



Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 13 May 2021

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Ms Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Andy Allen MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Mark Durkan MLA
Ms Karen Mullan MLA
Mr Fra McCann MLA
Ms Sinéad Ennis MLA
Mr Alex Easton MLA
Mr Robin Newton MLA

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



In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Neal Flanagan (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Mr Oliver Bellew (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 9.21 am in open session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 6 May 2021.

3. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

Fra McCann joined the meeting at 9.23 am.



4. Matters Arising

Update from the Model Engineers' Society

The Committee noted an update from the Model Engineers' Society, advising that it had been contacted by a representative of National Museums NI to request a meeting for a mutual update.

Response from Sport NI on the breakdown of Sports Sustainability Funding

The Committee noted a response from Sport NI on Sports Sustainability Funding. Members welcomed the Department's recognition that, although progress had been made in relation to the inclusion of women and disabled people in sport, much more still needed to be done. A Member raised the issue of gender budgeting in this regard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask whether it intends to adopt gender budgeting in the future.

Response from the Department of Finance (DoF) in relation to the Living Over The Shops Scheme

The Committee noted the DoF response regarding the disposal of surplus NI Civil Service property assets.

Response from NICVA in relation to the effects of Covid-19 on the Voluntary and Community Sector

The Committee raised concerns regarding the inability of the Health Commissioners to set Full Cost Recovery rates for Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector service providers as set out under the concordat between the Department of Health (DOH) and the VCSE.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the DOH to ask why Full Cost Recovery is not being met, as per the concordat agreement, and to seek clarification on the Department's position on Full Cost Recovery for charities providing services.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite NICVA and CO3 representatives to brief the Committee on this and other matters relating to the VCSE sector at a future meeting.

Departmental response in relation to the Women Involved in Community Transformation (WICT) Programme

The Committee welcomed confirmation that a new enhanced programme is expected to commence delivery in September 2021 and that, in the interim, to ensure that there is no gap in service delivery, the current WICT Partners have been offered the opportunity of an extension to 30 September 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Training for Women Network (TWN) to request an update on the ongoing transition process, and to ask that it consults with other delivery partners, particularly in relation to redundancies made during the pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response to the Women's Caucus to highlight the work of Department for Communities in relation to the WICT Programme.

Departmental response in relation to the Public Petition to Ban Conversion Therapy

The Committee noted the response, which advised that research and policy work has begun to inform the drafting of legislation to ban conversion therapy alongside work on the Executive's LGBTQI+ Strategy.

Departmental response in relation to Neighbourhood Renewal Outcomes

The Committee expressed concern that Neighbourhood Renewal funding excluded rural areas that have a population of over 2,500 and fewer than 5,000 people.

A Member advised the Committee that they had requested a Departmental analysis of the performance and impact to date of Neighbourhood Renewal funding and felt that the response did not address this.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for clarification on the Neighbourhood Renewal funding gap and to seek a full analysis of its performance and impact to date.

Departmental response in relation to JobStart

The Committee expressed disappointment with the response as Members felt that it failed to answer their original query as to whether those partaking in the scheme could gain a qualification once their placement comes to an end.

Members were also disappointed in relation to lack of detail on the geographical split of the current opportunities offered by Jobstart. Members had previously raised concerns that the opportunities might be concentrated in the east.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for details of qualifications and which awarding bodies, if any, are involved in the JobStart Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting that it provides the Committee with a regular rolling update on the geographical spread of opportunities.

Response from the Department of Health in relation to funding for the Voluntary and Community Sector

The Committee noted the response, which provided a breakdown of funding of just over £6 million to Community and Voluntary Organisations in 2020/21.

Departmental Letter regarding the changes to NI Social Security Legislation following the Introduction of a Child Disability Payment in Scotland

The Committee welcomed confirmation that work is under way between the Department, the Scottish Government and the UK Department for Work and Pensions, to identify any potential issues as a result of the changes being brought forward in Scotland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for a comparison between the changes introduced in Scotland and the current legislation in Northern



Ireland, and to ask if there are any lessons to be learned from how Scotland has handled the issue.

5. Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill: Agreement of Report

Mark Durkan declared an interest as family members own licensed premises.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee had begun consideration of the report at its meeting on 11 May 2021, when minor changes were suggested.

The Chairperson informed Members that a copy of the changes and then a second version of the changes, with further additions, had been circulated to Members by email for comment.

Committee Deliberations on the Bill

The Committee considered the Committee Deliberations on the Bill section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Committee Deliberations on the Bill section of the report, as amended.

Clause by Clause Consideration of the Bill

The Committee considered the Clause by Clause Consideration of the Bill section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Clause by Clause Consideration section of the report, as amended.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for its report on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill to be published.



6. Departmental briefing on the Covid-19 Charity Fund

Andy Allen declared an interest as a Charity Trustee.

The following Department Officials joined the meeting:

Ms Joanna Grey

Mr Iain Greenway

The Departmental Officials briefed the Committee on the Covid-19 Charity Fund.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

Members expressed their thanks for the Department's hard work under unprecedented circumstances, and for its proficiency in releasing funds quickly.

The Committee discussed funding access for charitable groups based in Northern Ireland whose work is carried out in other jurisdictions and countries.

The Officials agreed to provide the Committee with a breakdown of the successful and unsuccessful applications to the fund, along with the reasons why applications had been unsuccessful. Officials also agreed to check whether Children in Crossfire had made an application to the fund and, if so, to advise whether it had been successful.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister in support of her bid for £10 million in additional funding.

The Chairperson thanked the Departmental Officials for their attendance.

7. SL1: The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit (Care Leavers & Homeless) (Amendment) Regulations 2021

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed regulations amend the Housing Benefit Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006, and the Universal Credit Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016, to change the age limits to existing shared accommodation rate exemptions for care leavers and for those who have spent at



least three months in a homeless hostel.

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

8. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered correspondence regarding the re-opening of outdoor football facilities to non-affiliated groups.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the correspondence to the Minister for comment.

- ii. Request from Co-Ownership to brief the Committee on its new Shared Ownership product for older people.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite representatives from Co-Ownership to brief Members at a future meeting.

- iii. Memo from the Committee for the Executive Office regarding SR 2021/114 — The Departments (Transfer of Functions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the rule and for a reply to be sent to the Committee for the Executive Office to advise of this.

- iv. Request from the Transport Hub Alternatives Group (THAG) to brief the Committee regarding the Transport Hub and Boyne Bridge issues.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on the historical status of the Boyne Bridge.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Sandy Row Community Forum to seek its views on the issue.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- i. Copy of Construction Employers Federation response to the call for evidence on a new Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland.
- ii. Copy of the Committee for Finance and the Committee for The Executive Office co-commissioned Assembly Research paper on matters arising from the Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland, also known as the “NI Protocol”.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a paper on potential briefings for meetings in May and June.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss further during a closed session at the end of the meeting.

10. Any Other Business

A Member raised an issue regarding the recruitment of people to fill roles in dealing with Universal Credit. The Member advised the Committee that they were aware that individuals had been written to advising them that they had been successful at interview but that no job offers have yet been made.



The Committee discussed a previous Departmental briefing when Officials advised that the Department had originally sought to fill 1,500 posts but, due to budgetary constraints, this had been reduced to 900.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for an update on the outcome of the recruitment competition, to ask whether 900 people will be offered posts, and to ask when it is anticipated that successful applicants will take up their posts.

A Member raised an issue in relation to the closure of Post Office Card Accounts. The Member advised the Committee that they had been informed that, if an individual does not have a bank account or is unable to open one due to a lack of photographic identification, payment can be made to the bank account of a family member.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ascertain if this is correct and, if so, to ask how much access the UK Department for Work and Pensions will have to nominated bank accounts.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 20 May 2021 at 10.00 am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting went into closed session at 10.56 am.

The meeting was suspended at 10.56 am and restarted at 11.03 am in closed session.

The Committee considered a paper on potential briefings for meetings in May and June and proposals for future informal stakeholder events.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Committee staff should make contact with the agreed organisations to arrange briefing sessions and stakeholder events in the coming months in a themed manner as far as possible around the key Committee priorities



The meeting was adjourned at 11.25 am.

Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities