



Northern Ireland Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday 21 January 2021
Room 29, Parliament Buildings

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

Present: Starleaf Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mark Durkan MLA
Sinéad Ennis MLA

In Attendance: Janice Thompson (Assembly Clerk)
Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Oliver Bellew (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in open session at 9.17a.m.

1. Apologies

Fra McCann MLA
Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised Members that there were discussions at the Chairperson's Liaison Group on Tuesday on reverting back to essential business only and on the number of people permitted in Committee rooms to maintain social distancing.

Members discussed a number of issues in relation to moving further towards virtual meetings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Secretariat to review the forward work programme and bring a list of potentially non-essential business to the meeting next week for discussion.

The Chairperson advised Members that the Committee is scheduled to hold its second informal stakeholder event on Tuesday 26 January, on Social Security and Welfare Mitigations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Secretariat to investigate alternative formats to enable the stakeholder event to take place virtually to ensure no Members or staff are required to attend Parliament Buildings unnecessarily.

Members noted that the Minister has agreed to brief the Committee at the meeting on 11 February on the Regional and Sub Regional Stadia Programmes for 30 minutes.

The Chairperson reminded Members that at the previous meeting it considered a Departmental reply on the Covid Charities Fund Phase 2 and had then written to the Department asking if they will be in contact with charities that were unsuccessful in their applications to Phase 1 to advise that they are able to apply again.

The Chair updated Members on a telephone conversation she had yesterday, in response to the letter, with a Department Official on the matter and proposed the Committee seek a briefing from the Official.

Andy Allen declared an interest as a Charity Trustee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a briefing on Phase 2 of the Covid-19 Charities Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a written update on the status of the concordat between DfC and the voluntary and community sector.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 14 January 2021.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee had written twice to the Department on the delay to the commencement of the Jobstart Scheme and other labour market interventions and that the limited Departmental response to its most recent letter was disappointing.

The Members expressed surprise that the issue was covered much more thoroughly in question time this week compared to the information it had received.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to put on record that the it was unable to effectively support the Minister in her role as well as to scrutinise, if it is not seeing all the information that is available on an issue. In addition, the similar scheme available in England, Scotland and Wales has been in operation since September leaving Northern Ireland lagging behind.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a briefing on the delays to the start of the Jobstart Scheme.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a reply from National Museums NI to Committee queries on the Model Engineer's Society.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response to the Model Engineers' Society for information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Model Engineers' Society asking if they have contacted the Minister/Department in relation to sourcing a new site and to provide details of costs to vacate the site and relocate.

5. Departmental briefing on SL1 – The Local Government (Capital and Accounting) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Anthony Carleton, Director of Local Government Policy
Jeff Glass, Local Government Finance

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

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

6. RaISe papers on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with two RaISe briefing papers as requested. The first on Local Licensing Forums in Scotland and the second a note on The Institute of Public Health, North South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group, webinar on 'Alcohol Related Harms in Night Life Settings on the Island of Ireland' held on 3 December 2020.

Members noted the RaISe briefing papers.

7. Lacada Brewery briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Roger Doherty, Director and Company Secretary
Erol Bucukoglu, Director and Chairperson
Laurie Davis, Director and Head Brewer

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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

The meeting was suspended at 10.48a.m. and restarted at 10.53a.m.

8. Society of Independent Brewers Association (SIBA) briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Barry Watts, Head of Policy and Public Affairs
Bruce Gray, Left Handed Giant Brewing Company

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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

9. CAMRA NI briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

The following representative joined the meeting:

Tom Strainer, Chief Executive

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

The Chairperson thanked the representative for their attendance.

10. Unite the Union briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

Kellie Armstrong declared an interest as a former member of the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union.

Mark Durkan declared a family interest in licensed premises.

The following representative joined the meeting:

Neil Moore, Hospitality Official

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

The Chairperson thanked the representative for their attendance.

11. Movie House briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

The following representative joined the meeting:

Michael McAdam, Managing Director

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

The Chairperson thanked the representative for their attendance.

12. SR 2021/1 – The Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Chairperson advised Members that they had been expecting a letter on the issue the Committee raised in relation to the one-off payment of £200 to an additional group identified by the Committee.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister in lieu of the letter had telephoned to confirm that the payment would go to this group once the Department had determined the way to have it administered.

The Committee considered SR 2021/1 which provides for a one-off payment to be made to qualifying persons under the Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme to assist with household energy costs during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 021/1 - The Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the rule.

Members raised concerns regarding other groups identified that have been missed and fall outside the scope of the current scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking that they extend the scope of the payment to include those working families on low incomes. Also to ask the Department to consider another Statutory Rule for those individuals who are awaiting a PIP review, which could be potentially backdated to include the qualifying period for the heating payment.

Members raised concerns in relation to the delay in the payment of the Winter Fuel Payment to entitled recipients.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department copying in the Minister for the Department for Work and Pensions outlining its concerns.

13. Correspondence

The Committee considered a Departmental response to queries raised in relation to Belfast School of Performing Arts.

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

The Committee considered correspondence seeking to give evidence to the Review of the Charity Commission.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write back to advise that this a Departmental review and to contact the Department about making a submission.

The Committee noted the following:

- i. Departmental response to Committee queries re how it will implement the applicable recommendations in the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission Annual Statement 2020.
- ii. Departmental letters in respect of the Annual Up-rating of Benefits, Pensions and Lump Sum Payments.
- iii. Copy of response from Rt Hon Michael Gove re Scrutiny of Common Frameworks.

14. Forward Work Programme

Members noted that, at the meeting on 28 January 2021, the Committee will be briefed by Armagh Cider Company Ltd, Public Health Agency and Omniplex Cinema's on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill.

It will also be briefed by Departmental Officials on the Budget 2021/22.

A Member requested that the Department provide a breakdown of the broad headline figures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking that for their briefing on Budget 2021-22 at the meeting on 28 January, that the broad headline figures are broken down further, in line with their response dated 19 October 2020.

15. Any Other Business

A Member raised the issue of the latest IERP funding that closed on 6 January.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Arts Council seeking details on the latest round of funding that closed on 6 January, including the number of applications and the amount that were successful and unsuccessful.

16. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Thursday 28 January 2021 at 9:15 a.m. in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 13.10p.m.

Ms Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities