range of issues including recycling, staffing, supporting IT infrastructure and Section 75/Good Relations.

The following sections of this report provide information on the performance and achievements of key procedural services in the Assembly and by each of the Committees. It also contains information relating to events and educational services and on the future accommodation requirements of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Commission's Strategic Priorities

The Assembly Commission has developed five strategic priorities to guide its work:

- 1 supporting Assembly business;
- 2 engaging the public;
- 3 supporting and developing our staff;
- 4 ensuring the effective governance of the Secretariat; and
- 5 accommodating the Assembly.

In relation to the first strategic priority, the Commission is responsible for the effective delivery and continuous improvement of support for Members in their work in Plenary sittings, Committees, constituencies and as office holders. To support these objectives, there are four key procedural offices in the Assembly Secretariat which offer support for Members in their Assembly work: the Business Office, the Bill Office, the Office of the Official Report (Hansard) and the Committee Office.

The Commission's Strategic Priorities

The Commission has agreed a number of key challenges to drive its work over the coming Parliamentary Session. Issues include:

- the development of a fully staffed, independent and distinct Parliamentary Service;
- the continued advancement and implementation of our Engagement Strategy;
- the further development of the Accommodation Strategy;
- the preparation for the devolution of policing and justice;
- the management of recommendations arising out of the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) Report relating to salaries, pensions and financial support for Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly;
- the development of a Good Relations Strategy;
- the development of a Sustainability Strategy;
- the development of an IT Strategy; and
- the development of an Information Management Strategy.

A Working Assembly

Business Office

The Business Office:

- supports Plenary sittings of the Assembly and meetings of the Business Committee;
- provides advice on procedure to the Speaker and Deputy Speakers, and to Members;
- operates tabling processes for motions, amendments and petitions and carries out the procedures for questions for oral and written answer; and
- manages the laying of documents and statutory rules before the Assembly.

The Business Office has two separate sections to carry out these functions:

The **Plenary Section** provides services and support to Assembly Plenary sittings and the Business Committee. It produces all the Assembly's working papers for each Plenary sitting, including the Order Paper, which sets out the business for the day. The Plenary Section prepares a detailed brief to assist the Speaker to deal with all the business scheduled and provides advice about matters of order and other procedural issues. It also prepares the Minutes of Proceedings of the Assembly, which are the legal record of the Assembly's decisions and make up the *Journal of Proceedings of the Assembly*.

The **Table Section** manages questions for oral and written answer, assists and advises Members about questions, and produces the Written Answer Booklet. The Table Section also provides guidance to Departments on the arrangements for Assembly questions. It also deals with Executive Committee, Private Member's and Committee motions and amendments to motions, together with the list of topics for Adjournment debate as tabled by Members. The section manages the laying of documents, statutory rules and other publications before the Assembly.

A Working Assembly

Tabling and Plenary statistics – Session 2008-09

Questions tabled	
Written	9008
Oral	4087
	13,095

Motions tabled	
Executive Committee	43
Committee	85
Private Members'	221
	349

Adjournment debate topics tabled	200
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Statutory rules received	413
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Papers presented	
Laid papers	202
Papers presented	229
	431

Plenary statistics	
Plenary sittings	69
Business Committee meetings	36

Bill Office

The Bill Office supports the work of the Assembly in its consideration of primary legislation by preparing and arranging the publication of all primary legislative documents and by providing information and advice on the primary legislative process.

Legislative process

The First Stage of the legislative process begins when a Minister or a Member proposes the introduction of a Bill. The Second Stage provides Members with an opportunity to debate the general principles of the Bill. After that debate the Bill is sent to an appropriate committee of the Assembly for more detailed scrutiny. The Committee will consider the evidence on the provisions in the bill before it makes a formal report to the Assembly. Once the Committee's report has been presented to the Assembly, Members have the opportunity to propose amendments, either during the Consideration Stage or the Further Consideration Stage of the Bill. The content of the Bill, as amended, is then subject to one last debate, known as Final Stage.

Bill Office statistics 2008-09

Executive	10
Commission	0
Private Members'	1
Committee	0
Bills that became Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly	9

Bills given accelerated passage 2008-09

Pensions (No. 2) Bill (NIA Bill 2/08)
Financial Assistance Bill (NIA Bill 4/08)
Budget Bill (NIA Bill 5/08)
Budget (No. 2) (NIA Bill 8/08)

Bills that received Royal Assent 2008-09

Charities Bill (NIA Bill 9/07)
Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 11/07)
Public Authorities (Reform) Bill (NIA Bill 19/07)
Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill (NIA Bill 21/07)
Presumption of Death Bill (NIA Bill 23/07)
Pensions (No. 2) Bill (NIA Bill 2/08)
Financial Assistance Bill (NIA Bill 4/08)
Budget Bill (NIA Bill 5/08)
Budget (No. 2) Bill (NIA Bill 8/08)

Amendments

Number of amendments tabled	137
Number of amendments made	100

Office of the Official Report

The Office of the Official Report (Hansard) reports what happens in all Plenary sittings of the Assembly and those meetings of its Committees that consider legislation or take evidence. Each report is essentially a transcript of everything that is said and done, and it lists the names of all the Members who speak and records all the decisions they make.

In the 2008-09 parliamentary year (1 September 2008 to 31 August 2009), Hansard produced 69 Official Reports of 68 Plenary sittings (one of the reports was split because of the duration of the sitting) and 350 reports of Committee meetings.

The reports of Assembly Plenary sittings are published on the Assembly's website on a phased basis during the day of each sitting and are then published in hard copy format by 8.30 am the next day. Reports published during the 2008-09 Session contained over 6.3 million words, and in addition to hard copy reports, the Hansard pages on the Assembly's website received just over 300,000 page views in 95,000 visits by over 48,000 unique visitors.

Reports of Committee meetings are published on the website within three days of each meeting.

After approximately every 10 sittings, a bound volume of Official Reports is published: this is the definitive version of the Official Report, and each volume contains the reports of all the debates, relevant Committee meetings, answers to written questions and written ministerial statements.

It is important to understand that the Official Report is not a verbatim transcript; rather, it is an edited version. The proper definition of the report is based on that contained in *Erskine May* (the parliamentary "Bible"), which has been in use by many Parliaments around the world since 1907. Erskine May states that the report:

... though not strictly verbatim, is substantially the verbatim report, with repetitions and redundancies omitted and with obvious mistakes

A Working Assembly

corrected, but which on the other hand leaves out nothing that adds to the meaning of the speech or illustrates the argument.

Hansard reports Members in the language that they use. During Plenary sittings of the Assembly, Hansard provides the Speaker and Clerks at Table with a simultaneous interpretation of speeches in Irish or Ulster Scots. The Official Report maintained its membership of the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association (BIPRA) and the Commonwealth Hansard Editors Association (CHEA) and sent representatives to CHEA's triennial conference, which was held in London and Edinburgh.



Simon Burrowes, Editor of Debates, speaking at a conference of the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association

Close working relationships continued to be developed with reporting organisations in other Parliaments and Assemblies, most notably those in the British Isles.

Quick Facts

1

Most meetings of Assembly Committees are held in Parliament Buildings

2

Committee meetings are mainly held in public Session and visitors are welcome to attend

3

The programme of work for each Committee can be viewed on the Assembly website at www.niassembly.gov.uk

Committee Office

The following pages provide an insight into the work of the Assembly Committees. The Committees play a key role in scrutinising and holding the Executive to account.

The Assembly's Standing Orders provide for four types of committee.

Statutory Committees are established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Belfast Agreement, section 29 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Standing Order 48. Eleven statutory Committees have been established to advise and assist the appropriate Minister on the formulation of policy in relation to matters within his/her responsibilities. Specifically the statutory Committees have the power to:

- consider and advise on departmental budgets and annual plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- consider relevant secondary legislation and take the Committee Stage of relevant primary legislation;
- call for persons and papers;
- initiate inquiries and make reports; and
- consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by its Minister.

Standing Committees are permanent Committees of the Assembly. There are currently six: the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, the Audit Committee, the Business Committee,¹ the Committee on Procedures, the Committee on Standards and Privileges and the Public Accounts Committee.

Ad hoc Committees are established, as necessary, to consider specific, time-bounded terms of reference that have been set by the Assembly. The Assembly decides the membership of ad hoc Committees and may direct their method of operation. Two ad hoc

¹ In accordance with Standing Order 55, the Business Committee makes the arrangements for the business of the Assembly and performs such other duties as the Speaker may request or the Assembly determines.

Committees were established by resolution of the Assembly during the period of this report. The first was established on 15 September 2008 to consider the proposal for a draft Criminal Damage (Compensation) (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, the second was established on 18 May 2009 to consider the proposal for the draft Private Security Industry Act 2001 (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 2009. Both Committee reports were approved by the Assembly.

Joint Committees are established, as necessary, to consider matters of joint concern. Changes to Standing Orders during the period of this report make provision for Committees to sit concurrently to consider matters of joint concern or establish an ad hoc joint Committee for the purpose.

No ad hoc joint Committees were established during this reporting period. However, there has been one meeting of Committees sitting concurrently. The Committee for Finance and Personnel and the Committee for Regional Development sat concurrently to hear evidence from the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ERINI) on public finance and expenditure issues that were relevant to both Departments.

During the period of this report, the Committees all undertook full work programmes: 522 Committee meetings were held, 42 of which took place outside Parliament Buildings; a total of 50 Committee reports were produced on a wide range of issues. They completed the Committee Stages of seven Bills and scrutinised 287 pieces of subordinate legislation.

Seeking and considering input from stakeholders, both individuals and groups, is a key element of the work of the Committees. A wide range of witnesses gave evidence to Committees, and information was also been gathered outside formal meetings in a variety of ways including fact-finding visits, major stakeholder conferences, informal meetings and receptions.

A Working Assembly

New ways of gathering evidence have been successfully employed during the period of this report. Examples include:

The Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety's innovative round-table research event, which brought together leading academic researchers from throughout the UK and Republic of Ireland, key stakeholders and Committee Members to discuss the effectiveness of measures to tackle obesity and to explore recommendations for possible inclusion in the Committee's Inquiry report.

The Committee for Regional Development and the Committee for the Environment's joint consultation event with stakeholders to discuss their views on the draft River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs).

The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's use of video conferencing to discuss best practice on scrutiny of European issues with representatives of the European and External Affairs Committee of the National Assembly for Wales.

These techniques provided increased opportunities for a greater range of groups and organisations to engage with Committee Members and put forward their views on a variety of issues.

The pages that follow contain more information about the work of each Committee. Further information including minutes of meetings, Committee reports and information on current and future business can be found on the Committee pages of the Assembly website.



An Assembly Plenary sitting.

Statutory Committees

Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

In this Session, the Committee was involved in a number of issues of great concern to the agriculture industry and those living in rural communities.

The Committee held 37 meetings in the 2008-09 Session, including a number of meetings held outside of Parliament Buildings. Key work areas included the Diseases of Animal Bill, the launch of two inquiries and consultation exercises, a number of evidence Sessions with stakeholders and local action group representatives and the scrutiny of departmental budget and policy. The Committee carried out eight visits through the year, seven of which were in Northern Ireland and one visit overseas.

Following the devastating dioxin contamination incident in December 2008, the Committee launched an inquiry to establish the sequence of events and actions of all relevant parties in relation to the incident. The aim of the inquiry is to produce a report of recommendations in order that the likelihood of a reoccurrence of such an incident and resultant effects on the Northern Ireland agriculture and food processing industries can be minimised.

In light of the concerns of the majority of consultation responses received by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development regarding an amendment to the Control of Oyster Fishing Regulations with regard to oyster sizes, the Committee launched its own consultation with the respondents and the results of this consultation are expected by the beginning of the 2009-10 Session.

Departmental budgets were examined by the Committee on seven occasions. The detailed examination contributed to ensuring that departmental financial targets were met for the first time in a number of years.



The Members are:

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr. (Chairperson)⁴

Mr Tom Elliott (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Thomas Burns

Mr Trevor Clarke

Mr Willie Clarke

Mr Pat Doherty¹

Mr William Irwin

Mr Patsy McGlone³

Mr Francie Molloy

Mr Edwin Poots²

Mr George Savage

¹ Mr Pat Doherty replaced Mr Gerry McHugh with effect from 21 January 2008.

² Mr Edwin Poots replaced Mr Allan Bresland with effect from 15 September 2008.

³ Mr Patsy McGlone replaced Mr PJ Bradley with effect from 29 June 2009.

⁴ Mr Ian Paisley Jnr replaced Dr William McCrea with effect from 4 July 2009.

A Working Assembly



Members of the Committee meeting exhibitors at the Ballymena Show.



Committee Members with the EU Commissioner for Agriculture, Mariann Fischer Boel.



Members of the Committee and hosts preparing for a tour of an incineration plant in the Netherlands.



Members and schoolchildren celebrating the Bramley.

The Committee received 70 presentations on policy issues from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and other industry stakeholders, ensuring that the needs of the agriculture industry and rural communities are given priority in the development and implementation of policies.

A number of recommended amendments to the Diseases of Animal Bill were proposed by the Committee, in particular the removal of the proposed link between compliance with biosecurity guidance and payment of compensation. The Committee also undertook public consultation on the draft Code of Practice of Searches of Premises under Warrant. The Consideration of the Bill is due in October 2009.

The Committee approved 53 pieces of secondary legislation and opposed one item of secondary legislation, on the basis that it would result in additional costs being passed to the poultry sector.

Looking ahead to the next Session, the Committee has a substantial work programme planned. The Diseases of Animals Bill will reach Consideration Stage and the Committee fully intends that their views and concerns for the protection of the industry are addressed.

The Forestry Bill, introduced in June 2009, will carry forward several key existing provisions of the Forestry Act (NI) 1953. It will also introduce some new powers, including the management of forestry land so as to contribute to the protection of the environment, and the encouragement of the enjoyment of that land by the public.

The Department also intends introducing primary legislation on animal welfare and dangerous dogs in the new Session.

The Committee is planning a study visit to Brussels to provide Members with an understanding of the structures and processes of the European Parliament. The aim of the visit is to assist the Committee in engaging on EU issues affecting the agricultural sector at a much earlier stage, both in representing its own views on policy matters and, where appropriate, in support of departmental objectives.

The Committee will continue to build on its dynamic and responsive strategy in engaging with the agriculture industry and rural communities across Northern Ireland.

Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

The 2008-09 Session has been very busy for the Committee. Not only did it hold 43 meetings, it began three inquiries, considered legislation for four statutory rules and scrutinised six policies as well as the departmental budget.

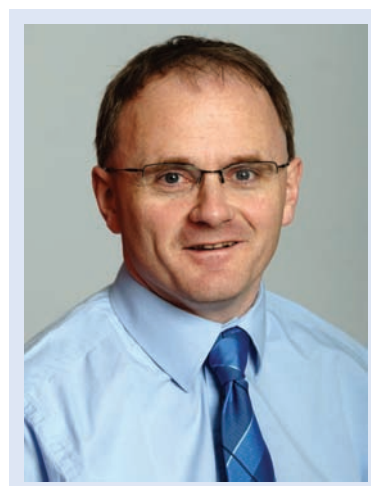
Following evidence Sessions and the publication of a report, the Committee recommended to the Assembly that the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) should develop a museums policy. The Department responded positively to this and is in the process of producing a policy.

The Committee launched an inquiry into the level of funding allocated to the arts in Northern Ireland and how that funding is distributed. The Committee is considering evidence provided and formulating its recommendations. It plans to publish its report before the end of 2009.

A review into the circumstances that gave rise to the financial deficit within the Northern Ireland Events Company in 2007 was conducted by the Committee.

On the issue of safety at sports grounds, the Committee encouraged DCAL and Sport NI to bring in the required secondary legislation. The Committee welcomed a briefing by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in June 2009 on its proposals to introduce three statutory rules to bring in the provisions of the Safety of Sports Grounds (NI) Order 2006 not already in force. The proposed statutory rules are planned to come into operation on 31 December 2009.

The Committee was briefed by the Public Records Office Northern Ireland on the proposed statutory rule to update admittance rules for those applying to use PRONI's on-site facilities. The Committee gave its approval and the rule came into operation on 1 April 2009.



The Members are:

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)

Mr David McNarry (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Francie Broly

Mr Dominic Bradley

Mr PJ Bradley ¹

Lord Browne

Mr Raymond McCartney ²

Mr Kieran McCarthy

Mr Nelson McCausland ³

Mr Ken Robinson ⁴

Mr Jim Shannon

¹ Mr PJ Bradley replaced Mr Pat Ramsey with effect from 29 June 2009.

² Mr Raymond McCartney replaced Mr Paul Maskey with effect from 10 March 2008.

³ Mr Nelson McCausland was appointed Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure on 30 June 2009 and will be replaced on the Committee by another DUP member in September 2009.

⁴ Mr Ken Robinson replaced Mr David Burnside with effect from 18 June 2007.

A Working Assembly



The Committee on a visit to the Sports Institute at the University of Ulster Jordanstown campus.



The Committee visits the Cathedral Quarter in Belfast.

DCAL and the Fisheries Conservancy Board briefed the Committee on its proposals for two statutory rules to amend fishing and eel fishing licence duties. The Committee was content with the changes to the charges, and the statutory rules came into force on 1 January 2009.

Waterways Ireland briefed the Committee on its proposals to produce updated bylaws for inland waterways. The Committee indicated that it was content for the public consultation process to begin, which is necessary to bring the bylaws forward.

The Committee considered and advised the Department on the management of its annual budget through the mechanism of the quarterly monitoring rounds. The Department was consistently encouraged by the Committee to manage its budget in such a way as to avoid having to surrender money back to the Department of Finance and Personnel, thus reducing its overall budget.

Following the Minister's decision not to proceed with a multi-sports stadium at the Maze/Long Kesh site and the submission of the three sporting codes (rugby, soccer and GAA) on their preferred options for stadia development, the Committee continues to engage with DCAL on this issue and will seek an update on progress in autumn 2009.

A consultation document launched by Ofcom on the future of public service broadcasting contained proposals to cut the number of hours of news and non-news programmes UTV is required to produce. Having expressed serious concerns with the proposals and opposed the proposed cuts, Committee Members led a debate in the Assembly calling on Ofcom to reconsider the proposals and on UTV to suspend its redundancy programme. The subsequent report from Ofcom reduced the original proposal to decrease non-news programmes to 90 minutes per week, this was changed to two hours.

The Committee discovered that no Department is pro-actively taking the lead on the promotion and use of townland names and so it decided to take positive action to raise the profile of this important matter. This is an area the Committee will continue to champion in autumn 2009.

A Working Assembly

The Committee requested a briefing from DCAL on what measures it is taking to increase the number of people participating in sport, as set out in the Programme for Government 2008-2011. The Committee will continue to monitor this area and in particular the implementation of the strategy for sport and physical recreation, which is currently awaiting Executive approval.

The Committee received a briefing on the London Olympics 2012 in February 2009, and held discussions with DCAL on how Northern Ireland can ensure it benefits from the 2012 games and their legacy.

The Committee received an update from the Minister on proposals to introduce a strategy for indigenous languages: the Irish language and Ulster Scots. The Committee will continue to monitor the progress of this strategy in autumn 2009.

The Committee made enquiries as to the possibility of a scheme, whereby recovered proceeds of crime are reallocated to communities most affected by crime, being set up in Northern Ireland. The Committee will receive briefings from Scottish officials and the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) in autumn 2009.

Key priorities for the next Session include the completion of the arts inquiry, the development of an indigenous language strategy, stadia development and the commencement of an inquiry into participation in sport.



The Committee hosts a seminar on townland names at Parliament Buildings.



Waringstown Primary School choir perform in Parliament Buildings.



Committee for Education

The Minister of Education updated the Committee on her proposals in early October 2008, and a February 2009 statement to the Assembly indicated that for 2010 transfers she would issue guidance (in the absence of regulations and a Department of Education-provided test). The Committee requested that the Minister reconsider the use of the CCEA test, as an interim compromise transfer arrangement and the Minister explained why she would not do so. In late June 2009, following consultation, the Minister published final transfer 2010 guidance and made a statement to the Assembly.

Committee scrutiny of the underlying policies of the Education Bill in the September to December 2008 period continued, with the Bill introduced to the Assembly on 25 November 2008 and referred to the Committee for consideration on 8 December 2008. The Committee's motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Bill to 30 September 2009 was agreed by the Assembly on 2 February 2009.

While awaiting public consultation responses, the Committee had nine departmental briefings on key aspects of the Bill and subsequently took oral evidence from 15 key stakeholders, each stakeholder Session was followed by departmental officials' response. The Committee commenced its detailed clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill in late May 2009.

In response to stakeholder and Committee concerns the Minister of Education confirmed that she will bring 13 departmental amendments to the Committee along with proposed regulations on key employment matters. The Committee had also raised with the Minister a number of other concerns, where it would wish to agree further amendments, and, as necessary, put down its own amendments including an enabling clause for regulations to bring clarity, certainty and confidence to the Bill where this is lacking on Education and Skills Authority (ESA) committees, particularly local committees. The Committee also registered specific concerns on ownership of controlled schools (a key subject for the second Education Bill) and ESA Board membership. The Committee is due to report back to the Assembly by 30 September 2009.

The Members are:

Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)

Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy Chairperson)

Mrs Mary Bradley

Mr Trevor Lunn

Mr John McCallister ¹

Mr Basil McCrea

Mr Nelson McCausland

Miss Michelle McIlveen

Mr John O'Dowd

Ms Michelle O'Neill

Mr Edwin Poots

¹ John McCallister replaced Mr Tom Elliott with effect from 22 June 2009. Mr Elliott replaced Mr Ken Robinson with effect from 26 January 2009.

The Committee considered a Private Member's Bill put forward by Mr David McNarry, MLA, on community use of school premises. Although agreeing with the underlying principles of the Bill, the Committee could not support the Bill at Second Stage, and it was not moved by Mr McNarry. The Committee continues to press the Department on action to address the concerns raised in the Bill.

The Committee considered, and approved, three proposed statutory rules during this report period. The draft Teachers' (Compensation for Redundancy and Premature Retirement) Regulations 2009, also considered by Committee, will be a priority for next Session.

The Committee undertook monthly budget scrutiny Sessions with senior departmental finance officials. This included scrutinising the lower percentage of the education budget going directly to schools in Northern Ireland compared with other parts of the UK. The Department in recognition of this and that the earmarking of some £200 million erodes flexibility at school level, has been assessing the scope for mainstreaming other earmarked budgets, having delegated some £27 million directly to primary schools from 2009-10. In response to the Committee's scrutiny of the common funding formula (CFF) for schools, the Department initiated changes to the CFF for 2009-10, and a strategic review of school funding and the CFF.

The Committee scrutinised a number of important policies by responding to and providing feedback on numerous major policy reviews and draft strategies by the Department of Education, including primary school funding; the special educational needs and Inclusion review; specialist schools; the sustainable schools policy; school improvement; the strategy for raising achievement in literacy and numeracy; the review of Irish medium education; the early years 0-6 strategy; the schools development proposal process; the policy on supporting newcomer pupils; the review of teacher education; pupil records and reporting and the review of the common funding formula. The Committee also considered the Middletown Centre for Autism; the Chief Inspector's Report; alternative education providers; food in schools policy; and school-based relationships and sexual education policy.

A Working Assembly

During this Session the Committee held four formal meetings in schools across Northern Ireland; in Holy Cross College, Strabane; Ballymena Academy; Portadown College and St Paul's High School in Bessbrook, scrutinising subjects such as area learning communities, area-based planning groups, the Craigavon system of education, bilateral school status, specialist school status and the skills gap with school leavers. Each meeting was followed by informal Q & A Sessions with young people from the surrounding schools. The Committee received excellent feedback from these Sessions. The Committee also met informally with representatives of Craigavon area schools, the Spirit of Enniskillen Trust, Autism NI, Early Years, the Buddy Bear Trust and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), providing an opportunity to have meaningful and direct engagement with Committee Members. An additional 14 stakeholder organisations attended a Committee event held in the Long Gallery on 24 June 2009. The Committees for Education, Employment and Learning and Enterprise, Trade and Investment, co-hosted a panel discussion of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) experts in the Long Gallery on 18 February 2009. Panel members and an invited audience of some 100 STEM stakeholders called for effective and immediate action arising from the overdue publication of the STEM review report.

Undoubted priorities will include the Education Bills, transfer to post primary, the review of special educational needs (SEN) and inclusion and the early years 0-6 strategy.



The Committee visits Portadown College.

Committee for Employment and Learning

The Committee's work programme for this Session included completing its Stakeholder Review of Teacher Education, an Inquiry into the Way Forward for Apprenticeships, and a Review of Workplace Dispute Resolution.

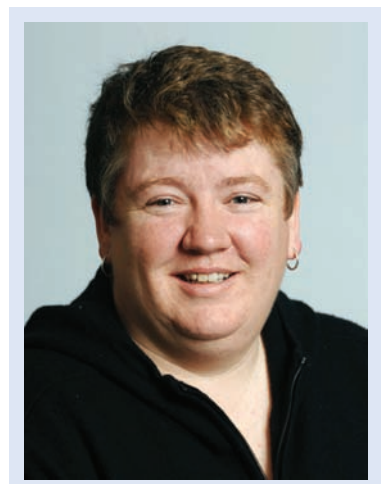
On the stakeholder review of teacher education, the Committee collated and considered the opinions and views of those involved in, and affected by, proposed changes to teacher education and produced a report of recommendations to the Minister for Employment and Learning. The Committee's report made a number of important recommendations around long-term funding and security for Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College and about the integrity of teacher education going into the future. The Committee continues to monitor the progress of these issues and the debate around them is still on going.

In its Inquiry into the Way Forward for Apprenticeships, the Committee considered the opinions and views of the providers, recipients and the utilisers of apprenticeships, and looked at useful regional and international examples of good practice in apprenticeships, and produced a report of recommendations to the Minister for Employment and Learning. Committee Members anticipate that the Inquiry Report's recommendations will have an influence on the design of the contracts when Apprenticeships NI is put out to tender again for 2010.

Recommendations on activities to raise the profile of apprenticeships, put forward by the Committee have already been adopted by the Department.

The Committee carried out a Review of Workplace Dispute Resolution. The next stage for the Committee is to work with the Department and stakeholders to design pilot projects to examine a variety of options for workplace dispute resolution.

The return of a significant sum by the Minister in the February 2009 monitoring round resulted in the Committee asking for a briefing from the Minister. The Committee continues to work with the



The Members are:

Ms Sue Ramsey (Chairperson)

Mr Thomas Buchanan^{1,5}
(Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Paul Butler

Rev Dr Robert Coulter²

Mr Alex Easton³

Mr David Hilditch³

Mr William Irwin³

Ms Anna Lo

Mr David McClarty

Mrs Claire McGill

Mr Pat Ramsey⁴

Mr Alastair Ross replaced Mr Jim Wells on 29 May 2007.

1 Mr Robin Newton replaced Mr Jimmy Spratt as Deputy Chairperson on 10 June 2008.

2 Rev Dr Robert Coulter replaced Mr Basil McCrea on 15 September 2008.

3 Mr Alex Easton, Mr David Hilditch and Mr William Irwin replaced Mr Nelson McCausland, Mr Alastair Ross and Mr Jimmy Spratt on 15 September 2008.

A Working Assembly

- 4 Mr Pat Ramsey replaced Mr Alex Attwood on 29 June 2009.
- 5 Mr Thomas Buchanan replaced Mr Robin Newton as Deputy Chairperson on 4 July 2009.



Chairperson Sue Ramsey, with Speaker William Hay, and QUB vice-chancellor, Professor Peter Gregson, at the launch of the Assembly postgraduate bursary programme.



Committee Members with NIE apprentices Stewart McConaghy, David Adamson and Ethan Furphy and their instructor Cathill McCarney during a visit to the NIE training centre at Nutts Corner.



Members and Sir Reg Empey MLA, Minister for Employment and Learning meet with the Governor of North Carolina, Beverly Perdue, at the State Capital in Raleigh NC.

Department to eliminate budget underspend and make best use of the Department's resources.

The Committee has continued to keep a keen watch on the wide range of policies produced by the Department for Employment and Learning. Programmes which have been scrutinised by the Committee have included: Steps to Work; Workplace Dispute Resolution; Training for Success; Apprenticeships NI; Success through Skills; the New Deal for 18-24 year-olds and New Deal 25+ programmes.

The Committee also approved 13 items of subordinate legislation laid in the Assembly; commenced the Committee Stage of the Employment Bill; undertook a number of study visits throughout Northern Ireland and to the United States of America; and met on 37 occasions.

The Committee also brought forward three motions to the Assembly during this Session. These included a debate on its *Report on the Review of Teacher Education*; a call for the reinstatement of concessionary rates at further education colleges for older people; and a debate on the Committee's *Report of its Inquiry into the Way Forward for Apprenticeships*. All three of these Committee motions received the support of the Assembly.

The Committee has a number of key issues it wishes to concentrate on for the 2009-10 Session, which include:

- taking forward the Committee Stage of the Employment Bill;
- a second inquiry into the Department's Training for Success programme,
- funding/staffing and development issues at the Queen's University of Belfast and the University of Ulster;
- consideration of the findings of the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) report;
- respond to the outworkings of the Department for Employment and Learning's September monitoring round;
- continuation of work to address issues surrounding apprenticeships;
- lead a response to the outworkings of the review of variable student fees and student finance.

Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment

The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment experienced a very busy Session in 2008-09. During this time the Committee met 35 times, considered and supported the approval of 22 items of subordinate legislation, scrutinised eight policies, conducted an inquiry into the role and potential of credit unions in Northern Ireland, examined departmental budgets and brought forward a motion for debate in the House.

One important piece of work that the Committee carried out was its Inquiry into the Role and Potential of Credit Unions in Northern Ireland. The purpose of this inquiry was to consider how credit unions could be permitted to expand the range of services they offer. The Committee's recommendations were welcomed by DETI and endorsed by HM Treasury following its review of credit unions and industrial and mutual societies in Northern Ireland.

The Committee scrutinised and advised on DETI's budget in relation to allocation, expenditure and reductions. The Committee closely examined budget readjustments and reclassifications that were proposed by the Department in response to the economic down turn.

The announcement by DETI that it intended to commission an independent review of economic policy was welcomed by the Committee. The main aim of the review is to determine whether existing DETI and Invest NI policies, programmes and resources will contribute optimally to the delivery of the productivity goal contained in the Programme for Government. The Committee will have an important role in scrutinising the outcomes of the review and will closely monitor the development of future economic policy.

The Committee noted the draft Enterprise Strategy but as the Department has put the Enterprise Strategy on hold until after the completion of the independent review of economic policy, the Committee agreed to defer comment until this time.



The Members are:

Mr Alban Maginness (Chairperson) ¹

Ms Jennifer McCann
(Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Paul Butler

Mr Leslie Cree

Mr Simon Hamilton

Mr Alasdair McDonnell

Mr Alan McFarland

Mr Gerry McHugh

Mr Sean Neeson

Mr Robin Newton

Mr Jim Wells

¹ With effect from 30 June 2009 Alban Maginness replaced Mark Durkan as Chairperson.

A Working Assembly

The Committee noted the draft social economy enterprise (SEE) strategy and took evidence from the Social Economy Network in relation to the strategy. Furthermore, the Committee sought the views of other relevant statutory Committees and forwarded a composite response to the Department to clarify some issues. The Committee made a number of suggestions for improvement.

Department officials briefed the Committee on the Regional Innovation Strategic Action Plan 2008-2011. Key issues discussed included the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan and progress with the achievement of objectives for the strategy.

MATRIX (a business-led expert panel that works in partnership with the public sector and academia) was tasked with developing a plan of action to establish Northern Ireland as a world-class knowledge and innovation-based regional economy. The Committee took evidence from the MATRIX panel and Secretariat. Key issues discussed included the two strands of the implementation process, the potential for a share of future global markets and the MATRIX response to the current economic climate.

The Department updated the Committee on current progress on the telecommunications infrastructure for next generation networks (NGN). Key issues discussed included the current positions of the project including next steps, procurement and the time frame for project completion. The Committee was supportive of the Department's approach.

The Committee has a key role in scrutinising and advising on the development of the strategic energy framework and in monitoring its implementation. Key to this is the scrutiny of energy prices and of the single electricity market.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) officials and the external consultant responsible for developing the tourism branding strategy briefed the Committee. Key issues discussed were the rationale behind the strategy, tourism opportunities and the next steps in the process.

A Working Assembly

The Committee undertook an in-depth scrutiny of major DETI/Invest NI projects to ensure that the projects were on course to achieve the expected benefits and to determine what remedial action the Department was taking, where this was not the case.

To assist in the development of new economic policies, the Committee brought forward a motion for debate in the House on the effects of the economic downturn on businesses and potential solutions to problems facing the local economy. Following the identification and debate of key issues in a Plenary sitting, the motion was welcomed and the Assembly agreed to note the Committee's analysis.

Top of the Committee's agenda for the 2009-10 Session is to work closely with the Department to develop a path out of the economic downturn and monitor the Department's work to retain and attract jobs. Additional key priorities include making the economy stronger and more resilient, supporting efforts to attract international investment, creation and development of innovative businesses; and making Northern Ireland self-sustainable in terms of energy and the economy.

In addition, in the coming Session the Committee will have an important role in scrutinising and advising the Department on the outcomes of the independent review of economic policy. The Committee will also consider the need to conduct an inquiry into the potential of the single electricity market to deliver value for money for consumers.

The following primary legislation will be considered by the Committee during the 2009-2010 Session:

- Gas (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Bill
- Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order Amendment Bill
- Debt Relief Bill;
- Unsolicited Services (Trade and Business Directories) Bill.



Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (from left to right) Alasdair McDonnell, Paul Butler, Gerry McHugh, Jennifer McCann (Deputy Chair), Simon Hamilton, Mark Durkan (Chair), Robin Newton, Leslie Cree, Alan McFarland, Sean Neeson.

Not pictured is Jim Wells.



Committee for the Environment

During the 2008-09 Session, the Committee met 36 times, focusing on climate change, the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill, as well as budget and policy scrutiny. The Committee also considered 24 statutory rules and carried out a number of fact-finding visits.

The Committee reported its findings on the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill. The Committee was concerned about enforcement of the Bill and made a recommendation that when implementing the Bill the Department should separate the regulatory and enforcement roles. The Committee also recommended that the Department pursues the feasibility of appointing a traffic commissioner for Northern Ireland. The Committee was concerned about the potential for read-across of the Bill into planning interests and action and recommended that the Minister provided clarity on this issue during Consideration Stage.

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill entered Committee Stage on 2 July 2009. The Committee issued a public notice calling for submissions from interested parties and conducted oral evidence Sessions in September 2009.

The Committee considered 24 statutory rules and received departmental briefings on the groundwater directive, planning fee increases, outdoor advertising, lead shot over wetlands, licence fees – PSVs / driving licences and motorbike special manoeuvres. The Committee insisted on better guidance for those affected by the banning of lead shot, required confirmation of adequate implementation of planning regulations to ensure no detrimental effects arose from the new outdoor planning regulations and noted a reduction in the planning fee increase proposals subsequent to its intervention.

An Inquiry into Climate Change was initiated by the Committee, the aim of which is to understand the implications of climate change for Northern Ireland and to make recommendations on government policies to mitigate the impacts of climate change, examine

The Members are:

Mrs Dolores Kelly (Chairperson) ⁶

Mr Cathal Boylan (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Roy Beggs ²

Mr Trevor Clarke

Mr John Dallat ⁵

Mr David Ford

Mr Danny Kinahan ^{3,4}

Mr Ian McCrea

Mr Daithi McKay

Mr Alastair Ross ¹

Mr Peter Weir

- ¹ From 21 January 2008, Mr Alastair Ross replaced Mr Alex Maskey on the Committee for the Environment.
- ² With effect from 15 September 2008 Mr Roy Beggs replaced Mr Sam Gardiner.
- ³ With effect from 29 September 2008 Mr David McClarty replaced Mr Billy Armstrong.
- ⁴ With effect from 22 June 2009 Mr Danny Kinahan replaced Mr David McClarty.
- ⁵ With effect from 29 June 2009 Mr John Dallat replaced Mr Tommy Gallagher.
- ⁶ With effect from 3 July 2009 Mrs Dolores Kelly replaced Mr Patsy McGlone.

A Working Assembly

economic implications and identify suitable adaptation initiatives. The Committee received 45 written submissions to the Inquiry and took oral evidence from 24 contributors. The Committee appointed a specialist adviser and published its Inquiry Report in December 2009.

The Committee received a Departmental briefing on the budget and regular updates on the Departmental quarterly monitoring rounds. Members requested further information in relation to departmental bids questioning, underlying policy in areas such as recruitment and consultancy costs and the reasons for delays and overspend in areas such as the electronic planning system e-PIC. The Committee also sought reassurance that the Department was on track to meet the forthcoming international financial reporting standards.

The Committee considered 47 consultation documents and issued responses to consultations on the landfill allowances scheme and a waste management charging scheme. It took briefings on consultations on the carbon reduction commitment, the determination of fees for entertainments licences and other proposed increases to charging schemes and the UK strategy for radioactive discharges and aquaculture.

The Committee also formed a subgroup to consider and deliberate on Planning Policy Statement 21 (PPS21). The subgroup met four times before bringing its findings back to the full Committee which endorsed a response to the independent working group appointed to advise the Department on planning guidance for non-farming rural dwellers. The Committee urged the working group to recognise that rural planning guidance should facilitate the evaluation of rural space by taking local need into consideration as well as site planning and effective landscaping. Members also wanted effective checks and balances in the guidance to prevent unsustainable development damaging Northern Ireland's rural character and squandering its natural resources.

The key priorities for the next Session will be a series of Bills in relation to wildlife and the review of public administration and the Committee will also focus on waste, planning reform and road safety.



Members on a visit to Fife Council, Scotland.



Members and RSPB representatives at the red kite project.



Committee visits environmental community projects in Armagh.



Committee for Finance and Personnel

The Committee had a busy programme of work and met on 38 occasions during the 2008-09 Session. During the Session the Committee scrutinised a range of legislation, including five bills and 10 statutory rules, in addition to a variety of key policy areas.

The Committee considered the Department of Finance and Personnel's (DFP) response to the Committee's earlier report on the Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill. The subsequent Committee report on the Bill included 22 key conclusions and recommendations. The Bill received Royal Assent on 2 March 2009.

The Presumption of Death Bill commenced Committee Stage and was designed to provide a legal framework to help address the needs of the families of people from Northern Ireland who go missing and to address the immediate concerns of the families of 'the disappeared'. The Committee's report on the Bill included 12 key conclusions and recommendations. The Committee welcomed various assurances from the Department and the Bill received Royal Assent on 2 July 2009.

The Civil Registration Bill began its Committee Stage. The Committee report included nine key conclusions and recommendations. Consideration Stage of the Bill was pending as the 2008-09 Session closed.

The Financial Provisions Bill commenced Committee Stage and the Committee sought further clarification from the Department on the repeal of the requirement to prepare finance accounts. The Committee agreed all the clauses and the schedule of repeals without the need to propose amendments, and this position was reflected in the subsequent Committee report on the Bill.

The Committee considered the Budget Bill, including the Spring Supplementary Estimates for 2008-09 and the vote on Account for 2009-10. The Budget (No. 2) Bill, together with the Main Estimates for 2009-10 was also considered by the Committee, which agreed that

The Members are:

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin (Chairperson)

Mr Peter Weir (Deputy Chairperson) ¹

Dr Stephen Farry

Mr Simon Hamilton

Mr Fra McCann

Ms Jennifer McCann

Mr David McNarry ²

Mr Adrian McQuillan

Mr Declan O'Loan

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr

Ms Dawn Purvis

¹ With effect from 4 July 2009 Mr Peter Weir replaced Mr Simon Hamilton as Deputy Chairperson.

² With effect from 29 September 2008 Mr David McNarry replaced Mr Roy Beggs.

A Working Assembly



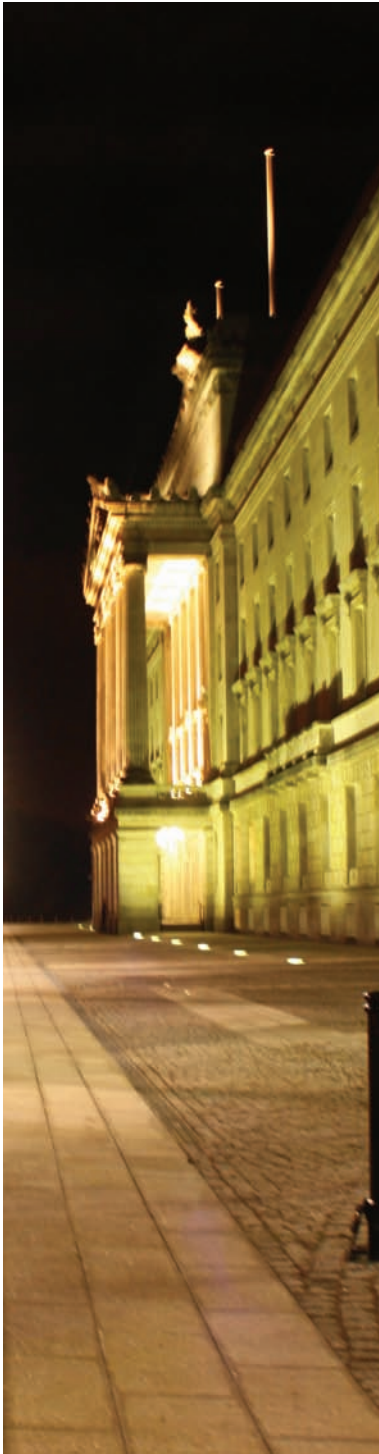
Committee for Finance and Personnel (from left to right): Simon Hamilton, Ian Paisley Jnr, Jennifer McCann, David McNarry, Stephen Farry, Dawn Purvis, Peter Weir (Deputy Chairperson), Mitchel McLaughlin (Chairperson), Declan O'Loan and Fra McCann.

it had been consulted appropriately on the provisions contained in both Bills and agreed to grant accelerated passage.

The Committee agreed its terms of reference for the Inquiry into Public Procurement Policy and Practice in Northern Ireland. The subsequent Inquiry Report will contain recommendations aimed at maximising the economic and social benefits from expenditure on public procurement in Northern Ireland.

The Committee commenced an Inquiry into the scrutiny of the Executive's Budget and expenditure. The stage one report was agreed and included a range of suggested improvements to the future budget process.

A Working Assembly



The Executive decided that a strategic stocktake of the Budget position for 2009-10 and 2010-11 would be undertaken in place of a comprehensive local budget process. The Committee made a co-ordinated submission to this exercise on behalf of all the statutory Committees. The Minister of Finance and Personnel made a statement in the Assembly on the stocktake, in which he welcomed the Committee's constructive approach. The Committee subsequently led a take note debate in the House, which gave Executive Ministers the opportunity to hear Members' concerns.

The Committee has taken a keen interest in the process of monitoring rounds, at both a departmental and strategic level. Members took the lead in questioning the Minister of Finance and Personnel and senior officials from DFP's central expenditure division on the strategic position of the Executive's Budget.

The Committee saw considerable potential in the creation of the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) within DFP. The Committee has taken oral evidence to ensure that it is carrying out its role effectively and providing value-for-money, particularly in its review of performance against the public sector agreements in the Programme for Government.

In its report on the Executive's draft Budget 2008-2011, the Committee raised concerns at the lack of detail on financing planned capital investment. The Committee also monitored DFP's progress against its own investment delivery plan to ensure the Department's capital investment remains on track.

In its report on the Executive's draft Budget 2008-2011, the Committee recommended a target of 1.5% for resource underspend in 2008-09 and not more than 1% thereafter. Going forward, the Committee will wish to examine both the extent to which the 2008-09 result is due to improved financial management across departments and the departmental performance in delivering Programme for Government targets.

A Working Assembly

As part of its policy scrutiny work, the Committee followed up on its *First Report on Workplace 2010 and Location of Public Sector Jobs* which was published in July 2007. Going forward, the Committee will monitor subsequent implementation of these policy proposals.

The Committee decided that the role of local banks and mortgage lenders in helping to alleviate the economic downturn for both households and local businesses should be kept under scrutiny and placed in the public domain. Oral hearings were therefore held with a range of local banking representatives and mortgage lenders. The Committee emphasised the need for continued dialogue and improved communication between banks and their customers.

A Committee motion expressing concern at the current arrangements for awarding pay and bonuses to senior civil servants was debated and approved by the Assembly. Arising from this, the Committee is to be briefed on the terms of reference for a ministerial review of the arrangements at its first meeting after recess.

The Committee was briefed by DFP officials on the outcome of the public consultation on the Executive's review of the domestic rating system. In relation to the Executive's review, the Minister of Finance and Personnel stated that the Committee made an extremely valuable contribution to the process and that many of the final outcomes agreed by the Executive aligned with the Committee's recommendations. The Committee has taken evidence from DFP on the policy aims and scope of the draft Rates (Amendment Bill), which will be introduced to the Assembly early in the new Session.

In relation to domestic rates, the Committee is continuing to monitor the implementation of recommendations in the access to benefits report on increasing uptake of rates reliefs and has continued its scrutiny of Land and Property Services (LPS), especially in relation to rates collection. The Committee is currently awaiting a PEDU report on its examination of LPS.

The Committee looked at the performance of HR Connect, one of the Department's main reform programmes. Based on the evidence

A Working Assembly

received, the Committee made recommendations to DFP aimed at improving the HRConnect services. In response to the Committee's recommendations, the Department confirmed that the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) is carrying out a review of the technical and service operations of HR Connect with a view to how services can be improved and that the project was subject to a recent detailed gateway review.

Other key policy areas that the Committee scrutinised included: departmental performance against targets in public service agreements and in its annual operational plan; DFP's lead responsibility for producing a regional economic strategy for Northern Ireland; progress by the Department in fulfilling its lead role in managing absenteeism in the NICS; data security in the public sector; progress in resolving the NICS equal pay claim; and the work of both DFP and the Special European Union Programmes Body in respect of European funding.

The Committee's priorities for the next Session include its ongoing inquiries into public procurement and Assembly scrutiny of the Executive's Budget and expenditure, which have been referred to above. Other immediate issues include the Rates (Amendment) Bill and NICS pay issues.

Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

The Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety held 33 meetings during the 2008-09 Session and carried out a number of fact-finding visits including to Muckamore Abbey Hospital; Autism NI, Queen's University Belfast; the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital and the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.

The Committee produced a report following the examination of the provisions in the Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill. The report's recommendations, which have been accepted by the Department, included a number of amendments to improve consultation by health and social care bodies and to strengthen the duty on these bodies to take account of the views of the Patient and Client Council.

The Committee considered and approved 35 statutory rules made by the Department and by the Food Standards Agency. Nine of these statutory rules arose out of the Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009.

An Inquiry into Obesity was begun by the Committee to examine current measures to prevent obesity and the availability of weight management and other services for those with obesity related ill health. The report, with recommendations, is being prepared by the Committee for Assembly approval for autumn 2009.

Departmental officials were questioned by the Committee on the progress of implementing the 26 recommendations in the previous *Report of the Inquiry into the Prevention of Suicide and Self Harm* (published on 1 May 2008). Considerable progress has been made on many of the recommendations including the Lifeline telephone helpline, ring-fencing of funding, and greater involvement for bereaved families. The Committee noted that the Protect Life strategy is under review.

In the area of budget scrutiny the Committee took evidence on efficiency savings from the Minister, trade union representatives, each



The Members are:

Mr Jim Wells (Chairperson) ³

Ms Michelle O'Neill (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Thomas Buchanan

Mr Kieran Deeny

Mr Alex Easton

Mr Sam Gardiner ¹

Ms Carmel Hanna

Mrs Dolores Kelly ²

Mr John McCallister

Mrs Claire McGill

Ms Sue Ramsey

¹ With effect from 15 September 2008 Mr Sam Gardiner replaced Rev Dr Robert Coulter.

² With effect from 29 June 2009 Mrs Dolores Kelly replaced Mr Tommy Gallagher.

³ With effect from 4 July 2009 Mr Jim Wells replaced Mrs Iris Robinson MP.

A Working Assembly



The Committee meets with key stakeholders in Parliament Buildings.

of the five Health and Social Care Trusts, and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.

In relation to the Department's consultation on the guidance on the termination of pregnancy, the Committee took evidence from pro-life and pro-choice organisations before submitting a response to the Department.

Following the Department's consultation on the draft Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Action Plan 2008-09 - 2010-11 the Committee took evidence from Autism NI and the National Autistic Society and visited Cardiff to see the implementation of the Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ADS) Strategic Action Plan for Wales. The Committee recommended a co-ordinated approach to delivering comprehensive autism services by involving other Departments, including Education, Employment and Learning, and Social Development.

The Committee carried out scrutiny on the Department's policy on generic prescribing, taking evidence from the Pharmaceutical Contractors Committee and departmental officials.

The Committee also took evidence from the Queen's University of Belfast and departmental officials regarding the supplement for undergraduate medical and dental education.

Two motions tabled by the Committee were debated and approved by the full Assembly: free car parking for hospital patients; and the call for frontline services for society's most vulnerable groups to be protected from the impact of efficiency savings.

Key priorities for the next Session include the response to the ongoing swine flu pandemic, funding for health and social care including efficiency savings; completion of the Inquiry Report into Obesity; examination of proposals for mental health and mental capacity legislation; and autism services.

The Committee also held three functions in the Long Gallery for health-related groups. At these a total of 36 groups were able to meet

A Working Assembly

Members of the Committee and speak to them about issues and concerns. A further event is planned for 13 October 2009.

On 7 October 2008 the Committee arranged an event at Parliament Buildings to highlight attacks on the emergency services. A number of schools from across Northern Ireland participated in demonstrations of the work done by the Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Service.

On 26 February 2009 the Committee arranged a training event in the Long Gallery in Parliament Buildings where Members were taught emergency life-saving skills by the British Heart Foundation.



Members of Fire and Rescue Service demonstrate their work at Parliament Buildings.



Committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

The main work of the Committee's 35 meetings during the 2008-09 Session was focused on the Committee's European inquiry.

The Committee looked at the way legislation and directives originating from the European institutions are implemented in Northern Ireland. The Committee also considered how Northern Ireland is promoted as a region of Europe and how Northern Ireland can improve its interaction with the European institutions.

The Committee conducted a huge amount of work in this area through written submissions, oral evidence Sessions and visits to examine best practice in other legislatures, including a visit to the Parliament of Catalonia to meet with the Committee for the European Union and Foreign Affairs and the President of the Parliament. The Committee also met with the Saxony-Anhalt Committee on Federal, European Affairs and Media, and held a video conference meeting with the National Assembly for Wales' European and External Affairs Committee.

The Committee expects to finalise its report early in the 2009-10 Session and make a number of key actions and recommendations on the way forward.

The Committee scrutinised and produced a report on the Public Authorities (Reform) Bill and also considered and agreed a proposal from the First Minister and deputy First Minister to seek accelerated passage for the Financial Assistance Bill.

The Fair Employment Specification of Public Authorities (Reform) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 and the Public Appointments Prerogative Order were also scrutinised by the Committee.

The Members are:

Mr Danny Kennedy (Chairperson)

Mrs Naomi Long (Deputy Chairperson)

Ms Martina Anderson

Mr Alex Attwood ²

Mr Tom Elliott

Mr Ian McCrea ¹

Mr Barry McElduff

Mr Francie Molloy

Mr Stephen Moutray

Mr Jim Shannon

Mr Jimmy Spratt

¹ With effect from 15 September 2008 Mr Ian McCrea replaced Mr Jim Wells.

² With effect from 29 June 2009 Mr Alex Attwood replaced Mrs Dolores Kelly.

A Working Assembly

Following input and consideration from the Committee, the action plan in relation to the strategy for children and young people was agreed by the Executive. Progress of the action plan against its objectives will be monitored in the 2009-10 Session.

In order to ensure that the Executive's response to the *Report of the Northern Ireland Task Force* (the Barroso Report) was comprehensive, the Committee commissioned the views of other statutory Committees of the Assembly and provided a response to Ministers; this will continue to be a priority for the Committee in the coming year.

The Committee met with the Commission for Victims and Survivors on a number of occasions regarding the draft strategy and proposals for a forum and service. The consultation and development of the proposed victims' service continues to be a key priority for the Committee.

The Committee also met with the Older Peoples' Advocate and departmental officials regarding legislative proposals for a Commissioner for Older People. The Committee will continue to consider this important issue.

A mini review of the gender equality strategy and the accompanying strategy actions plans was initiated by the Committee. Oral evidence will be received by the Committee on this issue in the next Session.

Key priorities for the Committee 2009-10 Session include the Department of Justice Bill, the European report, Commissioner for Older People, victims' service, gender equality and the Disability Discrimination (Transport Vehicles) Regulations.



The Committee meets with the President of the Catalan Parliament.



Committee for Regional Development

The Committee had a busy work programme in the 2008-09 Session, holding 34 meetings and considering over 180 items of subordinate legislation. Water, sewerage services and public transport continued to be high priority areas for the Committee.

The Committee undertook an Inquiry into the Management of Data Risks in Northern Ireland Water. The publication of the Report is anticipated in the next Session.

A call for evidence was issued by the Committee as part of its Inquiry into Sustainable Transport in Northern Ireland. The focus of the Inquiry is to explore and clarify the social, environmental and economic aspects of sustainable transport; to identify the policies, attitudes and technologies likely to underpin a move to more sustainable transport in Northern Ireland; and to make recommendations to the Assembly.

In addition to its consideration of the outcome of the Executive's strategic stocktake, the Committee provided feedback to the Minister on the Department's quarterly monitoring round returns. Members remained concerned that funding levels for structural maintenance are seriously inadequate, and that the future funding of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland must be addressed by the Executive. The Committee, along with the Committee for Finance and Personnel, also heard evidence on options for the Northern Ireland Executive to mitigate the recession. The Committee maintains a keen interest in these areas and will continue to question the Department on these issues.

In relation to the first stages of PC10 (Regulated Price Control Settlement for Water and Sewerage Services in Northern Ireland), the Committee wanted to see a number of issues dealt with in the PC10 timescale: the investment needed to address the problems in data quality and systems improvement; the issue of sewerage flooding in properties; the introduction of carbon cost in planning infrastructure; and greater integration of water and sewerage infrastructure planning

The Members are:

Mr Fred Cobain (Chairperson)

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Deputy Chairperson) ⁴

Mr Cathal Boylan

Mr Allan Bresland ¹

Mr Willie Clarke

Mr Tommy Gallagher ³

Mr Danny Kinahan ²

Mr Raymond McCartney

Mr George Robinson

Mr Alastair Ross ¹

Mr Brian Wilson

¹ With effect from 15 September 2008 Mr Allan Bresland replaced Mr William Irwin and Mr Alastair Ross replaced Mr Stephen Moutray.

² With effect from 22 June 2009 Mr Danny Kinahan replaced Mr John McCallister.

³ With effect from 29 June 2009 Mr Tommy Gallagher replaced Mr John Dallat.

⁴ With effect from 4 July 2009 Miss Michelle McIlveen replaced Mr Jim Wells.

A Working Assembly

with both land use planning and the regional development strategy. Work on developing guidance and price control will continue into the 2009-10 Session, when the Committee will provide its views on the Utility Regulator's determination and the Minister's final environmental and social guidance.

Translink's corporate and business plan, fare increases and fuel purchasing policy also came under scrutiny by the Committee during this Session. The Committee was critical of the lack of priority afforded actions to address disability and accessibility issues in Translink's corporate and business plan, and of the approach taken by Translink to its fuel purchasing policy. A new process and timetable is now in place that makes provision for consultation with the Committee prior to fare increases.

The Committee considered a strategic business case for the reform of public transport. Members were pleased to note that under the proposals, public transport would remain regulated, and that competition would be controlled and service providers would continue to require both an operator licence and a route licence. The Committee recommended that the options for reform proposed by Translink should be explored and developed more fully, and included as an option in the outline business case. Finally, Members recommended that any decision on the preferred structure for a middle tier organisation be deferred until the outcome of the outline business case is known and until full costs and benefits have been identified for the full range of options.

In addition, the Committee scrutinised the Minister's proposals for guidance on master planning for ports in Northern Ireland, and Northern Ireland's draft river basin management plans.

The Committee responded to calls for evidence on a number of topics, including the Barosso Report and the proposals to remove the exemption for operators of transport services from Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

The outcome of the public consultation on proposals for a Roads (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill was considered. The Committee was broadly content with the proposals, and recommended that the Department apply the lessons in the Public Accounts Committee *Report*



Committee Members visit George Best Belfast City Airport.



Committee Members on a visit to the Belfast sewers project.

A Working Assembly



The Committee hosts a stakeholders exercise in the Long Gallery at Parliament Buildings.

on *Roads Openings by Utilities* in implementing, managing and monitoring a permit scheme such as is proposed by the Department. A Bill is anticipated in the next Session. At that time, the Committee will explore further how the Department intends to implement the chargeable permit schemes for road openings, and to manage the permit scheme for road closures for certain events.

In the next Session the Committee will begin the work of scrutinising the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill; the proposed Roads (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill; as well as sustainable transport and accessible transport.

The Committee held a number of successful stakeholder engagement events during this Session. Members visited Dublin to study the impact of bus lanes on travel and transport in the Dublin area, met with the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport, and with elected representatives and officials on strategic planning issues.

On 6 February 2009, a research-led stakeholders' exercise was held in the Long Gallery, with representatives from the business, social and environmental sectors as well as transport operators. A report on this event will be published in October 2009 as part of the Committee's work on its Inquiry into Sustainable Transport.

In conjunction with the Environment Committee, the Committee held a joint stakeholder engagement event in the Long Gallery on 1 April 2009 on the subject of the draft River Basin Management Plans. A report on the event was agreed by the respective committees in June 2009, and was submitted to the Department of the Environment as part of the public consultation event on the draft River Basin Management Plans.

Also in June 2009, the Committee held a research event with representatives from the older people's and disability sectors in Northern Ireland. Feedback from the Session was positive, and a report on the event will be considered by the Committee early in the next Session, which will inform the Committee's response to the consultation on the accessible transport strategy action plan.

The Committee held a meeting at George Best Belfast City Airport and toured the airport facilities. The Committee also visited the Belfast sewers project to view progress on the new sewers and pumping station.

Committee for Social Development

During the 2008-09 Session the Committee for Social Development completed a substantial work programme, meeting 32 times and undertaking a range of activities, receptions, events and visits to engage with interested organisations and groups.

Pre-legislative consultations in relation to the Housing (Amendment) Bill and the Liquor Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill were undertaken by the Committee.

The Committee considered 76 statutory rules that were laid in the Assembly, three Westminster statutory instruments and a legislative consent motion relating to the Saving Gateway Accounts Bill. The Committee noted commencement Orders relating to the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and the Pensions (No. 2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

The Minister's request for accelerated passage for legislation relating to the further reform of occupational pensions was supported by the Committee. The Pensions (No. 2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 included provisions which require employers to enroll employees automatically in occupational pensions.

The Committee Stage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill commenced on 23 June 2009. To inform Members' understanding of the principles of the Bill, briefings were received from the Department and other key stakeholders. Further evidence Sessions are planned for next Session.

The Committee produced a report on disability living allowance (DLA) which focused on administration issues. A number of the report's recommendations including simplification of the application form and further analysis and review of DLA data by the Department were to be adopted.

The Committee's report on the neighbourhood renewal strategy was based on a consultation undertaken in 2007-08 with neighbourhood



The Members are:

Mr Simon Hamilton (Chairperson) ^{2,5}

Mr David Hilditch (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Billy Armstrong ³

Mrs Mary Bradley ⁴

Mr Mickey Brady

Mr Thomas Burns

Mr Jonathan Craig

Ms Anna Lo

Mr Fra McCann

Miss Michelle McIlveen

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín ¹

¹ With effect from 20 May 2008 Ms Carál Ní Chuilín replaced Mrs Claire McGill.

² With effect from 9 June 2008 Mr David Simpson MP replaced Mr Gregory Campbell MP as Chairperson of the Social Development Committee.

³ With effect from 29 September 2008 Mr Billy Armstrong replaced Mr Fred Cobain.

⁴ With effect from 29 June 2009 Mrs Mary Bradley replaced Mr Alban Maginness.

⁵ With effect from 4 July 2009 Mr Simon Hamilton replaced Mr David Simpson MP as Chairperson of the Social Development Committee.

A Working Assembly



Members of the Committee meet representatives from the Triangle Housing Association at a Committee reception held at Parliament Buildings.



Members of the Committee receive a briefing on eco-friendly district heating systems during their visit to the eco village in Lisburn.



Members of the Committee meet with representatives from the Edinburgh Community Planning Partnership during a visit to Edinburgh.

renewal partnerships throughout Northern Ireland. The Committee approved the report and the departmental response is to be considered by the Committee. The Committee agreed that it would consider this strategy again following the Department's planned review.

The Committee continued its consideration of town centre regeneration undertaking a fact-finding visit to Boston and Providence Rhode Island to review town centre management partnerships. The Committee considered a draft of the report prior to the end of the Session.

The Committee considered and endorsed aspects of the Department's budgetary submissions made as part of the monitoring round process. The Committee also reviewed the Department's submission to the strategic stocktake.

In relation to the budget for the Supporting People programme and the challenges presented by the Bamford review, the Committee made recommendations to the Minister, particularly in relation to the so-called freezing of the budget for 2008-11 and is to consider the Supporting People programme in the next Session.

A significant amount of evidence in relation to the introduction of local housing allowance (LHA) was considered by the Committee. It is anticipated that the Committee will give further consideration to LHA following the current Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) consultation and the anticipated UK-wide review of housing benefit.

The Committee made formal submissions to the consultations on the amended house sales scheme (for social housing) and the proposed mortgage rescue scheme. The Committee generally welcomed both policies.

A formal submission was made by the Committee to the DWP consultation on proposed amendments to the social fund. The Committee strongly opposed changes to the fund, which could have replaced interest-free crisis payment with loans charged at over 20% APR. This element of the proposals was subsequently withdrawn.

A Working Assembly

The Committee considered representations from the Department and NIPSA in relation to the strategic business review of the Social Security Agency. The majority of Committee Members generally welcomed the Department's revised proposals.

Following the Public Accounts Committee report, the Committee scrutinised the Department's progress in amending the warm homes scheme and targeting its benefits at those in fuel poverty.

The Committee also received evidence and continues to consider the following policies and projects: the review of public administration (as it relates to the functions of the Department); the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Park regeneration project; the Belfast strategic regeneration frameworks; the reform of the private rented sector; the volunteering strategy for Northern Ireland; the voluntary advice strategy for Northern Ireland; the options for funding social housing and possible revisions to the compact between Government and the voluntary and community sector.

The Committee proposed a motion that was agreed by the Assembly calling upon the Minister to increase the budget allocation for the decent homes programme and to improve communications between the Department and the Egan contractors. Following the June monitoring round, additional support was allocated to the decent homes programme.

The Committee's priorities for the next Session will be focused on the legislative programme. After the Committee concludes the Committee Stage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill, the Welfare Reform Bill is expected to be considered. It is understood that, subject to Executive approval, the Liquor Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill will be introduced. It is also anticipated that the Committee will have some role in the review of private Member's legislation – the Caravan and Mobile Home Owners Bill. These Bills and the anticipated Private Rented Sector Bill and the DSD RPA Bill may restrict the Committee's scope for further large-scale inquiries in 2009-2010.



Members of the Committee meet with representatives from the Citizens Advice Bureau.



Chairperson of the Social Development Committee, Mr David Simpson, attends an awareness raising event hosted by MacMillan Cancer Support in the Long Gallery.



Standing Committees

Assembly and Executive Review Committee

In September 2008, the Committee agreed to seek a fresh mandate from the Assembly relating to the devolution of policing and justice matters. The terms of reference for this work were to undertake a review of progress on the implementation of the recommendations and the resolution of outstanding issues identified in the *Report on the Inquiry into the Devolution of Policing and Justice Matters*; and to consider any other matter relating to the devolution of policing and justice matters.

During September 2008, the Committee sought the views of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the leaders of all the political parties represented in the Assembly on the specific matters that the Committee should consider.

In October 2008, the Committee decided on a list of 26 issues, which it subsequently allocated to one of three categories:

- category one issues to be resolved, within the Committee, pre-devolution.
- category two issues to be resolved by the Committee, pre-devolution but which might require wider consultation and consideration.
- category three issues to be resolved, post-devolution.

The Committee considered a number of written submissions and heard oral evidence prior to 6 January 2009 when it published the *First Report on the Arrangements for the Devolution of Policing and Justice Matters* on the category one list of issues. This report was debated at a Plenary sitting of the Assembly on 20 January 2009.

At its meeting of 13 January 2009, the Committee proceeded to consider the category two list of issues with a view to publishing a second report before the end of 2009.

The Members are:

Mr Jimmy Spratt (Chairperson) ²

Mr Raymond McCartney
(Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Alex Attwood

Mrs Carmel Hanna

Mr Simon Hamilton ³

Mr Danny Kennedy

Mr Nelson McCausland

Mr Alan McFarland

Mr Alex Maskey ⁴

Mr John O'Dowd

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr ⁵

At a meeting on 14 October 2008, the Committee agreed to extend 'observer status' to those parties represented in the Assembly but not, at that time, represented on the Committee, when the Committee was considering the devolution of policing and justice matters.

² Mr Jeffrey Donaldson resigned from the Committee with effect from 26 February 2008 and was replaced by Mr Jimmy Spratt on 4 March 2008.

On 13 January 2009 the Committee agreed to appoint a specialist adviser to assist in its deliberations on the financial implications of devolving policing and justice powers. In relation to these financial matters the Committee also sought written submissions from all agencies and organisations within the policing and justice field and conducted 12 associated oral evidence Sessions.

Throughout 2009 the Committee also commissioned, and considered, a number of research papers related to its work.

To aid its consideration of the category two list of issues, the Committee also made visits in June 2009 to Westminster, the Scottish Parliament and the Oireachtas and spoke with a range of individuals.

In its visit to Westminster, the Committee met the Secretary of the State for Justice, Jack Straw MP, and the Chairman and Members of the Justice Committee. When the Committee visited the Scottish Parliament it met the Convenor and Members of the Justice Committee, officials from the Lord Advocate's office, the Solicitor General and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice. When the Committee visited the Oireachtas it met with the deputy to the Attorney General, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Chairman and Members of the Justice Committee, the Justice Minister and the Garda Commissioner. These three visits aside, the Committee did not convene any meetings outside Parliament Buildings. In total, in 2008-2009 the Committee held 31 meetings.

The Committee is seeking to publish the *Second Report on the Arrangements for the Devolution of Policing and Justice Matters* in time to inform a debate at a Plenary sitting of the Assembly on 9 March 2010. Key priority issues that the Committee is expected to address, in the future, include the matter of dual mandates held by Members of the Assembly, the work of the proposed efficiency review panel, the operation of the ministerial code, the power to refer ministerial decisions to the Executive Committee, the Assembly voting system, designations and cross-community voting, the size of the Assembly and the number of MLAs, and the number of ministerial offices held and the functions exercisable by the holder of each office.

- 3 With effect from 15 September 2008, Mr Simon Hamilton replaced Mr Ian McCrea.
- 4 With effect from 20 May 2008, Mr Alex Maskey replaced Ms Caral Ni Chuilin.
- 5 With effect from 15 September 2008, Mr Ian Paisley Jnr replaced Mr George Robinson.



Audit Committee

The Audit Committee held four meetings during the 2008-09 Session. The work programme of the Committee included the agreement of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) estimate for 2009/10, the appointment of auditors to the NIAO, the approval of the draft NIAO Corporate Plan, and the consideration of the NIAO resource accounts.

The Audit Committee agreed the NIAO Estimate for 2009-10 for £9.3 million.

Having taken the views of the Department of Finance and Personnel and the NIAO, the Committee endorsed the recommendation that Baker Tilly Mooney Moore should be appointed as auditors to the NIAO.

Following the consideration of a submission from the auditors and having examined the NIAO resource accounts for year ended 31 March 2008, the Committee was content with the accounts.

An increase in the salary of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) in line with the scale for judicial group 5 for 2009 -10 was agreed by the Committee and then debated and agreed in the Assembly.

During the 2008-09 Session, the Committee also considered the implications for the public sector on the introduction of the international financial reporting standards, and the issues concerning clause 1 of the Financial Provisions Bill.

The Members are:

Mr Peter Weir (Chairperson) ³

Mr Samuel Gardiner (Deputy Chairperson)

Dr Stephen Farry

Mr Tommy Gallagher ²

Mr Paul Maskey ¹

¹ With effect from 29 September 2008 Mr Paul Maskey replaced Mr John O'Dowd.

² With effect from 29 June 2009 Mr Tommy Gallagher replaced Mr Pat Ramsey.

³ With effect from 4 July 2009 Mr Peter Weir replaced Mr Robin Newton.

Committee on Procedures

The Committee brought forward a substantial amount of work from the previous Session, to be undertaken during 2008-09, including Inquiries into Assembly questions and private Bills. Additionally, as part of its commitment to an ongoing review of Standing Orders, the Committee agreed a work programme for the Session which included issues such as quorum for Plenary Session, voting when the Speaker's decision is challenged and joint Committees.

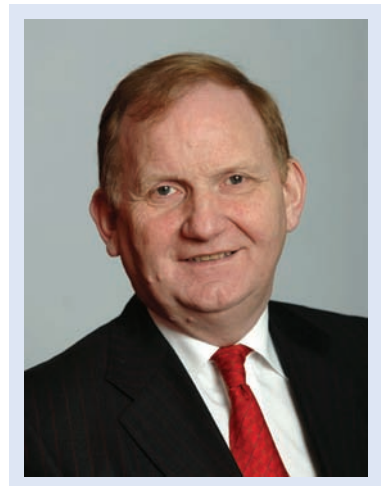
Meeting on 14 occasions throughout the Session, the Committee had 39 motions debated and agreed in the Assembly. It agreed and published reports on inquiries on private legislation and Assembly questions, and commenced a further Inquiry on Legislative Consent Motions. A draft Report on this issue will be considered in the next Session.

With regard to private legislation, the Committee undertook an in-depth inquiry into possible procedures that may be adopted by the Assembly. The inquiry considered all the procedures relating to a private Bill and included a research exercise, examining practices in other legislatures. The *Committee's Report on the Inquiry into Private Legislation*, along with new Standing Orders emanating from the report, was agreed by the Assembly.

The Committee's Inquiry into Assembly Questions focused on procedures for submitting, selecting and responding to oral and written questions and included a survey of all MLAs. The Committee's Report was approved by the Assembly in March 2009 and revised Standing Orders, produced as a consequence of the Committee's report were agreed by the Assembly in June 2009.

In accordance with its agreed work programme, the Committee reviewed a number of Standing Orders during the year.

The existing Standing Order gave rise to the possibility that the loss of a quorum in a Plenary sitting could lead to the loss of the remainder of the day's business in the Assembly. An amendment to the Standing Order to correct this was agreed by the Assembly.



The Members are:

Lord Morrow (Chairman)

Mr Mervyn Storey (Deputy Chairman)

Mr Mickey Brady ¹

Mr Francie Brolly

Lord Browne

Mr Raymond McCartney

Mr David McClarty

Mr Adrian McQuillan

Mr Sean Neeson

Mr Declan O'Loan

Mr Ken Robinson

¹ Mr Mickey Brady replaced Mr Willie Clarke as of 20 May 2008.

A Working Assembly



Chairperson, Lord Morrow, speaks in the Assembly Chamber.

Prior to amendment, Standing Orders did not provide for written ministerial statements. As part of its consideration, the Committee also reviewed the arrangements for oral statements and made a number of changes. A report to assist Members was published and amendments to Standing Orders were agreed by the Assembly.

It was considered that Standing Orders did not reflect current practice and the Committee brought forward amendments relating to divisions, voting, the appointment of tellers and the closing of doors which were agreed by the Assembly.

In the 2007-08 Session the Committee published its *Report on Committee Systems and Structures* which recommended that the Assembly should endorse the creation of joint Committees. The Committee took this recommendation forward and its review resulted in revised Standing Orders being agreed by the Assembly on 19 January 2009. These allowed a number of options when two or more Committees are considering a matter of joint concern, including the setting up of an ad hoc joint Committee. The amended Standing Orders were used by the Committee for Finance and Personnel and the Committee for Regional Development when they considered options for the Executive to mitigate the recession.

While reviewing other Standing Orders, the Committee noted problems arising from the definitions of common terms, such as working days and sitting days. These were reviewed and the amended Standing Order was agreed by the Assembly.

The Committee agreed that a number of minor and technical changes would be incorporated into a complete reprint of Standing Orders during the 2009 summer recess.

The Committee has agreed a challenging work programme for the forthcoming 2009-10 Session. The programme will include the completion of the inquiry into legislative consent motions and developing new Standing Orders relating to the devolution of policing and justice, should these powers be devolved.

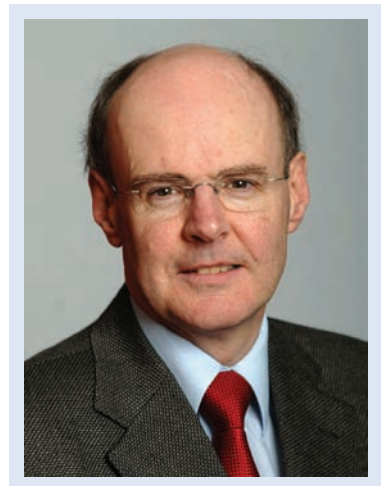
Committee on Standards and Privileges

The focus of the Committee during the 2008/09 Session included the review of the Assembly's Code of Conduct and the consideration of a number of complaints against Members. The Committee held 25 meetings during the 2008-09 Parliamentary Session.

The Committee completed an extensive review of the Northern Ireland Assembly's Code of Conduct, the aim of which was to ensure that there is public trust and confidence in the integrity of elected representatives. The Committee then introduced a number of changes that were designed to increase transparency and accountability and its review of the Code of Conduct was approved by the Assembly in June 2009. The most significant changes to the Code were that Members will now be required to register all outside earnings and the time they spend on these activities and will also need to register family members who benefit from any Member's allowance. The Assembly will also be able to suspend Members without pay if they are found to have breached the new Code.

During the 2008-09 Session Mr Tom Frawley continued to act as Interim Assembly Commissioner for Standards. In this role he carried out independent investigations into complaints against Members and reported back to the Committee. Ten complaints were referred to the Interim Commissioner during this Session. In addition to these, the Interim Commissioner had seven cases to investigate that had been carried over from the previous Session, and one further case, the investigation into which had been suspended for a period.

Of these 18 cases, 12 have been completed. The completion of these cases led to the Committee publishing seven reports. Each of these reports set out the complaint, the Interim Commissioner's investigation into the complaint and the Committee's consideration of the issues and judgement on whether the Code of Conduct had been breached. In total, one complaint was upheld and a further complaint was partially upheld.



The Members are:

Mr Declan O'Loan, Chairperson ¹

Mr Willie Clarke, Deputy Chairperson ²

Mr Allan Bresland

Mr Francie Brolly

Rev Dr Robert Coulter

Mr Jonathan Craig ³

Mr David Hilditch

Mr Paul Maskey ^{4,5}

Mr Alastair Ross ⁶

Mr George Savage

Mr Brian Wilson

¹ Mr Declan O'Loan replaced Mrs Carmel Hanna as Chairperson with effect from 3 July 2009.

² Mr Clarke replaced Mr McHugh as Deputy Chairperson with effect from 21 January 2008.

³ Mr Jonathan Craig replaced Mr Alex Easton as a Member of the Committee with effect from 15 September 2008.

⁴ Mrs McGill replaced Mr McHugh as a Member of the Committee with effect from 28 January 2008.

A Working Assembly

- 5 *Mr Maskey replaced Mrs McGill as a Member of the Committee with effect from 20 May 2008.*
- 6 *Mr Ross replaced Mr Adrian McQuillan as a Member of the Committee with effect from 29 May 2007.*

As part of a report by the Committee into a complaint against a Member, the Committee called for an urgent review of the rules governing MLAs' office cost allowances. The Assembly Commission agreed to carry out such a review and this important work is well under way.

Among the Committee's key priorities for the next Session is the appointment of a Commissioner for Standards, having first given consideration to the most appropriate arrangements and circumstances in relation to such an appointment. The Committee will oversee the introduction of the new Code of Conduct, monitoring progress and considering as required any complaints against Members. The Committee will also approve and introduce new regulations on all-party groups.

The Committee will continue to keep the issue of Members' conduct under review and will not hesitate from taking whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the public can have confidence in the integrity of the Assembly and its Members.

Public Accounts Committee

The Public Accounts Committee focuses on holding to account those charged with spending public money and ensuring that improvements in public service are introduced. Through its investigations and reports, the Committee identifies the lessons that must be learned and promotes best practice for the future.

The Committee takes very seriously its role in deciding which Audit Office reports it will take evidence and report on with a view to improving accountability and financial governance mechanisms in the public sector.

During this Session, the Committee met formally 33 times. Eight of the meetings were evidence Sessions that were conducted in the Senate Chamber; 20 were partly closed or closed; and five meetings were held externally, four of which were evidence Sessions. The purpose of most closed Sessions was to consider the approach to specific reports, enabling Members to explore the facts and increase their understanding of the more complex findings in the reports.

The external meetings were held at the Northern Ireland Audit Office (Belfast); the Stormont Hotel (Belfast); Altnagelvin Area Hospital; Intertrade Ireland (Newry); and CAFRE Greenmount College Antrim.

During the 2008-09 Session, the Committee held inquiries and reported on 12 Audit Office reports, making 133 recommendations to improve financial accountability to the taxpayer, and monitoring the Departments' progress in implementing them. In addition, the Committee made three composite reports comprising inquiries conducted by correspondence.

Although it would be unrealistic to mention all the reports published by the Committee during the 2008-09 Session, some deserve special mention.

In its investigation into the private finance initiative (PFI) Laboratory and Pharmacy Centre at Altnagelvin, the Committee visited



The Members are:

Mr Paul Maskey (Chairperson) ²

Mr Roy Beggs (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Jonathan Craig

Mr John Dallat

Mr Trevor Lunn

Mr Patsy McGlone ^{1,8}

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin

Ms Dawn Purvis

Mr George Robinson ⁶

Mr Jim Shannon ⁷

Mr Jim Wells ^{3,4,5}

¹ With effect from 4 March 2008 Mr Thomas Burns replaced Mr Patsy McGlone.

² With effect from 20 May 2008 Mr Paul Maskey replaced Mr John O'Dowd.

³ With effect from 1 October 2007 Mr Mickey Brady replaced Mr Willie Clarke.

⁴ With effect from 21 January 2008 Mr Ian McCrea replaced Mr Mickey Brady.

⁵ With effect from 27 May 2008 Mr Jim Wells replaced Mr Ian McCrea.

A Working Assembly

- 6 With effect from 15 September 2008 Mr George Robinson replaced Mr Simon Hamilton.
- 7 With effect from 15 September 2008 Mr Jim Shannon replaced Mr David Hilditch.
- 8 With effect from 29 June 2009 Mr Patsy McGlone replaced Mr Thomas Burns.



The Committee launches its report into vehicle testing centres.

the facilities at the hospital. The development centre was a key component of a £250 million redevelopment programme for the complex and its construction cost £15.2 million.

The Committee commended the project and described it as a complex and innovative PFI project, which overall has been well managed. The Committee had a few concerns about monitoring internal costs on PFI projects and the need to apply the Gateway Review process as the project developed. Overall, the Committee was impressed by examples of good practice in the exercise, and by staff dedication and joined-up services on its visit.

In respect of its *Report on Warm Homes: Tackling Fuel Poverty*, the Committee recognised the positive contribution made by the warm homes scheme, which had provided important assistance to more than 60,000 vulnerable households to help to improve home energy efficiency. Mindful of the high level of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland, however, its report was particularly robust.

The Committee highlighted the need to target the least energy efficient homes to maximise the impact of the scheme and insisted that performance and installation times could be improved. It also recommended that the scheme target rural homes, and made specific suggestions for the terms of the Department for Social Development review of the scheme, including the adoption of a fuel poverty indicator tool and more competitive tendering.

As part of its focus on fraud prevention, the Committee published its *Report on Brangam, Bagnall & Co Legal Practitioner Fraud Perpetrated Against Health and Personal Social Services*. This fraud was perpetrated over a period of seven years and extracted at least £278,000 from six of the 11 health bodies to whom the practice provided legal services.

The Committee welcomed the recovery of the amounts defrauded and £123,000 in costs, and welcomed also the Department's undertaking to review its records management guidance. It also emphasised the importance of remedial reviews being rolled out across the entire public sector.

A Working Assembly

The *Report on the Control of Bovine Tuberculosis in Northern Ireland* looked at the development and spread of the disease. Committee Members showed a strong appreciation of its impact on constituents in the farming community.

The Committee concluded that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development had failed to meet the not inconsiderable challenge of eradicating bovine TB, making progress much too slowly and at a prohibitive cost. It recommended that the Department adopt a much more strategic approach to achieve progress, shifting its focus to eradication of the disease rather than mere containment.

In its *Report on the Review of Financial Management in the Further Education Sector in Northern Ireland and Governance Examination of Fermanagh FE College*, the Committee reviewed the financial management of the 16 further education colleges up to 31 July 2007, when they were reorganised into six new regional colleges. The Committee found instances of severe financial mismanagement, particularly in two of the former colleges, and made 18 recommendations for the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education and their arm's-length bodies to ensure high standards of financial management via robust systems, controls and supervision.

During this Session, the Committee began its investigations into the unique accounting and reporting arrangements of the North/South bodies. These bodies are engaged in a range of important areas including tourism, trade and development, food safety, the promotion of Irish and Ulster Scots and the administration of EU funds. Their activities are funded jointly by the Northern Ireland Assembly and Dáil Éireann in varying proportions.

As part of this initial examination, the Committee met with two of the bodies while its counterpart Committee of the Oireachtas met with a further three. The Committees then met in Dublin to discuss the bodies' financial governance systems and overall accountability in North/South bodies. The Committees will confer again in the coming year to compare their findings and co-ordinate the publication of their reports.

A Working Assembly

The Committee began an investigation into Valance Technology, which received financial support from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Invest NI. The Committee focused on the risk-taking culture in inward investment at the time; the neglect of existing controls in awarding funding; the failure to use bespoke mechanisms set up to safeguard the investment; and the lack of proper record-keeping and transparency in key decisions. The Committee has asked the Department for further information and will report on this inquiry in the 2009-2010 Session.

The Public Accounts Committee met on 12 February 2009 to consider the Comptroller and Auditor General's (C&AG's) report *The PFI Contract for Northern Ireland's New Vehicle Testing Facilities*.

The role of the C&AG as an independent auditor of the public sector means he can be seen as the eyes and ears of the Public Accounts Committee, the taxpayer's watchdog. During his 15 years in the post, John Dowdall provided an efficient, professional and impartial service to the PAC and to the Assembly as a new institution.



Committee Members and staff mark the retirement of John Mc Dowdall, the Comptroller and Auditor General (sixth from left).

An Engaging Assembly

One of the objectives for the Northern Ireland Assembly is to ensure that it develops a responsive strategy for engaging the public, while at the same time recognising that Members have primary responsibility for relationships with the public.

The Assembly Commission has put into place a number of initiatives in this Session and has placed engagement at the heart of its strategic priorities.

Widening public access to the Assembly, improving and deepening the understanding of its work and increasing the outreach and education programmes—these lie at the heart of the Assembly's engagement activities in 2008-09.



Eamonn Mallie facilitates one of the Assembly roadshows.

An Engaging Assembly

Events: Welcoming People from Home and Abroad

Since its inception in 1998 the Events Office has had a key role in the Assembly's engagement activities: facilitating numerous visits, tours and functions in and around Parliament Buildings on behalf of the Assembly. This effort continued in the 2008-09 year which saw more events and guests coming to Parliament Buildings.

The purpose of the Events Office is to provide all MLAs, the Speaker, Members of the Assembly Commission and Ministers with a co-ordinated and comprehensive event booking, planning and management service designed to deliver successful events. The office manages and co-ordinates the booking of function facilities, the planning and delivery of events.

The types of event held in Parliament Buildings include tours, press and media functions, receptions, concerts and balls and include people from local community and faith organisations, international political and economic delegations, and local sporting and cultural groups.

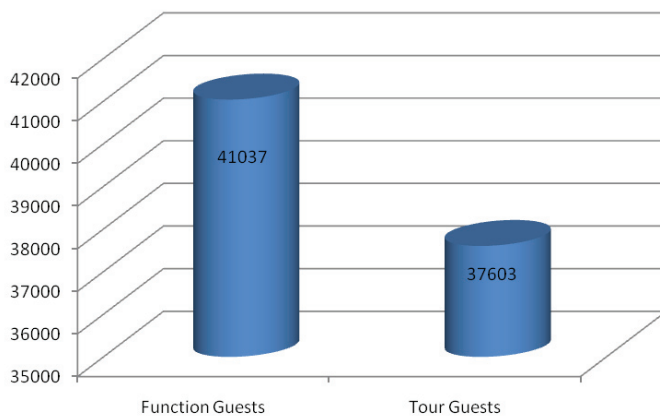
There were 495 functions and 1,046 tours during the 2008-09 Session. The number of guests totalled 65,630 for the year.



Spirit of Enniskillen participants visit Parliament Buildings.

An Engaging Assembly

Guest Numbers 2008/2009



Some of the groups which came to Parliament Buildings during this period include:

- NI Karate-Do-Wado-Kai lobby group;
- Commonwealth 10 pin bowling championship contestants
- Dromara FC
- World Blind Golf Championship
- Ravarra Pipe Band
- Northern Ireland's Beijing Olympians
- Artistes of Comhaltas
- the ICTU May Ball, the Ullans Academy awards
- the Derry Travellers Support Group
- Coláiste Éanna, Dublin
- Israeli and Palestinian students
- Basra development commissioners
- Omagh Ethnic Community Support Group
- Roscommon Retired Teachers Association
- Wheelock College, Boston
- Kosovo guests



The Assembly hosts an event for Morris Minor owners.



The Speaker celebrates diversity at the 2009 St Patrick's Day event.

An Engaging Assembly



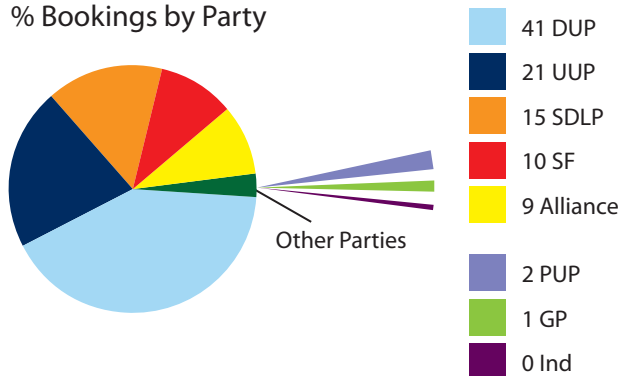
Speaker William Hay MLA, greets Prime Minister the Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP and Security Minister Paul Goggins MP on a visit to Parliament Buildings.

- US Pentagon staff
- Philippino parliamentarians
- Children of Chernobyl
- the Honourable Chief Justice M.L. Lehohla of the Kingdom of Lesotho
- a delegation from the Kurdish National Assembly
- Inuit guests from Baffin Island
- contestants in the Maidens of Mourne pageant
- Kilcooley Over 50s Club
- Notre Dame basketball players
- the Red Hand Thistle Cultural Society
- guests from Rathlin Island
- Ballintoy & District Community Development Association
- the Goldwing Club of Ireland
- the Youth Achievers Ball
- the Egyptian Society of Northern Ireland
- Motor Neurone Disease Association
- concert as part of 'Music in Great Irish Houses'
- the Jewish community in Northern Ireland
- the launch of Assembly's bursary scheme
- a musical evening for Bangor Soroptimists
- a cost of living event for the Age Consortium
- the Northern Ireland schools debating finals and;
- several mock Youth Parliaments.

The service provided by the Events Office continues to prove very popular with individual MLAs and the political parties they represent. A total of 104 Members (96%) have drawn on its services. All political parties of the Assembly have used the service during the period of this report.

An Engaging Assembly

% Bookings by Party



Education Service

The Education Service provides an educational visits programme in Parliament Buildings, as well as educational resources to support teaching and learning about the Northern Ireland Assembly. This includes an education website, <http://education.niassembly.gov.uk>. The aim of the programme is to encourage young people and others to learn about the Assembly, to understand how it affects their lives and to participate in the democratic process.

Although the main focus of the education programme is on schools and young people, it is open to any group wishing to learn about the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Education Service has developed programmes and resources to suit a wide range of groups, taking account of different ages, ability levels and interests.



Children from St. Joseph's Primary School take part in an education programme.

An Engaging Assembly

What does the Education Programme involve?

All groups participating in the education programme receive a presentation on the Assembly and a tour of the Building (including a visit to the Public Gallery when the Assembly is sitting). Depending on the needs of the group, the programme may also include one or more of the following: an activity Session (schools); meetings with MLAs or party staff; or an address by Assembly staff such as a committee clerk. Everyone taking part receives an educational pack containing relevant information and educational resources.

From 1 September 2008 to 4 July 2009, 446 groups, comprising 13,850 participants, took part in the education programme.

Education Service Statistics 2008-09

Type of group	Number of groups	Percentage of groups	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Schools	327	73	10,981	79
Youth	45	11	1,024	7.
University	46	10	1,183	8.5
Adult	20	4.5	479	3.5
Further and Higher Education	5	1	124	1
Exchange	3	0.5	59	0.5
Total	446	100	13,850	100

The majority of groups came from Northern Ireland (85%). Groups also visited from other parts of the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Europe and the USA.

School groups accounted for over 70% of participants and included a range of primary and post-primary students studying citizenship, government and politics, history, and education for mutual understanding. Youth groups included alternative education and youth participation groups.

An Engaging Assembly

Visiting universities came from Northern Ireland, England, Sweden, Denmark and the USA. Adult groups included many from the voluntary sector, the Institute of Directors, teachers and visitors from abroad.

Other Education Service Events

The Education Service worked with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the organisation of a youth parliament event held in the Assembly Chamber on 2 October 2008. A schools debate organised by the UUP/SDLP youth wings (November 2008) and a YMCA youth parliament (March 2009) were also facilitated. A conference for A-level politics teachers was held in March 2009 and a joint Westminster/Assembly conference for primary school teachers in June 2009. For the Stormont estate Children in Need fun day on 31 May, the Education Service organised craft activities in the Long Gallery.

The Education Service continued to develop links with relevant outside institutions, including other legislatures, the schools and youth sectors, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the Education and Library Boards.

External Liaison

Outreach

The External Liaison Unit provides an outreach service to representatives from statutory agencies, voluntary and community groups and business groups to explain how the Assembly works and to encourage involvement and engagement. During this Session, the unit visited organisations including the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, the Children's Commissioner, the Consumer Council, NICVA, rotary clubs, development organisations and residents' associations.

An Engaging Assembly

The medium and long-term objectives of outreach visits are twofold:

- to build contact between the Assembly and the public, with the intention of increasing knowledge about the legislature, and promoting engagement with it;
- to create a consultative forum through which feedback can be channelled directly back into the Assembly, and into the outreach policy writing process.

Work continues to promote the availability of the outreach service to every public group across Northern Ireland, and the route to accessing it.

Inward Visits

The External Liaison Unit develops tailor-made programmes to meet the needs of the many delegations requesting visits. During the 2008-09 Session, the Assembly was visited by political delegations, ambassadors, presidents and students from around the world – countries such as Burundi, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Kurdistan and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Assembly continues to receive a large number of requests from delegations wishing to visit the Assembly – often from post-conflict countries and students of politics wishing to discuss and share experience with Northern Ireland politicians.

Outward Visits

As Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), the Reverend Dr Robert Coulter and Mr Stephen Moutray attended the 53rd annual conference in New Delhi to discuss several global issues including sustainable development, human trafficking, energy issues, and the role of governments in promoting democracy. During this visit, our Members also had the opportunity to visit the Asha Project in New Delhi which provides support, education and healthcare for the nearly four million people living in the slums there, giving them the motivation and abilities to make lasting changes to their lives. Dr Coulter and Mr Moutray commented that the Assembly should encourage efforts by



Speaker William Hay welcomes Dr Adnan Rashad Mufti, the Speaker of the Kurdistan National Assembly.

An Engaging Assembly

young people undertaking such voluntary efforts and support opportunities to undertake similar projects where possible.

The Northern Ireland Branch was also welcomed back into the CPA during the conference, having been held in abeyance during suspension. The conference provided Members with an opportunity to meet with various parliamentarians from across various regions, races and backgrounds within the Commonwealth and to share discussions on various pressing global issues and thereby strengthening the ability of our Assembly to address them.

Representatives of the Assembly also took part in a research initiative conference on information and communication technologies (ICT) for parliamentarians hosted by the Houses of the Oireachtas in Dublin in March 2008. Parliamentarians were able to share their experiences and discuss with experts how best to utilise emerging e-governance tools, how to secure greater voter participation at elections and increase public engagement and outreach using these new technologies.

Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust (NIABT)

The NIABT was re-established in 2007 following the restoration of the Assembly. An AGM was held in October 2007 and this allowed for the election of a new board of trustees.

Two lunchtime information Sessions were held between April 2008 and September 2008 to inform parliamentarians and the business sector on the aims of the NIABT.

In June 2008, the NIABT drafted and adopted a business plan and during July 2008-September 2008, the NIABT conducted a series of educational visits to Bombardier, Norbrook Laboratories and Moy Park. The NIABT also ran an educational awareness programme and the board of trustees met with the President of the European Union, Hans Gert Pöttering. In December 2008 the NIABT held its AGM and elected a new board of Trustees.

An Engaging Assembly

In January 2009 the board of trustees engaged with Jim Nicholson MEP and Bairbre de Brún MEP to explore the potential for development of a European education programme and in February 2009, the annual president's dinner took place with the Rt Hon Lord Peter Mandelson as guest speaker.

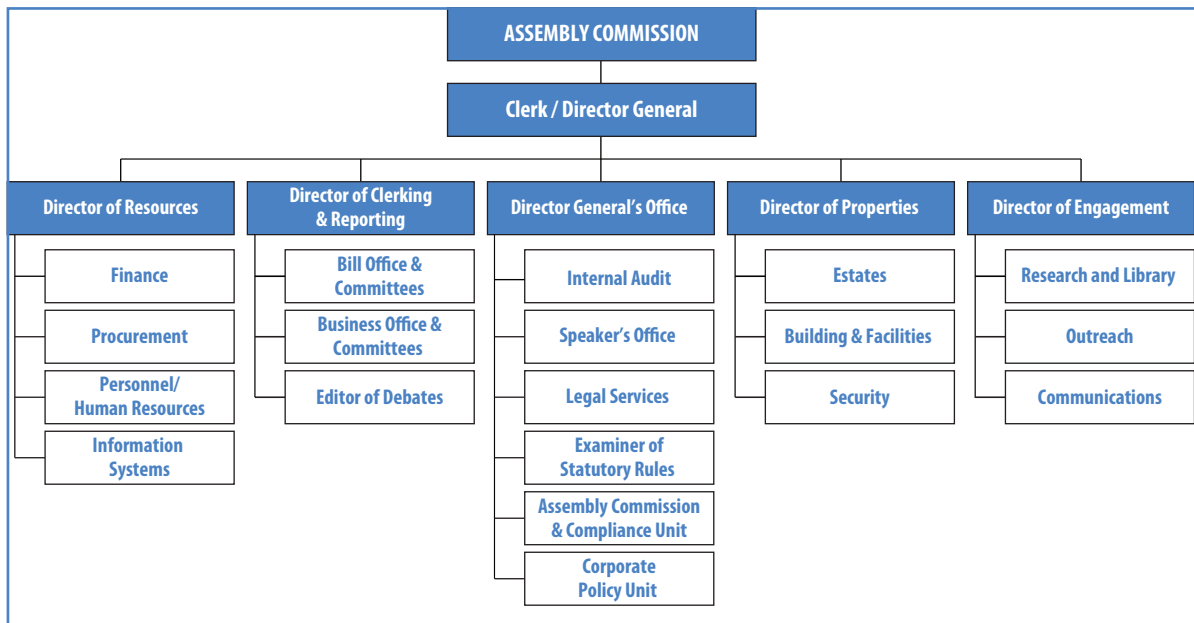


The NIABT welcomes the Rt Hon Lord Peter Mandelson to Parliament Buildings. Left to right are: Sean Neeson MLA; Arlene Foster MLA, Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment; the Rt Hon Lord Peter Mandelson; and William Hay MLA, Speaker of the Assembly.

An Evolving Assembly

The Northern Ireland Assembly has continued through this period to move towards its goal of instituting a distinctive, separate identity. To this end, the Assembly Commission has moved ahead with the separation project which will, by 1 April 2010, have created an independent parliamentary service separate from the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

The four directorates, set up after the review of the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2007, are now embedded, and can be seen below. In addition, all major recruitment exercises are under way or completed.



Over the next year, the Commission will be looking at ways of improving on the structures already in place and moving confidently into the future.

Accommodating the Assembly



A key concept for politics in the 21st century is engagement. Engaging with the public is something that the Assembly and the Assembly Commission take very seriously, and promoting participation and knowledge of the political process.

The responsibility to promote participation can be seen by the purpose, vision and strategic priorities of the Commission. One of these priorities is to ensure that Parliament Buildings, the home of the Northern Ireland Assembly, is both welcoming and fit for purpose.

Parliament Buildings, opened in 1932, is both beautiful and historic and has been appreciated by visitors from around the world

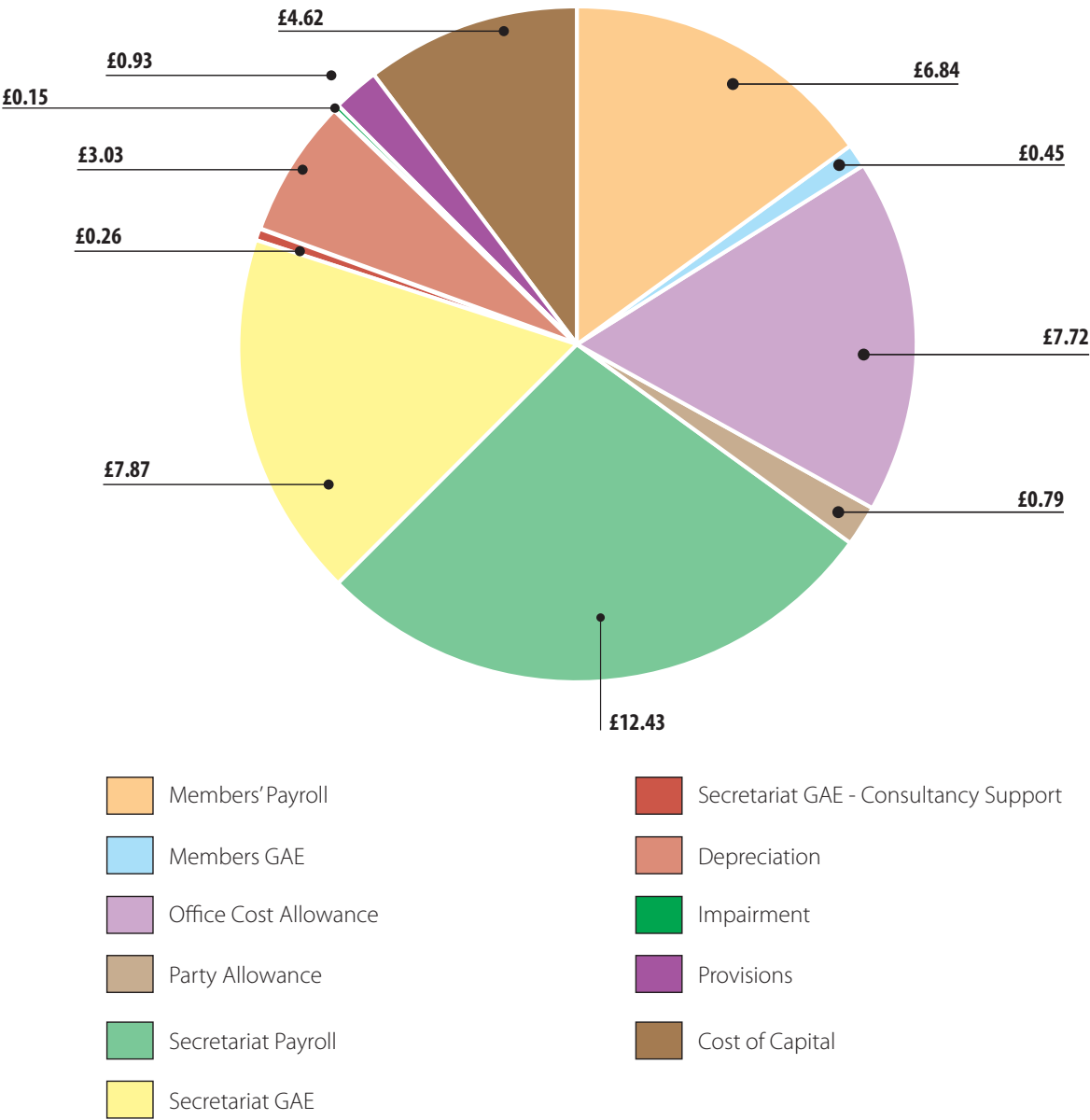
A major refurbishment of the Assembly Chamber was undertaken during the summer of 2008 to upgrade the facilities for Members, improve accessibility and to facilitate better engagement with the public.

During 2009, a strategic review of accommodation was carried out looking at ways to improve the public engagement facilities, the committee room functionality and for opportunities to increase the usable space within the existing footprint of Parliament Buildings.

Some of the recommendations from the review have already been carried out, including the creation of a new Committee meeting room with full broadcast functionality and the creation of an additional room for use by the Education Service, and further improvements are planned for the summer recess 2010.

The Great Hall, Parliament Buildings.

Operating Cost Statement April 2008 – March 2009 (£'m)



Note: (GAE) General Administration Expenditure

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