



Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 22 April 2021

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

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

Apologies: Mr Alex Easton MLA

In Attendance: Dr Janice Thompson (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk)



In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Neal Flanagan (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Ms Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Oliver Bellew (Clerical Officer)

Ms Claire McCanny (Assembly Clerk, Bill Office)

The meeting commenced at 9.19 am in open session.

1. Apologies

Apologies as above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed the Committee that a new All Party Group on Homelessness had been established and that she was Chairperson of the group with Karen Mullan as Vice Chairperson.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that the BBC had referred to two Committee commissioned RaISe papers on Sports Participation in Northern Ireland. The Chairperson reminded Members that they had noted the papers at the meeting on 4th February and agreed to schedule a briefing once the Committee returned to normal business.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee team was preparing a list of briefings that the Committee had agreed to take forward after completion of the Committee stage of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill.



3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 15 April 2021.

4. Matters Arising

Ministerial letter in relation to the removal of the prohibition to sell society lottery tickets by machine

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister intended to bring forward regulations to amend the Lotteries Regulations (NI) 1994 to allow the sale of tickets by society lotteries by machine, for example through Facebook or the internet.

The Committee welcomed the news and felt that the proposed changes would undoubtedly help charities and sports clubs raise much needed income.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if there was a timescale for the introduction of legislation and when the regulations will come into operation.

Robin Newton joined the meeting at 9.21 am.

Departmental update on labour market recovery interventions

Fra McCann joined the meeting at 9.22 am.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee had been provided with a Departmental update on labour market recovery interventions.

The Committee welcomed the news that a range of schemes had now commenced but raised concerns that the majority of opportunities may be concentrated in the east of the country.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a breakdown of the geographical split of the current JobStart opportunities across Northern Ireland.



The Committee discussed the potential for those young people participating in the JobStart Scheme to gain a qualification.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if those participating in the scheme would gain a qualification upon completion.

Members raised concerns regarding the accountability of employers to provide a well-structured and monitored programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if an assessment is carried out on employers to ensure that they are providing a well-structured and monitored programme.

The Committee raised concerns regarding the Department's consultation process and believed that consulting with NICVA alone was not sufficient.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if consultation had taken place across the Voluntary and Community Sector to alert the sector to the labour market recovery interventions.

Departmental response in relation to a Video Relay Service

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee had been provided with a Departmental response in relation to a Video Relay Service and that options are being considered in the context of developing actions for inclusion in the Disability Strategy. The response also highlighted that work on the Sign Language Bill, however, is being progressed in terms of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an oral briefing at a future meeting on the progress of all linguistic and communication issues.

Departmental response in relation to the Living Over the Shops Scheme

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental response in relation to the Living Over the Shops scheme (LOTS).

Members discussed the potential for vacant NI Civil Service office buildings being used by the NI Housing Executive (NIHE) or for social housing.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance to ask if there was potential for NI Civil Service office buildings to be considered for use by the NIHE or for social housing purposes for town centre living if the buildings, or floors of buildings, are no longer required.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response to the Belfast Metropolitan Residents Group.

Departmental response to Committee queries on SR 2021/67 Universal Credit (Extension of Coronavirus Measures)

The Committee noted the response and was content that the measures can be extended.

5. Departmental Briefing on Amendments to the Pension Schemes Bill

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Gerry McCann, State and Private Pensions & EU

Ms Doreen Roy, State and Private Pensions

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. Committee Deliberations on the Clauses of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee would continue its deliberations on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill.

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



The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a response from the PSNI on the estimated additional costs associated with proposed late night opening.

Members noted the response.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee had received a letter from a group called Free the Night which recently formed after reviewing what has been brought forward in the Bill.

Members noted the letter.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee had received a joint written submission from the Northern Ireland Brewery and Independent Pub Association (NIBIPA) and the Society for Independent Brewers (SIBA) on the matter of taprooms.

The Committee agreed to discuss the issue further during closed session.

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Liam Quinn

Ms Carol Reid

Clause 29: Young People Prohibited from Bars

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee had requested that the Minister add to the amendments already agreed for this clause by ensuring that the Bill contains regulation making powers in order to be able to amend the number of months referred to in 29(1) and to the number of prize-giving ceremonies referred to in 29(3), should this become necessary in the future.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister had accepted the request and will take this forward as a Departmental amendment.

Members indicated that they were content with the Minister's commitment to take forward the amendment but would need to see the text of the amendment.



Cinemas

The Chairperson informed Members that the Department had received legal advice which confirmed that cinemas could be included within the definition of a “place of public entertainment” by regulations.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister had instructed Officials to carry out a short focused public consultation over the summer months.

The Chairperson further informed Members that it is the Minister’s intention to consider all responses and that, subject to no serious concerns being raised, regulations will be brought to the Assembly in the autumn.

Members indicated that they were content with the Minister’s commitment to carry out a consultation and bring regulations to the Assembly in the autumn.

The Chairperson informed the Departmental Officials that the Committee would require the text of all the Minister’s proposed amendments in order for the Committee to progress to its formal clause by clause consideration of the Bill.

The Departmental Officials assured the Committee that the Office of Legislative Counsel was in the process of drafting the amendments and was committed to completing the work as quickly as possible for Ministerial approval.

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

7. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure regarding a Review of the Caravans Act 2011.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Department’s primary purpose in this legislation is in relation to Part 1 of the Caravans Act 2011 and those people who live on a caravan park/site as their permanent residence.

The Chairperson further informed Members that Part 2 of the Caravans Act 2011 contains specific legislation controlling the arrangements



between park owners and those renting caravan pitches for more than 28 days and is the responsibility of the Department for the Economy.

The Committee welcomed clarification on this issue.

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Clerking and Member Support Office regarding engagement with marginalised groups.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss its engagement with marginalised groups at its meeting on 29 April 2021.

- iii. The Committee considered a request to brief from UNISON on the Supporting People Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule the briefing after the Committee Stage of the Licensing Bill has ended.

- iv. The Committee considered a letter from the Speaker regarding the Public Petition - 'Ban Conversion Therapy'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ask what work the Department now intends to carry out to address this issue and for a timescale for completion of the work.

The Committee noted the following:

- i. Sported correspondence sharing insight from the sport development sector, including three reports.
- ii. Departmental response to the Committee for Education re Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE).
- iii. Sports Council for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20.



- iv. Copy of the Construction Employers Federation response to the Department for Infrastructure's Review of the 2011 Planning Act.

8. Forward Work Programme

Members noted that, at its meeting on 29 April 2021, the Committee will continue its deliberations on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill.

9. Any Other Business

A Member raised the issue of the Minister's recent press release announcing the allocation of £18.06 million to projects being delivered under "People and Place – a Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal" in the 2021/22 financial year.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for a written paper on both the actual outcomes so far and the anticipated outcomes, resulting from the Strategy and this additional funding.

Members questioned whether such a significant funding announcement should have been brought forward to the Assembly Chamber.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask whether an announcement of funding on this scale should have been made to the Assembly in plenary session.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 29 April 2021 at 9.15 am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.



11. Committee Deliberations on the of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

The meeting moved into closed session at 10.13 am to allow the Committee to be briefed by an Official from the Northern Ireland Assembly Bill Office.

The meeting was suspended at 10.13 am and restarted at 10.25 am

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee needed to make a decision with regard to taprooms.

Taprooms:

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee had agreed at its meeting on 15 April 2021 to bring forward an amendment on this issue.

The Chairperson further informed Members that the Assembly Bill Office had produced revised amendments reflecting the Committees discussions during its meeting on 15 April 2021.

The Assembly Bill Office Official discussed the revised proposals regarding taprooms.

Members discussed a range of issues in connection with taprooms and agreed to discuss these further at the meeting on 29 April 2021.

Clause 5: Drinking Up Time

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister had provided a written commitment to a review of the extension of “drinking-up” time.

The Committee agreed to deliberate further on whether a more detailed review clause should be added to the Bill.



Review Clause

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister would be willing to take forward an amendment whereby the first review is carried out as soon as practicable after three years following commencement of the provisions.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister would also be willing to take forward an amendment whereby subsequent reviews are carried out as and when the Department thinks appropriate.

Members indicated that they were content with the first part of the Minister's response but not the second part and would prefer subsequent reviews within five years of the first. The Officials agreed to take the proposal back to the Minister.

Cinemas

The Chairperson reminded Members that they had discussed the Minister's proposals earlier during open session.

Members indicated that they were content with the Minister's response.

Minimum Unit Pricing

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister would not be making an amendment on this issue.

The Committee discussed a potential amendment that would place a duty on the Minister of Health to introduce Minimum Unit Pricing within a certain timescale.

The following Departmental Officials re-joined the meeting during closed session to provide clarification on a range of issues discussed during the earlier part of the closed session:

Mr Liam Quinn

Ms Carol Reid

The Committee was content with the clarification provided by the Departmental Officials on the issues raised during the close session discussions.



The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.57 pm.

Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities