

A Working Assembly

The Business Office

The Business Office:

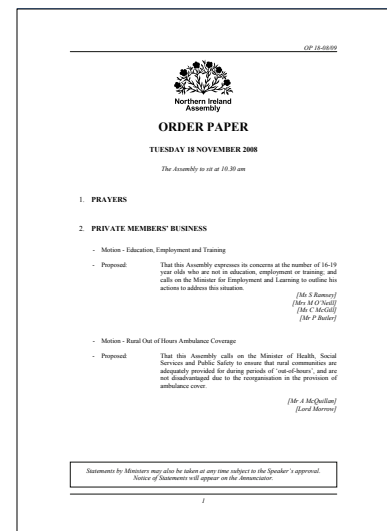
- supports plenary sittings of the Assembly and meetings of the Business Committee;
- provides advice on procedure to the Speaker and Deputy Speakers, and to Members;
- operates tabling processes for motions, amendments and petitions and carries out the procedures for questions for oral and written answer;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

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

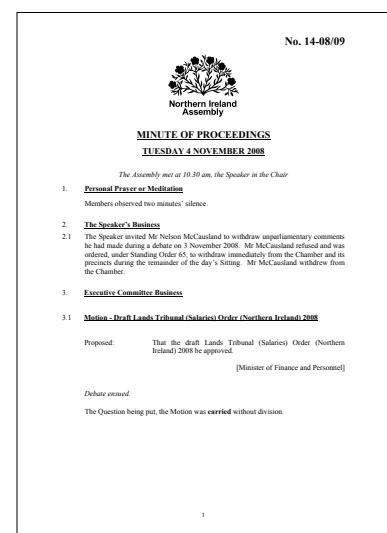
The **plenary section** provides services and support to the Business Committee and Assembly plenary sittings. It produces all the Assembly's working papers for each plenary sitting, including the Order Paper, which provides the official agenda for the day. The plenary section prepares the Speaker's brief through which it provides advice about points of order and other procedural matters. It also prepares the Minutes of Proceedings of the Assembly. The Minutes of Proceedings 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 booklets. The table section also provides guidance to government departments on the arrangements for Assembly questions. It also deals with Executive Committee, Private Members' and Assembly Committee motions and amendments to these 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.

Order Paper

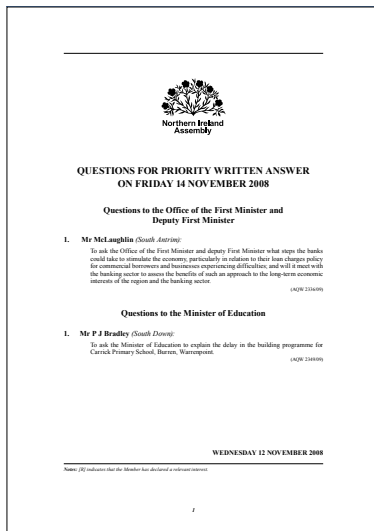


Minutes of Proceedings

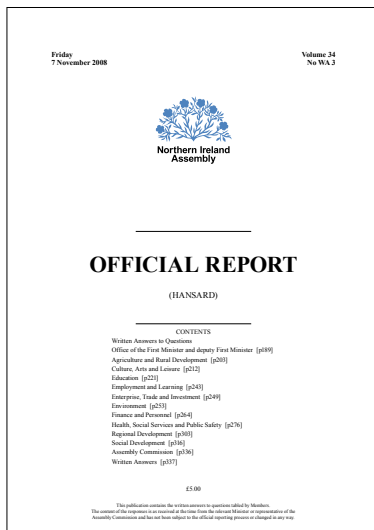


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Question for Written Answer



Written Answer Book



Tabling statistics – May 8, 2007 to July 4, 2008

Questions tabled	
Written	8,991
Oral	4,316
Total	13,307

Motions tabled	
Executive Committee	55
Committee	84
Private Members'	313
Total	452

Adjournment debate topics tabled	
Adjournment debates	89

Statutory Rules received	
Statutory Rules	470

Papers presented	
Laid papers	248
Papers presented	253
Total	501

Plenary statistics	
Plenary sittings	87
Business Committee meetings	46

The 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.

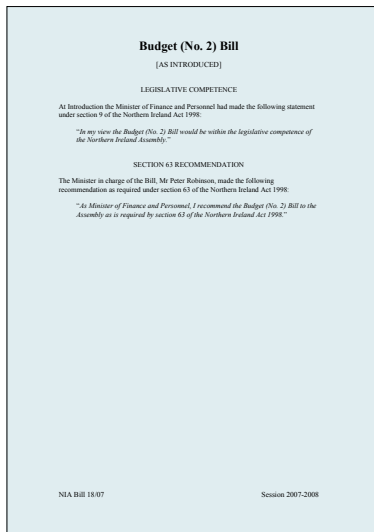


Legislative Process

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.

Twenty-two Executive bills have been introduced since restoration of the Assembly on May 8, 2007, the most recent being the Presumption of Death bill on 1 July 2008.



Bill Statistics – 8 May 2007 to 4 July 2008

Executive	22
Commission	0
Private Members'	1
Committee	0
Bills that became Acts of Northern Ireland Assembly:	14

The first Executive bill was introduced on June 4, 2007: Welfare Reform bill

The first non-Executive bill was introduced on March 31, 2008: Carer's Allowance bill

Bills given accelerated passage: 10

These were: Budget (2007), Welfare Reform, Children (Emergency Protection Orders), Pensions, Budget (2008), Commission for Victims and Survivors, Local Government Boundaries, Mesothelioma, etc., Child Maintenance and the Budget (No 2) bill

Bills that have received Royal Assent 14

These were: Budget (2007), Welfare Reform, Children (Emergency Protection Orders), Pensions, Health (Miscellaneous Provisions), Budget (2008), Taxis, Public Health (Amendment), Commission for Victims and Survivors, Local Government Boundaries, Libraries, Mesothelioma, etc., Child Maintenance and the Budget (No 2)

Amendments

Number of amendments tabled	201
Number of amendments made	159

The Office of the Official Report

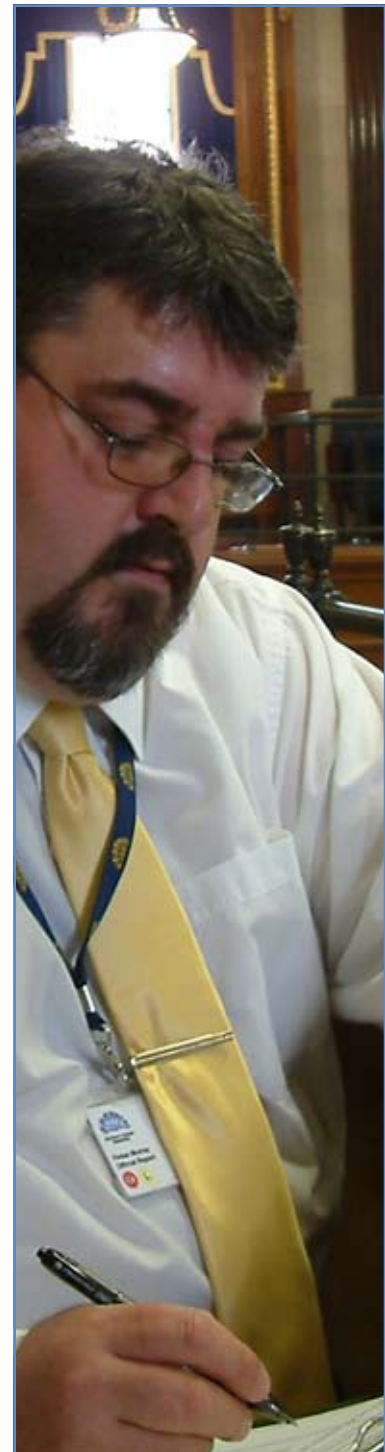


The Office of the Official Report (Hansard) produces the official reports - essentially transcripts - of what happens in all sittings of the Assembly and those meetings of its Committees that consider legislation or take evidence. Each report lists the names of all the Members who speak, provides a report of what they say and records all the decisions made.

The reports of Assembly sittings are published electronically 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 of Committee meetings are provided to the relevant Committee within three days of its 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 and also answers to written questions.

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



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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 in of speeches in Irish or Ulster Scots.

During the period 7 May 2007 to 4 July 2008, Hansard produced official reports for 87 sittings of the Assembly and 354 separate reports of Committee meetings. These reports included a total of nearly seven million words. In addition to the hard copy reports, the Hansard pages on the Assembly's website attracted over 86,000 visits from nearly 45,000 unique visitors, registering more than a quarter of a million page views during the same period.



In August 2007, Hansard and the Assembly hosted a highly successful annual conference of the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association (BIPRA). The office maintains membership of BIPRA and the Commonwealth Hansard Editors Association, and enjoys close working relationships with counterparts in many other parliaments.

The Committee Office

Committees

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 three 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 Committee¹, 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 which have been set by

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.

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

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the Assembly. The Assembly decides the membership of ad hoc committees and may direct their method of operation.

The committees quickly got to grips with identifying the key issues within their respective remits and developing forward work programmes. Within a short period of time, most were immersed in committee inquiries and/or the Committee Stages of primary legislation.

During the period of this report the committees held 645 meetings, 32 of which took place outside Parliament Buildings; a total of 38 committee reports were produced on a wide range of issues. They completed the Committee Stage of six bills and scrutinised 321 pieces of subordinate legislation.

Three ad hoc committees were established by resolution of the Assembly during the period of this report. The first was established on 19 November 2007 to consider the proposal for a draft Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2007, the second was established by resolution of the Assembly on 3 December 2007 to consider the proposal for a draft Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2007 and the third on 21 April 2008 to consider and make proposals for partnerships that could enhance the economic case for viable local postal services. All three ad hoc committees completed their work within the required timescales, and their reports were approved by the Assembly.

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 has given evidence to committees, and information has also been gathered outside formal meetings in a variety of ways including fact-finding visits, major stakeholder conferences, informal meetings and receptions. These techniques have 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: www.niassembly.gov.uk.

Statutory Committees

Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

During the year the Committee acted as an advocate for the agriculture industry and rural communities.

Outside of our statutory obligations, our aim is to engage with the agricultural and rural communities and represent their views and opinions.

This was demonstrated following the publication of a devastating report into the condition of the Northern Ireland red meat sector in October 2007. We organised a seminar that had representatives of the industry, processors, major retailers and politicians sitting around the same table for the first time. A second seminar in July 2008 saw real progress being made, with further actions to build on this progress agreed.

During this period, we undertook successful direct negotiation with two EU Commissioners on behalf of the agricultural community. We met with Commissioner Joe Borg before the council decision on fish quotas in December 2007. We were able to present new scientific evidence which led to an increase in the quota of haddock for Northern Ireland fishermen. We also presented evidence that contributed to the argument to retain nephrop (prawn) quotas at the previous levels.

We returned to Brussels in May to meet with Commissioner Boal and highlight the plight of the pig industry in Northern Ireland. Again, we were able to get agreement for further consideration of tolerance levels for GM grains and the use of non-ruminant feeds.

We have been keen to engage with young people, encouraging them to make use of the political processes. Our success in this area was demonstrated by a case brought to us by agricultural students studying at one of the agricultural colleges in Northern Ireland. These students presented us with a strong argument for retaining a key



The Members are:

Dr William McCrea MP (Chairperson)

Mr Tom Elliott (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr PJ Bradley

Mr Allan Bresland

Mr Thomas Burns

Mr Trevor Clarke

Mr Willie Clarke

Mr Pat Doherty MP (from 21/01/08)

Mr William Irwin

Mr Gerry McHugh (until 21/01/08)

Mr Francie Molloy

Mr George Savage

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course at the college. When they gave their views to the department it reversed an earlier decision to cancel the course.

During the year we visited three agricultural colleges: the Loughry and Greenmount campuses of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise in Northern Ireland, and the Harper Adams University College in England.

We also engaged with other legislatures in the United Kingdom and Ireland. To date, we have enjoyed positive meetings with the Committee for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in Westminster, the Agricultural Committee in the National Assembly for Wales, the Minister for Agriculture in the Isle of Man and the Joint Agricultural Committee of the Dáil. Future meetings are planned with the Scottish Parliament.



We will soon begin our scrutiny and consideration of the Diseases of Animals Bill. We may also bring forward our own legislation to seek the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board.

However, we believe that the industry and rural communities are at the core of our non-statutory obligations and we will continue to listen to their views, opinions and concerns in the appropriate forum.



Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

The new Library Authority and the proposed multi-sports stadium on the site of the former Maze/Longkesh Prison were the key concerns of the Committee this year.

The Libraries Bill establishing a new Library Authority to deliver a single public library service for Northern Ireland received Royal Assent on 25 June 2008. It is known as the Libraries Act (NI) 2008. All the proposed amendments were agreed at Committee Stage before the Bill reached Consideration Stage. The amendments made provision for more board members, most of whom will be locally elected representatives. They also provided for libraries to collect materials on the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland.

Beginning in June 2007, we considered a number of issues concerning the proposed multi-sports stadium. We heard presentations and evidence from the Minister, senior departmental officials and consultants. We will revisit this unresolved matter after summer recess.

Our Chairperson represented the Committee in June 2007 at the opening ceremony of the Titanic Built in Belfast exhibition in Washington, USA. During the visit to Washington he also represented the Committee at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, an international exposition of living cultural heritage staged annually outdoors on Washington's National Mall.

We began work on an inquiry into the development of a museums policy for Northern Ireland in May 2008. We also undertook preliminary work on an inquiry into the underfunding of arts and sport. This work will continue after the summer recess.



The Members are:

Mr Barry McElduff (Chairperson)

Mr David McNarry
(Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Dominic Bradley

Mr Francie Brolly

Lord Browne

Mr David Burnside (until 18/06/07)

Mr Paul Maskey (until 10/03/08)

Mr Kieran McCarthy

Mr Raymond McCartney
(from 10/03/08)

Mr Nelson McCausland

Mr Pat Ramsey

Mr Ken Robinson (from 18/06/07)

Mr Jim Shannon

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We also held four meetings outside Parliament Buildings, combining visits to the Armagh Planetarium and Observatory, Armagh; Belfast Central Library, Belfast; Derry Central Library, An Gaeláras, and the Shantallow Community Arts Project, all in Derry/Londonderry; and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra.



Committee for Education

The Committee's focus was on scrutinising a raft of policy reviews by the Department of Education, which will fundamentally reform Northern Ireland's education system.

Two areas dominated our time during the year: the transfer procedure to post-primary education, and the Review of Public Administration (RPA) reform of the administration of education.

We raised some 60 questions and points of clarification on the Minister's proposals for the transfer procedure. Following consultation, we formally responded to the most recent proposals on 4 July 2008.

We carried out detailed pre-legislative examination of some 20 policy areas in the RPA, including proposals for area-based planning for the school estate.

We also responded to other significant policy reviews including: School Improvement and Literacy and Numeracy, Special Educational Needs and Inclusion, and Careers Education Strategy.

The Committee examined the Department's Comprehensive Spending Review bids and priorities, and published responses to the draft Budget and draft Programme for Government in December 2007. As well as carrying out a particular scrutiny of extended schools and interface funding, we examined the funding for primary schools in detail. This led to us tabling a motion which was debated in the Assembly in early July 2008. A Committee brief was published on the Assembly's website. The Department responded with proposals to increase the fully delegated funding to primary schools by some £27 million in 2009/10.

By developing a highly successful, innovative and informal approach we were able to hear directly from schools and educational providers. During the year we held three informal receptions attended by 65 groups in the Long Gallery.



The Members are:

Mr Mervyn Storey
(Member from 09/05/07 and
Chairperson from 10/06/08)

Mr Dominic Bradley (Deputy
Chairperson)

Mrs Mary Bradley

Mr Paul Butler (until 20/05/08)

Rt Hon Jeffrey Donaldson MP (until
31/03/08)

Mr Trevor Lunn

Mr Nelson McCausland (from 31/03/08)

Mr Basil McCrea

Miss Michelle McIlveen

Mr John O'Dowd (from 20/05/08)

Mrs Michelle O'Neill

Mr Edwin Poots (from 17/06/08)

Mr Ken Robinson

Mr Sammy Wilson MP
(Chairperson until 10/06/08 and
member until 17/06/08)

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We also met a range of stakeholders across Northern Ireland. In February 2008 we visited St Mary's College, Creggan, Derry/Londonderry. As well as holding public sessions with local learning communities, we met with 15 groups of school children over the year.



Committee for Employment and Learning

The Committee's priority during the year was reviewing the new Training for Success programme.

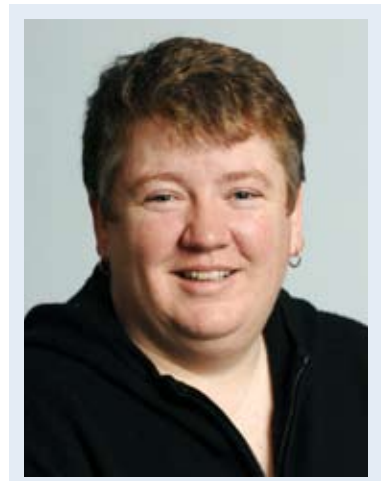
Our main work during the year was assessing the Department for Employment and Learning's new technical and professional training programme, Training for Success. We considered this a priority because of the significant criticism of the Department's previous Jobskills programme. By collecting evidence from the key economic sectors and working with the Department for Employment and Learning, we made sure that problems were identified and addressed early in the programme.

We held a meeting at Queen's University, Belfast, which included a tour of three of the University's key research and development centres. We also undertook study visits to the following educational and training organisations:

- Ulster Supported Employment Limited, Belfast;
- South West Regional College, Omagh campus; and
- University of Ulster, Coleraine campus.

We want to be more accessible to our stakeholders, so we arranged 28 informal meetings with them during the year. The main aim of these meetings was to give the community and voluntary sector the opportunity to put key issues to our members. Organisations that took the opportunity included the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, Age Concern and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

We brought three motions for debate to the Assembly plenary. The first was the motion on our 'First Report on Training for Success'. On 10 December 2007, we proposed to annul the 'Student Fees (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007'. The aim of this motion was to prevent higher education fees being increased in line with inflation. The motion was not carried. On 23 June 2008,



The Members are:

Ms Sue Ramsey (Chairperson)

Mr Robin Newton
(Member from 09/05/07 and
Deputy Chairperson from 10/06/08)

Mr Alex Attwood

Mr Paul Butler

Ms Anna Lo

Mr Nelson McCausland

Mr David McClarty

Mr Basil McCrea

Mrs Claire McGill

Mr Alastair Ross (from 29/05/07)

Mr Jimmy Spratt
(Member and Deputy Chairperson
until 10/06/08)

Mr Jim Wells (until 29/05/07)

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we brought a motion to the plenary calling on the Minister for Employment and Learning to delay the introduction of a revised funding model for St Mary's and Stranmillis University Colleges. Following the debate, we withdrew the motion.



Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment

The Committee's main focus this year was on matters relating to tourism, renewable energy, energy prices, innovation and the inquiry into the role and potential of credit unions.

During 2007/2008 our key work was the scrutiny of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's role in promoting Northern Ireland as 'open for business'. We were also heavily involved in a number of important tourism issues including the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre and the Titanic Signature Project and received briefings from the then-Minister, Nigel Dodds, the National Trust, Moyle District Council and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

We were actively involved in scrutiny of the Regional Innovation Strategy Action Plan and Start a Business Programme, and devoted a substantial amount of time to energy-related issues and matters concerning Invest Northern Ireland.

To see business enterprise and innovation first-hand we visited several institutions including:

- Enterprise Northern Ireland and the Craigavon Industrial Development Organisation, Carn Industrial Estate, Craigavon;
- NACCO Material Handling Ltd, Lurgan;
- Titanic House, Titanic Quarter, Belfast;
- Invest Northern Ireland Headquarters, Belfast;
- University of Ulster (Magee Campus), Derry/Londonderry; and
- Waterside Credit Union, Derry/Londonderry.

We received a wide range of briefings from key stakeholders in the energy industry about rising energy prices. Evidence was sought from the Consumer Council, the Utility Regulator and the energy



The Members are:

Mr Mark Durkan MP (Chairperson)

Ms Jennifer McCann (Member from 09/05/07 and Deputy Chairperson from 20/05/08)

Mr Paul Butler (from 20/05/08)

Mr Leslie Cree

Mr Simon Hamilton

Mr Paul Maskey
(Member and Deputy Chairperson until 20/05/08)

Dr Alasdair McDonnell MP

Mr Alan McFarland

Mr Gerry McHugh (from 21/01/08)

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin (until 10/09/07)

Mr Francie Molloy (from 10/09/07 until 21/01/08)

Mr Sean Neeson

Mr Robin Newton

Mr David Simpson MP

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companies. These briefings informed the Assembly debate on our motion on 'Rising Energy Prices'. The motion was unanimously carried.

We are conducting an inquiry into the role and potential of credit unions. We have received written responses from a broad spectrum of players in the financial services industry. So far we have heard briefings from the Irish League and Ulster Federation of Credit Unions and we plan further evidence sessions after the summer recess.



Committee for the Environment

Road safety, taxis and climate change were just some of the areas the Committee was concerned with in 2007/08.

Our detailed scrutiny of the Taxis Bill led to changes to the Bill to provide for an informal appeals mechanism for departmental decisions on licensing and licences authorising separate fares. We also agreed changes that will establish a role for the Consumer Council to manage passenger complaints and the regulation of fares.

We considered a range of measures to improve road safety in Northern Ireland and responded to the Minister of the Environment on the proposed measures. Our response supported proposals for a graduated licensing scheme. This scheme focuses on driver hours and driving experience, including experience of night driving and adverse conditions. We also supported the proposal to lower the blood alcohol limit to 20mg for inexperienced drivers, LGV drivers and motorcycle riders and to 50mg for other drivers. We also recommended that the Minister introduce a practical road safety education programme to make children and young people aware of all road dangers.

The draft UK Climate Change Bill was also a focus of our attention. We considered and responded to the Bill, supporting the UK carbon reduction targets it proposed. We also supported the idea for an independent climate change committee. This would have representatives from Northern Ireland and would provide independent advice to the Northern Ireland Executive and the UK Government.

During the year we welcomed the opportunity to travel to Market Place Theatre in Armagh, Teal Lough and Lough Fea in Cookstown, and the Giant's Causeway, to engage with the local community on a range of issues including the North-South interconnector and planning reform.



The Members are:

Mr Patsy McGlone (Chairperson)

Mr Cathal Boylan (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Billy Armstrong

Mr Trevor Clarke

Mr David Ford

Mr Tommy Gallagher

Mr Sam Gardiner

Mr Alex Maskey (until 21/01/08)

Mr Ian McCrea

Mr Daithi McKay

Mr Alastair Ross (from 21/01/08)

Mr Peter Weir



Committee for Finance and Personnel

This year the Committee published five reports covering a range of key areas, from the domestic rating system to building regulations.

We published the 'First Report on Workplace 2010 and Location of Public Sector Jobs' on 1 July 2007. This report included a range of recommendations to establish necessary safeguards and assurances before the Minister and the Executive make final decisions on the Workplace 2010 procurement solution. This is the largest private finance initiative contract of its kind in Northern Ireland.

As a result of our report, the Department of Finance and Personnel commissioned a Review of Policy on the Location of Public Sector Jobs, led by Professor Sir George Bain. The review was to address a number of our recommendations, which focused mainly on the need to maximise the potential economic and social benefits from a strategic approach to locating public sector jobs.

We contributed to the Executive's Review of the Domestic Rating System by conducting our own inquiry and producing a report in November 2007. When announcing the outcome of the Executive's Review, the Minister of Finance and Personnel highlighted our "massive contribution" to the process and pointed out that many of our recommendations had been implemented.

In December 2007, we published our co-ordinated 'Report on the Executive's Draft Budget 2008–2011', on behalf of all the Assembly Statutory Committees. To inform this report, we hosted an information seminar for all MLAs on the Assembly's role in the annual budget process, on 17 September 2007. We also led a 'take note' debate on the draft Budget and commissioned the views of the other Statutory Committees. The report contained recommendations on a wide range of cross-cutting financial issues, including targets for reducing



The Members are:

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin (Chairperson)

Mr Simon Hamilton
(Member from 09/05/07 and Deputy
Chairperson from 10/06/08)

Mr Roy Beggs

Dr Stephen Farry

Mr Fra McCann

Ms Jennifer McCann

Mr Adrian McQuillan

Mr Declan O'Loan

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr (from 30/06/08)

Ms Dawn Purvis

Mr Mervyn Storey
(Deputy Chairperson until 10/06/08
and member until 30/06/08)

Mr Peter Weir

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departmental underspend which are now being used as a benchmark by the Department.

Our most recent publication 'Report on the Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill' was published on 25 June 2008. This included wide-ranging recommendations covering specific clauses of the Bill as well as related policy and enforcement matters, and topical issues such as energy conservation and the use of renewable energy technologies.



Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

The Committee undertook a major inquiry into the prevention of suicide and self-harm and has sought to engage widely with stakeholders and the general public.

A principal focus for us during our first year in operation was the inquiry into the prevention of suicide and self-harm. We considered 65 written submissions, held 14 evidence sessions and carried out fact-finding visits to Scotland and Dublin. We concluded that the publication by the Department of the 'Protect Life: A Shared Vision' The NI Suicide Prevention Strategy in October 2006 was a major advance in the effort to reduce the needless loss of life through suicide. We recognised, however, that this was just the first step and identified a number of areas where we believe the Strategy can be improved. On 19 May 2008 we presented a report containing 26 recommendations to the Assembly.

We scrutinised three pieces of primary legislation, namely, the Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, the Public Health (Amendment) Bill, and the Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill. On the first two we consulted widely and reported formally. We started a detailed review of the Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill, which proposes a new structure for health and social care organisations in Northern Ireland.

Other work included consideration of the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review, and taking evidence and making recommendations about the draft Budget and the draft Programme for Government. We supported the view set out in the draft Budget that:

"one of the most significant issues facing this and future Executives will be the priority that should be given to health and social services compared to other public services".



The Members are:

Mrs Iris Robinson MP (Chairperson)

Mrs Michelle O'Neill
(Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Thomas Buchanan

Rev Dr Robert Coulter

Dr Kieran Deeny

Mr Alex Easton

Mr Tommy Gallagher

Mrs Carmel Hanna

Mr John McCallister

Mrs Claire McGill (from 20/05/08)

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín (until 20/05/08)

Ms Sue Ramsey

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We gathered evidence on a range of policy issues and made our views known to the Minister. These issues included the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability, autism services, the stroke strategy, dementia services, and healthcare-acquired infections, such as MRSA and clostridium difficile.

As part of our efforts to engage with stakeholders and the general public, we held eight of our 40 formal meetings outside Parliament Buildings. We also undertook ten informal visits to various parts of Northern Ireland and three visits outside Northern Ireland. We developed innovative ways to allow more groups, who would otherwise not get the opportunity to meet the Committee, to put forward their views. To this end we held 26 informal meetings and hosted two informal receptions in Parliament Buildings. These provided an opportunity for health related groups to speak to us on a diverse range of issues. A further reception has been scheduled early in the next session.



Committee for The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Committee completed a major inquiry into child poverty in Northern Ireland and obtained the support of the Assembly for the 47 cross-departmental recommendations in its report.

In September 2007, we began a major inquiry into child poverty in Northern Ireland. During the inquiry, we considered more than 50 written submissions and took oral evidence from around 30 organisations, including 7 government departments.

We recognised that there is child poverty throughout Northern Ireland, and so we held oral evidence sessions in the offices of Dungannon Borough Council and Magee College, as well as in Parliament Buildings. Our report included 47 recommendations for consideration by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Executive. It was approved by the Assembly, with support from all sides of the House, on 18 June 2008.

On 20 June 2007, we heard from the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the Executive's emerging priorities and OFMDFM's priorities for 2007/08. We supported successful bids by OFMDFM to increase budget allocations for victims and survivors and for the Planning and Water Appeals Commission. We also strongly supported calls for additional resources for children and young people's priorities.

On 26 November 2007 we led a 'take note' debate on the draft Programme for Government and Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland and subsequently published a co-ordinated response to these on behalf of Statutory Committees.

In March 2008, we considered a proposal from the First Minister and deputy First Minister to seek accelerated passage for the Commission



The Members are:

Mr Danny Kennedy (Chairperson)

Mrs Naomi Long (Deputy Chairperson)

Ms Martina Anderson

Mr Tom Elliott

Mrs Dolores Kelly

Mr Barry McElduff

Mr Francie Molloy

Mr Stephen Moutray

Mr Jim Shannon

Mr Jimmy Spratt

Mr Jim Wells

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for Victims and Survivors Bill. We subsequently took evidence from OFMDFM and the four Commissioners for Victims and Survivors before public consultation on a new strategic approach for victims and survivors.

Other work included examining the Draft Public Authorities (Reform) Bill and proposals to introduce regulations to implement the EU Gender Goods and Services Directive. We also undertook detailed consideration of regulations to improve legal protection for people with a disability. We successfully pressed for early action to introduce regulations to protect people with a disability from discrimination in the provision of transport services.

In June 2008, some Members visited the European Parliament and the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels. This was to help us to fulfil our role in scrutinising OFMDFM's work in promoting international relations and co-ordinating European policy.



Committee for Regional Development

The Committee's top priorities this year were water reform and transport.

Since May 2007, we held 46 full Committee meetings and three Committee subgroup meetings, with attendance of 85%. We have met with more than 30 interest groups and stakeholder organisations, and held meetings in Magee College, Newry and Mourne District Council offices, Belfast International Airport and Ballymena Business Centre, visited Derry/Londonderry, Warrenpoint, Coleraine and Belfast harbours and attended conferences on transport, ports and airports.

Our top priority has been water reform. Starting in May 2007, we took oral and written submissions from a wide range of industry and community stakeholders. We published detailed responses to the proposals in the Strand One and Strand Two reports issued by the Executive's Independent Water Review Panel. We also initiated an Assembly debate on the Strand One proposals and, in June 2008, appointed a specialist adviser to help us formulate our response to the planned public consultation on the Executive's proposals for water reform.

We also carried out a great deal of work on transport, particularly in the case for a rapid transit system for Belfast. We visited vehicle manufacturers to gather in-depth information on the subject. Some members took part in a visit, with the Minister for Regional Development and representatives from local councils, to view bus-based rapid transit systems in Amsterdam, Utrecht and Eindhoven in Holland. We also visited the proposed routes for the rapid transit system in Belfast and examined the land and road use issues that these have raised. Our views were published in the Committee's response to the Strategic Outline Case for Rapid Transit in Belfast report in May 2008.

In addition we published our views on issues including the draft Budget, draft Investment Strategy and draft Programme for



The Members are:

Mr Fred Cobain (Chairperson)

Mr Jim Wells (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Cathal Boylan

Mr Willie Clarke

Mr John Dallat

Mr William Irwin

Mr John McCallister

Mr Raymond McCartney

Mr Stephen Moutray

Mr George Robinson

Mr Brian Wilson

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Government; the Review of the Regional Development Strategy; free travel for people aged 60-64 years; proposals for the reform of ports policy in Northern Ireland; the Accessible Transport Strategy Action Plan; and the Varney Review.

On legislation we considered more than 200 statutory rules and began our pre-legislative scrutiny of Departmental proposals for legislative change in the powers and governance of ports and harbours, and on proposals for a Roads (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.



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Committee for Social Development

Housing and regeneration have been the main issues for the Committee for Social Development

We considered five pieces of primary legislation: the Pensions Bill; Child Maintenance Bill; Mesothelioma, etc., Bill; Welfare Reform Bill and the Charities Bill. We consulted widely and reported formally on the Charities Bill, recommending a number of amendments that were tabled by the Minister and approved by the Assembly.

Our principal focus was Minister Ritchie's new housing agenda. Members attended conferences on social and affordable housing in Sheffield, Belfast and Cork. The conferences provided an excellent opportunity for us to learn about various aspects and models of social and affordable housing. They also provided information that helped our scrutiny of the Department's work in this area. We also visited Dublin to see at first hand examples of best practice in mixed tenure housing.

We are conducting an inquiry into town centre regeneration. We have received written and oral evidence from a wide range of organisations on this matter. We are also planning a visit to Boston in the new session to see examples of good practice in this field. We will publish our inquiry report in the next session.

We considered the administration of Disability Living Allowance in detail and will publish a report on our findings in the next session.

We consulted widely with Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships on the implementation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. This took the form of a questionnaire, workshops and evidence sessions. We are working in this area on an ongoing basis and we will publish a report on the consultation in the next session.



The Members are:

Mr David Simpson MP (Member and Chairperson from 10/06/08)

Mr David Hilditch (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Mickey Brady

Mr Thomas Burns

Mr Gregory Campbell MP (Member and Chairperson until 10/06/08)

Mr Fred Cobain

Mr Jonathan Craig

Ms Anna Lo

Mr Alban Maginness

Mr Fra McCann

Mrs Claire McGill (until 20/05/08)

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín (from 20/05/08)

Miss Michelle McIlveen



Standing Committees

Committee for Assembly and Executive Review

This newly established Committee focused on the devolution of policing and justice matters.

During the period of this report, we met 28 times and conducted a major inquiry into the devolution of policing and justice matters.

In the course of the inquiry we considered 30 written submissions and held eight evidence sessions. The witnesses included the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Lord Chief Justice, the Chief Constable, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, the Chairman of the Policing Board and the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Court Service. We also took evidence from two 'expert witnesses', namely Professor Jackson (Queen's University of Belfast) and Mr PJ Fitzpatrick (Chief Executive of the Irish Court Service).

Our report, published in March 2008, contained 41 recommendations. These related to the policing and justice matters which might be transferred, the ministerial model and procedures for filling ministerial posts, including the structure of any new department, the timing of the devolution of policing and justice matters and further work needed. This would enable the Assembly, if it so desired, to request

Assembly and Executive Review Committee

This Committee exercises the functions set out in Section 29A and 29B of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and Standing Order 59 which provide for the committee to:

- *consider matters relating to the functioning of the Assembly or the Executive Committee as may be referred to it by the Assembly.*
- *consider the operation of Sections 16A to 16C of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and, in particular, whether to recommend that the Secretary of State should make an order amending that Act and any other enactment so far as may be necessary to secure that they have effect, as from the date of the election of the 2011 Assembly, as if the executive selection amendments had not been made.*
("the 2011 Assembly" and "the executive selection amendments" have the same meanings as in section 29B of the NI Act 1998).
- *make a report to the Secretary of State, the Assembly and the Executive Committee, by no later than 1 May 2015, on the operation of Parts 3 and 4 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.*



The Members are:

Mr Jimmy Spratt (Member and Chairperson from 04/03/08)

Mr Raymond McCartney
(Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Alex Attwood

Rt Hon Jeffrey Donaldson MP
(Member and Chairperson until 26/02/08)

Mrs Carmel Hanna

Mr Danny Kennedy

Mr Alex Maskey (from 20/05/08)

Mr Nelson McCausland

Mr Ian McCrea

Mr Alan McFarland

Ms Carál Ní Chuilín (until 20/05/08)

Mr John O'Dowd

Mr George Robinson

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the devolution of these powers. The report was approved by the Assembly and referred to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in March 2008.



The Audit Committee

The Audit Committee approved the estimates and corporate plan for the Northern Ireland Audit Office and agreed an amendment to Standing Orders.

We met for the first time on 7 June 2007 and agreed the estimates for the Northern Ireland Audit Office for the financial year 2007/08.

During February 2008, we worked with the Committee on Procedures for a motion which was approved by the Assembly, amending SO53.* This amendment allowed the Audit Committee to table a motion for the salary of the post holder of the Comptroller and Auditor General. We subsequently considered the salary of the Comptroller and Auditor General. We noted the agreement in place that the salary should be linked to what was recommended for the judiciary at salary group 5 by the Senior Salaries Review Body. We tabled a motion for the salary on 31 March 2008. This was approved by the Assembly.

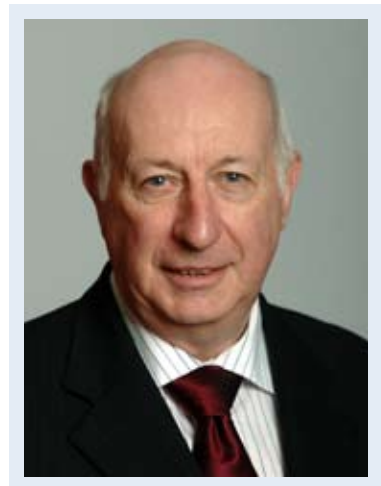
We also examined and approved the corporate plan for the Northern Ireland Audit Office for 2008–2011. Our work also included examining the issue of environmental audit and the code of practice for data matching. We began preparations for the approval of external auditors for the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

The Standing Orders for the Audit Committee were also amended in February 2008 to give us powers to call for persons and papers as per section 44(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The Audit Committee exercises the functions laid upon the Assembly by Section 66 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Standing Order 58, namely to agree with the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland the operating expenses of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and to lay before the Assembly the estimate of these expenses.

The Committee also examines and scrutinises the NIAO 3-year rolling corporate plan and tables any motion relating to the salary payable under Article 4(1) of the Audit (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 to the holder of the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

* Subsequently renumbered as SO58



The Members are:

Mr Robin Newton (Chairperson)

Mr Samuel Gardiner
(Deputy Chairperson)

Dr Stephen Farry

Mr John O'Dowd

Mr Pat Ramsey



Committee on Procedures

The Committee on Procedures undertook three inquiries. We also reviewed and made changes to a number of Standing Orders and introduced a new one.

Our first inquiry looked into the potential for electronic voting, whereby members could vote from their places in the Chamber rather than dividing into the lobbies to be counted. We decided against electronic voting because it robbed voting of some of its theatre. We also felt that voting by dividing into the yes/no lobbies provided an opportunity for back-benchers to talk informally with Ministers. The breathing space provided by a division is useful, particularly after an intense debate.

The Members are:

Lord Morrow (Chairperson)

Mr Mervyn Storey
(Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Mickey Brady (from 20/05/2008)

Mr Francie Brolly

Lord Browne

Mr Willie Clarke (until 20/05/08)

Mr Raymond McCartney

Mr David McClarty

Mr Adrian McQuillan

Mr Sean Neeson

Mr Declan O'Loan

Mr Ken Robinson

Our second inquiry looked into the current structure and systems which apply to Assembly committees. We examined issues such as reducing membership, using substitutes and rapporteurs, days and times of committee meetings, quorum and joint committees. Our report, which was debated in the Assembly on 2 June 2008, made recommendations on quorum and on introducing joint committees. An amendment to Standing Orders allowing for a reduced quorum in certain limited circumstances was introduced on 1 July 2008. We have begun work on a new Standing Order on joint committees.

While we have not yet reported to the Assembly, we have completed our third inquiry into private bills and drafted a policy on procedures for private bills. The inquiry examined: the stages that private bills would be expected to go through; the role of a private bill committee; the use of parliamentary agents; and the lodgement of objections and fees.

We also carried out a number of smaller reviews of possible new procedures. This included a procedure allowing for a 'right of reply' for members of the public who had been adversely named during Assembly proceedings. After considering this possibility we decided

In accordance with Standing Order 54 the Committee on Procedures considers and reviews on an ongoing basis the Standing Orders and procedures of the Assembly.

against it. After detailed consideration we did bring a totally new Standing Order called 'Matters of the Day' to the Assembly. It gained Assembly approval on 29 April 2008. This new Standing Order provides a formal procedure for Members to comment on events or incidences of significant public interest. Work on a new Standing Order to allow for written Ministerial statements is ongoing.

