The Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC)

The Assembly and Executive Review Committee is a Standing Committee of the Assembly The role of AERC is to review matters relating to the functioning of the Assembly and the Executive.

2017 - 2022

In the 2017-22 Mandate, following the New Decade, New Approach Deal, the Committee commissioned an independent review of the *entitlements of an official opposition*, which resulted in changes to the rules (Standing Orders) about formation of 'the Opposition' and stronger entitlements (eg speaking and questioning rights in the Chamber). The Committee also undertook preliminary evidence gathering on potential institutional reforms regarding the removal of the designations requirement (to be replaced with a requirement for weighted majorities on certain decisions) and the titles and method of appointing the First and deputy First Ministers to reflect the joint and equal nature of the office and the principle of partnership. The evidence gathered was published and the Committee recommended in its Legacy Report that the next AERC continue this work.

2022 - 2027

The AERC has undertaken a number of reviews in the current mandate, including the following:

Review into Assembly and Executive Reform

The current AERC has built on the work of the previous committee in this area continuing to consider "institutional reforms which could improve the functioning and stability of the Assembly and the Executive Committee".

An online consultation on Citizen Space closed at the end of June 2025 and the Committee undertook a comprehensive review of available research and evidence relating to institutional reform, which was followed by a process of gathering further written and oral evidence. Following consideration of all the evidence gathered, there will be an evidence-based report which will be debated in the Assembly before the end of the mandate.

See separate Assembly Research paper – *Assembly and Executive Reform – a Literature Review.*

See also a paper from University College London – *Reform of Stormont: Options for discussion.*

Review of Assembly Committee Engagement on Cross-cutting Executive Strategies

With statutory committees each scrutinising a single department it is vital that the Assembly ensures that it is properly scrutinising strategies which cut across the remits of more than one department. The AERC has identified 108 strategies that cut across multiple departments and have real potential to improve the lives of citizens. For example, the Department for Communities is the lead department for the Executive's Gender Equality strategy, but all other departments have responsibilities in delivering it. The Department of Education is responsible for the Executive's Early Learning and Childcare Strategy; however, the Department of Health, Department for the Economy, Department for Communities, Department of Finance and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs all contribute to its delivery. In addition, a whole-of-Government approach is usually required to deliver these strategies well – including Arm's Length Bodies, Local Government and the Community and Voluntary Sector.

The Review was suggested by the Executive Office following correspondence from the Committee for the Communities in order to ensure the scrutiny of these strategies is effectively managed.

The Committee has considered two pieces of research which provided an overview of cross-cutting scrutiny in other legislatures. It also considered the Citizen Space submissions following its public call for evidence and has heard oral evidence from the Head of the Civil Service and six Permanent Secretaries. It will hear from third sector stakeholders (non-governmental groups, eg charities and voluntary groups) soon and expects to report its recommendations to the Assembly after the Christmas 2026 recess.

November 2026