



# Northern Ireland Assembly

## COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday 10 December 2020**  
**Room 29, Parliament Buildings**

Present: Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)  
Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Andy Allen MBE MLA  
Alex Easton MLA  
Robin Newton MBE MLA

Present: Starleaf Mark Durkan MLA  
Sinéad Ennis MLA

In Attendance: Janice Thompson (Assembly Clerk)  
Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Supervisor)

*The meeting commenced in open session at 9.04a.m.*

#### **1. Apologies**

Fra McCann MLA

#### **2. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson informed Members that she proposed to change the start time of the stakeholder event on 26 January 2021 to 1.30p.m. to accommodate the meeting of the Business Committee.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to change the start time to 1.30p.m.

The Chairperson informed Members that she had been contacted by sports clubs that had applied to the Department of Finance for Covid-19 funding to cover loss of

income from their bar. They were advised by the Department of Finance that, as a sports club, they had to apply to the Department for Communities.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance and the Department for Communities to clarify the situation over which stream of funding that sports clubs should be applying to and to ask that guidance is published to help sports clubs.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee's Call for Evidence on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill was due to close on Monday 14 December 2020. The Chairperson proposed that the call for evidence is extended until 18 January 2021 to allow more time for individuals and organisations to respond.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to extend the deadline until 18 January 2021.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday December 2020.

### **4. Matters Arising**

Members noted the latest report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

Members considered a reply from the Cliff Edge Coalition to Committee queries on welfare reform mitigations.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to reinforce the points made by the Cliff Edge Coalition and to call for the underspend on Welfare Reform mitigations to be utilised until new mitigation measures are in place.

Members noted a Departmental reply to Committee queries on the Welfare Reform Mitigations Scheme underspend.

Members considered a letter from the Department advising that a copy of the Second Independent Review of PIP report will be laid in the Business Office on 11 December 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask how it intends to implement the recommendations from the report.

### **5. Departmental briefing on its 5 Year Strategy**

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Beverley Wall  
Karen Ward

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

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request the following:

- information on the number of staff recently recruited to work on the administration of benefits;
- a copy of the Departmental business plans once they have been finalised;
- a comparative breakdown on the figures on Universal Credit, particularly in relation to advanced payments and the contingency fund; and
- a Department briefing on the business plans once finalised.

*The meeting was suspended at 10.06a.m. and restarted at 10.11a.m.*

## **6. Departmental briefing on labour market interventions**

The following Officials joined the meeting:

Deirdre Ward  
Chris Smart

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

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a breakdown – by age, gender and constituency - of the projected 112,000 people that will become unemployed due to the impact of Covid-19.

## **7. Briefing by National Museums Northern Ireland on the impact of Covid-19**

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Kathryn Thomson, Chief Executive  
William Blair, Director of Collections

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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

## **8. Briefing by the Model Engineers' Society**

Kellie Armstrong declared an interest as John Matthews is a former Alliance Party councillor.

The following representatives joined the meeting:

David Heatley  
Mark McDonald  
John Matthews

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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) to ask the following:

- Why a number of the traditional events such as the Hill Climb, Carriage Driving and the Vintage Bus Rally no longer take place and are not part of future plans for the museum;
- If NMNI will reconsider their decision to evict the Model Engineers' Society (MES) from the Cultra site;
- What range of options did NMNI consider for the MES before issuing the notice in October instructing them to vacate the Cultra site:
  - Was an options appraisal drawn up leading to a proposed business case for the eviction of the MES from the Cultra site;
  - was consideration has been given to retaining the MES on a different part of the Cultra site;
  - were there any discussions with the MES to encourage them to operate on more days,
- If NMNI intends to offer financial or other assistance to the MES to move to a new site – to explain the financial justification compared to them remaining on site; and
- For the meetings that have taken place between the NMNI and the MES regarding the issue – to request copies of the minutes of these meetings; and

*The meeting was suspended at 12.43p.m. and restarted at 12.48p.m.*

#### **9. Assembly Research briefing on the Northern Ireland public finance framework**

The following Assembly Research Officer joined the meeting:

Colin Pidgeon

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

The Chairperson thanked the official for his attendance.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if there is an underspend of Covid-19 funding.