On 1 July 2008 we gained Assembly approval for a number of amendments to Standing Orders. These included: allowing all Assembly committees powers as per section 44(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; changing the length of time for tabling amendments to motions (SO15); amending the Standing Orders on committees for clarity and grammar (SO46-48); amending the Standing Order for the Business Committee for clarity and grammar (SO50); and adding a new section to the Standing Orders on interpretation regarding the nominating officer (SO76).

Finally, we visited the Scottish Parliament, House of Commons and the Irish Parliament to learn about best practice. These visits contributed to our knowledge of procedures and proved very helpful to us in our inquiries and reviews.



Committee on Standards and Privileges

The Committee on Standards and Privileges' focus was on undertaking an extensive review of the Assembly's Code of Conduct and the Guide to the Rules Relating to the Conduct of Members.

The Northern Ireland Assembly Code of Conduct and the Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members had not been reviewed since 2002 and we recognised the need to make this our priority.

Further to holding public evidence sessions into the revised Code and Guide, and considering other examples of best practice, we put our suggested amendments out to public consultation.

This consultation concluded on 4 August 2008.

We will consider all submissions in the autumn before laying the amended Code and Guide before the Assembly for agreement.

We also agreed an arrangement with the Assembly Ombudsman to act as the Interim Assembly Commissioner for Standards. In this role he carries out independent investigations into complaints against MLAs and reports back to us.

The Members are:

Mrs Carmel Hanna (Chairperson)

Mr Willie Clarke
(Deputy Chairperson from 21/01/08)

Mr Allan Bresland

Mr Francie Brolly

Rev Dr Robert Coulter

Mr Alex Easton

Mr David Hilditch

Mr Paul Maskey (from 28/05/08)

Mrs Claire McGill
(from 28/01/08 until 20/05/08)

Mr Gerry McHugh
(Deputy Chairperson until 21/01/08
and Member until 28/01/08)

Mr Adrian McQuillan (until 29/05/07)

Mr Alastair Ross (from 29/05/07)

Mr George Savage

Mr Brian Wilson

The Committee on Standards and Privileges has the power to:

- consider specific matters relating to privilege referred to it by the Assembly
- oversee the work of the Assembly Clerk of Standards
- examine the arrangements for the compilation, maintenance and accessibility of the Register of Members' Interests and any other registers of interest established by the Assembly
- review from time to time the form and content of those registers
- consider any specific complaints made in relation to the registering or declaring of interests referred to it
- consider any matter relating to the conduct of Members, including specific complaints in relation to alleged breaches of any code to which the Assembly has agreed and which have been drawn to the Committee's attention; and recommend any modifications to any Assembly code of conduct as from time to time appear necessary.

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During the year we referred 15 different issues for investigation to the Interim Assembly Commissioner for Standards. The Interim Commissioner considered all of these issues and further to his advice two of these issues proceeded to full investigation and warranted the production of a Committee report. These reports are published on the Committee's website.

We also registered and approved nine All Party Groups or All Party Assembly Groups in this time period.





Public Accounts Committee

The Public Accounts Committee holds to account those responsible for spending public monies and seeks sustained improvements to the public service by identifying lessons from the past and promoting best practice for the future.

This has been an extremely busy and demanding period for us in not only taking over work commenced at Westminster, but beginning our own selection and consideration of the reports of the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Departmental Accounting Officers and senior managers were regularly before the Committee in public session to answer Members' questions and to explain their plans for the future. From the outset, we made clear to those coming before us that we welcomed innovation in the interests of efficiency, where the risk has been well thought through and managed. On this basis, the Committee has sought to give all a fair hearing. We believe that this approach has produced positive outcomes.

We published 17 reports that not only identified problem areas but made positive recommendations on the way forward.

It would be unrealistic to mention in detail all of the Committee's reports but some do deserve special mention:

- **Report on the Transfer of Surplus Land in the PFI Education Pathfinder Project** – this report clearly showed how not to transact a PFI project and set the minimum standards for future projects.
- **Report on Use of Consultants** – this report raised serious concerns at what seemed to be uncontrolled expenditure on private consultants in the public service.

In accordance with Standing Order 56 the Public Accounts Committee considers accounts and reports on accounts laid before the Assembly.

The Members are:

Mr Paul Maskey (Member and Chairperson from 20/05/08)

Mr Roy Beggs (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Mickey Brady
(from 01/10/07 until 21/01/08)

Mr Thomas Burns (from 04/03/08)

Mr Jonathan Craig

Mr Willie Clarke (until 1/10/07)

Mr John Dallat

Mr Simon Hamilton

Mr David Hilditch

Mr Trevor Lunn

Mr Ian McCrea
(from 01/10/07 until 27/05/08)

Mr Patsy McGlone (until 04/03/08)

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin

Mr John O'Dowd (Member and Chairperson until 25/05/08)

Ms Dawn Purvis

Mr Jim Wells (from 27/05/08)

- **Report on Good Governance** – Effective Relationships between Departments and their Arm's Length Bodies – this report emphasised the continuing responsibilities that departments have to ensure that adequate controls are always in place where public funding is involved.
- **Report on National Fraud Initiative** – this was a unique report in that the Committee wished to show its support for the extension of the National Fraud Initiative to Northern Ireland and to encourage all public bodies to participate.

We look forward to building on our achievements in the coming year. We will focus on issues of governance, in particular, ensuring that there is a strong culture of accountability in departments' relationships with their Arm's Length Bodies. It will not be enough to have the right structures in place. Good governance will need to be seen to be delivered.

In April 2008, the Committee Chairperson and Clerk attended the first ever meeting of Public Accounts Committee Chairs and Clerks from throughout these islands in Cardiff. It is hoped that these contacts can be built upon over the coming year to allow for further improvements to our working practices.