



Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 23 September 2021

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Ms Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Andy Allen MLA
Ms Aíne Murphy MLA
Mr Paul Frew MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Mark Durkan MLA

Apologies: Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Fra McCann MLA
Mr Stephen Dunne MLA

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



In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced at 09.05 am in open session.

1. Apologies

Apologies as above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson passed the sincere condolences of the Committee to Deputy Chairperson Kellie Armstrong and her family circle on the recent loss of her brother.

The Chairperson thanked Alex Easton and Pam Cameron for their work on the Committee.

The Chairperson also welcomed new Members Paul Frew and Stephen Dunne to the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write letters of thanks to Alex Easton and Pam Cameron.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received details of the Gambling with Lives launch of their Education Pilot Programme on 28 September in The Long Gallery, at 11.45am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the invitation and for Members to respond individually.



3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 16 September 2021.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson reminded Members that, following the Training for Women Network (TWN) briefing on 16th September, the Committee had requested an urgent Departmental briefing on the Women in Community Transition (WICT) Programme.

The Committee noted that the briefing will take place on 30th September 2021.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with Departmental correspondence in relation to the Review of Welfare Mitigations.

Members noted that the review will be taken forward by an independent Advisory Panel and that it is anticipated that it will begin its work week commencing 4 October 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for details on the reasons behind the actual delays in launching the review and to request a copy of the terms of reference for the review.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with Departmental correspondence in relation to the PIP Assessment Services Contract with Capita.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Departmental Officials and the Capita senior team to brief Members at a future meeting.

The Committee also agreed to request, in advance of the briefing session, a written Departmental briefing paper on the improvements that have been made to date to the delivery of PIP assessment services.

The Committee discussed the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Department's ability to tender for a new contract.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask what efforts were made to secure a contract with another provider.

The Committee noted a Departmental response regarding refugees from Afghanistan.

The Committee agreed to move to the consideration of Secondary Legislation at 09.17 am.

5. SL1 – The Social Security (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations (NI) 2021

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed regulations will amend the Social Security (Immigration and Asylum) Consequential Amendments Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 to ensure that they operate in line with the new immigration system and to take account of the fact that EU Association Agreements no longer apply to the UK after EU Exit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a briefing on the proposed regulations.

SL1 – The Social Security (Habitual Residence and Past Presence) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021

The Chairperson informed Members that, following the change in regime in Afghanistan, the Home Office has established two resettlement routes for Afghan nationals: the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghanistan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). There is currently another scheme in operation which is due to end in 2022 - the Afghanistan Locally Employed Staff Ex-Gratia Scheme.

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed regulations will ensure that anyone arriving here under one of these schemes is exempt from the Habitual Residence and Past Presence Tests and may be entitled to certain social security benefits from their arrival.

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



6. SR 2021/242 - The Private Tenancies (Coronavirus Modifications) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/242: The Private Tenancies (Coronavirus Modifications) (No. 2) Regulations (NI) 2021, which enables the Department to extend “the emergency period” to 4th May 2022.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/242: The Private Tenancies (Coronavirus Modifications) (No. 2) Regulations (NI) 2021 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, had no objection to the Rule.

7. SR 2021/243 - The Pensions Regulator (Information Gathering Powers and Modification) Regulations (NI) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/243: The Pensions Regulator (Information Gathering Powers and Modification) Regulations (NI) 2021, which sets out the minimum information which the Pensions Regulator must include in a notice which requires a person to attend an interview under extended provisions introduced by the Pension Schemes Act 2021 (“the 2021 Act”). They also modify the Regulator’s extended inspection powers so they apply to multi-employer schemes and set the level of the fixed and escalating civil penalties introduced by the 2021 Act.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/243: The Pensions Regulator (Information Gathering Powers and Modification) Regulations (NI) 2021 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, and had no objection to the Rule.

8. SR 2021/244 - The Occupational Pension Schemes (Climate Change Governance and Reporting) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/244: The Occupational Pension Schemes (Climate Change Governance and Reporting) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, which introduces requirements for trustees of certain occupational pension schemes



to ensure that there is effective governance of those schemes with respect to the effects of climate change.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/244: The Occupational Pension Schemes (Climate Change Governance and Reporting) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, had no objection to the Rule.

9. SR 2021/246 - Occupational Pension Schemes (Climate Change Governance and Reporting) (Miscellaneous Provisions Amendment) Regulations NI 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/246: The Occupational Pension Schemes (Climate Change Governance and Reporting) (Miscellaneous Provisions Amendment) Regulations NI 2021, which introduces requirements about trustee knowledge and understanding of matters relating to the effects of climate change on occupational pension schemes, for trustees who are subject to the climate change governance and reporting requirements.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/246: The Occupational Pension Schemes (Climate Change Governance and Reporting) (Miscellaneous Provisions Amendment) Regulations NI 2021 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, had no objection to the Rule.

10. SR 2021 248 The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit (Sanctuary Schemes) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/248: The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit (Sanctuary Schemes) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, which introduces an exception to the maximum housing support available to Housing Benefit and Universal Credit claimants in the social rented sector whose home has been adapted under a sanctuary scheme.



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Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/248: The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit (Sanctuary Schemes) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, had no objection to the Rule.

11. SR 2021 249 The Universal Credit (Childcare Costs) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/249: The Universal Credit (Childcare Costs) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, which makes provision for including an Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF) payment in a person's Universal Credit (UC) account for upfront childcare costs when deciding the award of the childcare costs element of UC.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/249: The Universal Credit (Childcare Costs) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, had no objection to the Rule.

12. Private Tenancies Bill

Andy Allen declared an interest as a Private Landlord.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with several papers in relation to the Committee Stage of the Bill, including a potential list of stakeholders for oral evidence sessions and draft questions for the Committee's Call for Evidence.

The Committee was content with the draft questions for the Committee's call for evidence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule the oral briefings and to issue the call for evidence as soon as possible and to set the closing date for Friday 29th October 2021.



A Member raised concerns regarding the Committee's scrutiny of legislation schedule in the current mandate and the potential introduction of further primary legislation by the Department.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if it has plans to introduce any further primary legislation in the near future.

13. NICVA briefing on the Charities Bill

Andy Allen declared an interest as a charity trustee.

The following representative joined the meeting:

Ms Denise Copeland, Governance and Charity Advice Manager

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

The Chairperson thanked the representative for her attendance.

The Committee agreed to move to Correspondence at 09.48 am.

14. Correspondence

- i. Right to Work request to brief the Committee on their recently published report 'Sounding the Alarm – Advice Workers Fear for Clients' Rights in a Broken Social Security System'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite representatives to a future stakeholder event.

- ii. Invitation from the Minister to attend a reception for Olympic and Paralympic Athletes at Tokyo.

Agreed: Members agreed to advise the Committee team if they wish to attend.



- iii. Correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) on Public Sector Pensions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Finance to support the need for the LCM.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding a call for evidence on the Defamation Bill.

15. Rural Community Network (RCN) briefing on the Charities Bill

The following representative joined the meeting:

Mr Aidan Campbell, Policy and Public Affairs Officer

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

The Chairperson thanked the representative for his attendance.

The meeting was suspended at 10.16 am.

The meeting restarted at 10.25 am.

16. Community Foundation NI briefing on the Charities Bill

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Ms Síofra Healy

Ms Dawn Shackels

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 Committee agreed to return to its consideration of Correspondence at 10.44 am.

- v. Invitation to Chair and Deputy Chair to UC:US Launch to New Guide to Claiming Universal Credit.

The Chairperson informed Members that, due to limited numbers, the invitation presently extends to the Chair, Vice Chair and Clerk.

The Chairperson further informed Members that she was unable to attend and that the Clerk was content for another Member to use her invitation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members should inform the Committee team if they wished to attend.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- i. Departmental letter regarding a minor change in the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) (Commencement No.1) Order (NI) 2021.
- ii. SR 2021 247 (C.9) - The Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) (2021 Act) (Commencement No 1) Order.
- iii. Departmental update on the Department's 2021/22 proposals to support the creative, community and sports sectors impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- iv. Copy of letter to the Department in relation to a European Commission proposal for a Directive on Pay Transparency.



17. Forward Work Programme

The Committee agreed to discuss its Forward Work Programme in greater detail during the closed session.

18. Any Other Business

A Member raised concerns regarding the HC1 claim form for help with health care costs for those who have a low income.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask what the process is for people who need to complete this form, to ask what the Department is doing to notify people that they need to complete the form if they are in receipt of benefits and to ask for further information on the thresholds.

19. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 30 September 2021 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings, at 9.00 am.

The meeting was suspended at 10.47 am.

The meeting restarted at 11.01 am.

20. Departmental briefing on the Development of the Irish Language Strategy and the Ulster-Scots Language, Heritage and Culture Strategy

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Ms Maeve Walls, Director of Culture

Ms Janet Smyth, Head of Languages Strategies Team



Mr Joe Magee, Head of Languages Operations

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

Andy Allen left the meeting at 11.10 am.

Paul Frew left the meeting at 11.15 am

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

21. Briefing by NIPSO on PIP and the Value of Further Evidence Report

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Ms Margaret Kelly, NI Ombudsman

Ms Michaela McAleer

Ms Laura Proctor

Ms Paula Cunningham

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 representatives from NIPSO agreed to forward the Departmental action plan on the report recommendations to the Committee and to brief on the action plan at a future Committee meeting.

The meeting moved into closed session at 11.52 am.



The Charities Bill

The Chairperson provided Members with an update on next week's evidence sessions.

PIP

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a secretariat background and options paper on Personal Independence Payment Contract.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss further at its meeting on 30th September.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.54 am.

Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities