



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 1 July 2021

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Karen Mullan MLA

Mr Fra McCann MLA

Ms Sinéad Ennis MLA

Ms Pam Cameron MLA

Mr Andy Allen MLA

Mr Mark Durkan MLA

Apologies: Mr Alex Easton MLA

Ms Paula Bradly MLA (Chairperson)

In Attendance: Dr Janice Thompson (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Ms Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Supervisor)



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In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Oliver Bellew (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 09.18 am in open session, chaired by the Deputy Chairperson.

1. Apologies

Apologies as above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a memo from the Clerk of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in relation to primacy over reports of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO).

The Committee noted that the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Communities (DfC) will appear before PAC at its meeting on 8 July.

Members also noted that the Committee could feed into the PAC considerations at this stage by sending a letter highlighting Members' concerns on the issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to PAC all relevant papers and correspondence considered by the Committee in relation to the Sports Sustainability Fund.

Departmental briefing on the Local Government Meetings and Performance Bill

The Deputy Chairperson informed the Committee that the Department had offered to brief the Committee on the amendments for Further Consideration Stage of the Local Government Meetings and Performance Bill.



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The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental paper on the amendments to the Bill.

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Ms Julie Broadway

Mr Anthony Carleton

The Officials briefed the Committee and took part in a question and answer session with Members.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 24 June 2021.

4. Matters Arising

Response from the Women's Network in relation to the Women Involved in Community Transformation Programme

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that The Women's Network (TWN) had accepted the 6-month funding extension offer.

The Committee noted that a further 110 women had now engaged on the programme but, due to the shortness of the extension, they will only be able to complete the first element of the programme.

The Committee expressed frustration and disappointment at the Department's handling of the matter, particularly around the lack of communication with both TWN and individual Members of the Committee.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask what actions, if any, they are taking to ensure communications are improved and to ensure a more timely allocation of funding to prevent the uncertainty that TWN experienced.

Departmental response in relation to Full Cost Recovery for Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise Sectors

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that the principle of full cost recovery continues to be supported by departments in line with Treasury guidance.

The Deputy Chairperson further informed Members that Full Cost Recovery does not mean all costs will be recovered in all situations.

The Committee noted that the Minister has initiated a review of funding approaches in the Department including the contributions that it makes to salaries, pensions, sickness allowances and a potential cost of living uplift.

The Committee further noted that the review is ongoing, with the Minister intending to make a decision in the near future.

Charities Bill

Andy Allen declared an interest as a Charity Trustee.

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that the Charities Bill passed Second Stage on 29 June and that Committee Stage had commenced on Wednesday 30 June 2021.

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental response to Committee queries following the briefing session on the Bill at the meeting on 10 June 2021.

The Deputy Chairperson further informed Members that they had been provided with several papers in relation to the Committee Stage of the Bill including a potential list of stakeholders for oral evidence sessions, draft questions for the Committee's Call for Evidence and a draft signposting ad.

The Committee was content with the draft questions for the Committee's call for evidence and the draft sign posting ad.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward details to the Committee secretariat of any other organisations they wish to be included on the stakeholder list.

As there was a technical problem before the next scheduled briefing session, the Committee agreed to move to its consideration of secondary legislation and other agenda items at 09.45 am.

4. SL1 - The Occupational Pension Schemes (Master Trusts) Regulations (NI) 2021

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that the proposed regulations set out the authorisation and supervision regime for Master Trust pension schemes under the provisions of the Pension Schemes Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department for Communities to proceed to make the Statutory Rule.

5. SR 2021/166 - The Registered Rents (Increase) Order (NI) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/166: The Registered Rents (Increase) Order (NI) 2021, which allows for increases in rents of statutory and protected tenancies in those properties that meet the housing fitness standard. Rents entered on the register between 2nd April 2007 and 18th July 2021 will be entitled to be increased by 1.5 percent.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/166: The Registered Rents (Increase) Order (NI) 2021 and had no objection to the Rule.



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6. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO) Investigation report on Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite representatives from NIPSO to brief the Committee on the Report in September.

- ii. The Committee considered a request from Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) to brief the Committee regarding post Covid – the way forward.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite representatives from JRF to brief the Committee in September.

- iii. Departmental response to issues raised in RalSe paper 'A High Street Task Force for NI'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy to the Committee for the Economy, Committee for Finance and the Committee for the Executive Office for Information.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- i. Guide summarising the Northern Ireland Audit Office's work with the Department for Communities.
- ii. Memo from Assembly EU Affairs Manager regarding ECJ opinion against Department for Communities.
- iii. Investing Activity Report for Department for Communities June 2021.
- iv. Correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding the Financial Reporting (Departments and Public Bodies) Bill.



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7. Forward Work Programme

Members noted that, at the meeting on 8 July 2021, the Committee will only consider correspondence, Departmental replies and subordinate legislation.

The meeting was suspended at 09.52 am.

The meeting moved into open session at 10.00 am.

The Committee agreed to return to the Departmental pre legislative briefing on the Private Tenancies Bill.

8. Departmental pre legislative briefing on the Private Tenancies Bill

Andy Allen declared an interest as a Private Landlord.

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Mr David Polley

Ms Eilish Devlin

Mr Conrad Murphy

The Officials briefed the Committee and took part in a question and answer session with Members.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

9. Briefing by Sport NI on Post Covid Recovery

The following Sport NI representatives joined the meeting:

Ms Antoinette McKeown, Chief Executive

Mr John Hart



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The representatives briefed the Committee and took part in a question and answer session with Members.

Pam Cameron joined the meeting at 11.18 am.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

10. Briefing by the Arts Council on Post Covid Recovery

Pam Cameron declared an interest as Secretary of Little Willow Productions Limited.

The following Arts Council representatives joined the meeting:

Ms Roisin McDonough, Chief Executive

Ms Noírín McKinney, Director of Arts Development

Ms Karly Greene, Director of Strategic Operations & Partnerships

Mr Paul Harron, Director of Operations

The representatives briefed the Committee and took part in a question and answer session with Members.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ask that the Department considers taking forward recommendations from the Culture, Arts & Heritage Recovery Taskforce for a long term strategy for the recovery of the sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ask for further details on the £13 million allocation from Barnett Consequential funding and to ask how much of this will be allocated to the Culture, Arts and Heritage sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to The Executive Office in support of the Minister's bid for £13 million of Barnett Consequential funding to assist the Culture, Arts and Heritage sector.

The meeting was suspended at 12.09 pm.



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The meeting moved into open session at 12.16 pm.

11. Briefing by Hospitality Ulster on Post Covid Recovery

The following Hospitality Ulster representative joined the meeting:

Mr Joel Neill

The representative briefed the Committee and took part in a question and answer session with Members.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the representative for his attendance.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 12.20 pm.

12. Any Other Business

The Committee welcomed the Minister's recent announcement to extend the terminal illness provision in social security benefits.

Members noted that changing the provisions around the special rules would require amendments to both primary and secondary legislation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to request more detail on the timeframe for this work and to ask whether accelerated passage will need to be used for the primary legislation required to enact the changes.

13. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 8 July 2021 at 10.00 am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.



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The meeting was adjourned at 13.12 pm.

Kellie Armstrong MLA
Deputy Chairperson, Committee for Communities