**10. SL1 - The Pension Protection Fund (State Aid) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020**

*Agreed:* The Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the rule.

**11. SR 2020/283 - The Occupational Pensions (Revaluation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/283 which specifies the percentage by which preserved pension rights are revalued for members of salary related occupational pension schemes who leave their scheme before pension age (“early leavers”). An Order is made each year to apply to those who attain their scheme’s normal pension age in the following calendar year.

*Agreed:* The Committee considered SR 2020/283 - The Occupational Pensions (Revaluation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the rule.

**12. SR 2020/297 - The State Pension Debits and Credits (Revaluation) (No.2) Order (NI) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/297 which revalues the resulting new State scheme pension debits and credits to reflect price increases since the debit or credit was created.

*Agreed:* The Committee considered SR 2020/297 - 2020/297 - The State Pension Debits and Credits (Revaluation) (No.2) Order (NI) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the rule.

**13. SR 2020/298 - State Pension Revaluation for Transitional Pensions (No. 2) Order 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/298 which revalues “protected payments” to reflect increases in the general level of prices since 6th April 2016.

*Agreed:* The Committee considered SR 2020/298 - State Pension Revaluation for Transitional Pensions (No. 2) Order 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the rule.

**14. Correspondence**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Gillen Review Implementation Team.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to The Gillen Education and Awareness Group to express support for their work and to request a written briefing paper on their work in relation to the voluntary and community sector and housing allocations.

The Committee considered a request from Carnegie Trust to brief on the recommendations that the organisation will be making following the conclusion of their embedding Wellbeing in NI project in Spring 2021.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to invite the Carnegie Trust to a future stakeholder event.

The Committee considered a letter from Robin Swann, Minister for Health, declining a Committee invitation to the Chief Medical Officer to provide oral evidence for ‘The Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill’ but offering a written briefing paper.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to accept a written briefing paper.

The Committee considered a Departmental letter in relation to the development of a New 10 Year Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request an oral briefing at a future meeting.

The Committee considered a copy of an email seeking clarification on the guidance for those self-employed in the fitness industry.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to send a copy of the email to the Department for Communities for comment.

The Committee considered a response from the BBC to queries from an individual correspondent in relation to its coverage of Northern Ireland senior women’s international football matches and other women’s sport in general.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response to the original correspondent.

The Committee considered a Departmental response to concerns raised in relation to SR 2020/249 - The Taxi Driver (Coronavirus, Financial Assistance) Regulations (NI) 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Committee for Infrastructure for information.

Correspondence from the Brass Band League NI and Salvation Army regarding current Covid-19 restrictions.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for Communities for comment.

The Committee noted the following:

- i. Committee for Finance Analysis of Forecast Outturn - Quarterly Report.

- ii. Attorney General response to Committee invitation to submit a paper and provide oral evidence on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill.
- iii. Additional information on Co-Ownership's plans to develop an over 55 product.
- iv. Departmental letter in relation to amendments to NI Social Security Legislation.
- v. Departmental update in relation to the draft Executive Paper regarding the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill and associated Explanatory and Financial Memorandum (EFM).

## **15. Forward Work Programme**

Members noted that, at the meeting on 17 December, the Committee will be briefed by the Department on the following issues:

- January Monitoring Round; and
- The definition of affordable housing

The Committee will also be briefed by the Minister and by the Arts Council on the impact of Covid-19.

The Chairperson informed Members that she proposed to invite an Assembly Researcher to brief on her paper on the impact of Covid-19 on the Arts Sector.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to receive a briefing from Assembly Research at the meeting on 17 December 2020.

## **16. Any Other Business**

A Member raised the issue of liquor licences in Northern Ireland.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for a list of liquor licence holders in Northern Ireland and whether there are any licences that remain unissued.

## **17. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be on Thursday 17 December 2020 at 9:00 a.m. in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting adjourned at 13.19p.m.*

**Ms Paula Bradley MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Communities**