



Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 20 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)
Mr Oliver Bellew (Clerical Officer)



In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced at 9.18 am in open session.

1. Ministerial briefing on the need for Accelerated Passage for the Local Government Bill

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Deirdre Hargey, Minister

Anthony Carleton

Julie Broadway

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

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and Officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to use Accelerated Passage for the Bill.

2. Apologies

There were no apologies.



3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 13 May 2021.

4. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Ministerial letter in relation to the establishment of a Culture, Arts and Heritage Recovery Taskforce to consider measures to support reopening and recovery in the short-term, paving the way for a longer term strategy for culture, the arts and heritage.

Members noted the letter.

5. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Ministerial response in relation to Welfare Reform mitigation measures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for the number of people that have been affected by the loopholes, to ask how much this is costing these individuals and to ask if support will be made available to them through retrospective payments.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental response in relation to the relocation of the Model Engineers' Society (MES).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask what figures have been submitted in the business case from National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) in relation to the redevelopment of the Walled Garden site and, as part of that redevelopment, for the relocation of the equipment owned by MES to its new site.



The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental response in relation to Post Office Card Accounts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask why it is only considering a Vulnerable Customers' Strategy now when the forthcoming closure of Post Office Card Accounts has been an issue for several years. Members wished to encourage the Department to engage in a co-design process with charities and carers on this Strategy and also to support the extension of the contract with the Post Office into 2022. The Committee would also like to know if a joint bank account into which payments are made for a vulnerable individual, might be subject to financial abuse.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental response in relation to SL1 - The Social Security (Claims and Payments) Telephone and Video Assessment Regulations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask where the 8 venues for appeals are, to ask if these venues are fully accessible and to ask if consideration has been given to the use of venues other than court houses which can be intimidating places for appellants. Members would also like to know how many of the estimated 5000 people who have been waiting over a year for appeals to be heard have had their benefits stopped.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with responses from the Department of Education and the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on the amount of funding that had been provided to the voluntary and community sector in the past financial year.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a detailed breakdown from all Departments of the funding awarded to each voluntary and community organisation.

The meeting was suspended at 10.02am

The meeting restarted at 10.08am



6. Departmental briefing on Budget 2021-22

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Cherrie Arnold

Gavin Patrick

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 Departmental Officials agreed to provide a breakdown of where the 320 staff vacancies that will not be filled are across the organisation. The Departmental Officials also agreed to provide the Committee with a summary of all its budget bids.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 10.49am

7. Correspondence

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental letter regarding the Housing Supply Consultation - Call for Evidence. The Project Team had asked if Members had any views at this stage.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write back to advise that it had no views at this stage.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- i. Letter of response from NILGA Regarding Burial Ground Regulations.
- ii. Copy of letter and briefing paper from Housing Rights to Junior Ministers regarding the importance of including a standalone housing outcome in the Programme for Government.



- iii. Correspondence from the Clerk to the Committee for Finance regarding Accruing Resources: Increased Granularity.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson informed Members that, at the meeting on 27 May 2021, the Committee will receive a briefing from the Independent Review of Charity Regulation Panel and also two briefings from RaISe – one on Sport and Disability in Northern Ireland and one on female Participation in Sport and Physical Activity in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson further informed Members that the Department had asked that Officials brief on a Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) on the Westminster Compensation (London Capital & Finance plc and Fraud Compensation Fund) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to be briefed on the LCM at the meeting on 27 May 2021.

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.

9. Any Other Business

A Member raised the issue that Northern Ireland universities and further education colleges no longer offer a housing degree and that this may be impacting on the recruitment of staff to work in areas such as housing transformation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if the lack of a housing degree being offered by universities and further education colleges has impacted on its recruitment of staff to work in areas such as housing transformation.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to universities and further education colleges to ask if they offer a housing degree and, if not, why this option was dropped and if there are plans to reintroduce it.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Royal Ulster Architectural Society to ask what it would like to see included in any future housing degree courses.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 27 May 2021 at 10.00 am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting went into closed session at 11.02am.

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 the forward work programme and agreed to request further Departmental briefings on Neighbourhood Renewal and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.13am.

Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities