

Terms of Reference for Review

Review into Assembly and Executive Reform

Background

The review follows on from the initial consideration of aspects of institutional reform which the previous Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) undertook in the last Assembly mandate. The review will build on this and on other evidence and research, which has arisen from subsequent inquiries and deliberations, including from academia, Westminster and the Assembly.

Purpose, scope and steps

The overall purpose of the review is to build on the applicable work to date and to undertake an up-to-date examination of what institutional reforms could be implemented to improve the functioning and stability of the Assembly and the Executive Committee.

The scope of the review is wide ranging and could cover any aspects of the functioning of the Assembly and/or the Executive Committee (as provided for in Parts 3 and 4 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998) with which issues have been identified. However, after initially identifying a range of potential options, the AERC may focus its examination to particular areas of institutional reform.

The Committee's work will include the following steps:

- (a) reviewing the research and evidence which is available from internal and external sources on potential areas of applicable institutional reform;
- (b) gathering and considering any necessary additional research and evidence in this regard;
- (c) identifying the full range of potential options for applicable institutional reform in light of the up-to-date research and evidence;
- (d) engaging with stakeholders to obtain views on the range of options identified; and
- (e) selecting and assessing the options for applicable institutional reform in light of the above steps.

Approach

In conducting its review, the Committee will take written and/or oral evidence from a range of stakeholders to inform its consideration of the possible reforms. The stakeholders will include, for example:

- The political parties and Independent Members represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly;
- The Executive Office;
- The UK Government;
- The Government of Ireland;
- The House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee

- Pre-identified academics and experts in parliamentary reform;
- The Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly;
- The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission; and
- The general public via public consultation.

The Committee will also obtain further research, legal advice and other information, as necessary, to inform its deliberations.

Outputs and outcomes

The review will lead to an evidence-based report that will inform the Assembly, the political parties and any wider political discussions by providing an up-to-date examination and setting out:

- A range of potential options for institutional reform;
- The views of stakeholders on each of the options identified;
- An assessment of selected options, including considerations on their implementation; and
- Any recommendations which the Committee has agreed on next steps.

The Committee's report, which will be debated in the Assembly, will help to elucidate the options and related considerations for applicable institutional reform, with the aim of improving the functioning and stability of the Assembly and the Executive Committee.