



Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 25 February 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 Alex Easton MLA

Mr Mark Durkan MLA

Ms Sinéad Ennis MLA

Ms Karen Mullan MLA

Apologies: Mr Fra McCann MLA

In Attendance: Dr Janice Thompson (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk)



In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Oliver Bellew (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 9.16 am in open session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee is due to receive a briefing by the deaf community on the Video Relay System at its meeting on 4 March.

The Chairperson further advised Members that there is no ISL interpreter available through the CDP Framework to attend that day, however the Clerk would continue to try to source one in time.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the briefing had been postponed on two previous occasions and advised that the two witnesses both use BSL and are content to proceed.

The Chairperson proposed that the Committee proceed with the briefing with the BSL interpreter in attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to proceed with the briefing with a BSL interpreter in attendance.

The Chairperson advised Members that she had been made aware of the difficulties facing people who have come to live in Northern Ireland in the past year who are unable to get a National Insurance number due to the lack of face to face interviews during Covid.



Members raised concerns regarding people's ability to access work legally or to complete a tax return if self-employed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ask when face to face interviews will resume and to ask how these individuals can get a National Insurance number otherwise. The Committee also feels that these meetings could be carried out virtually given the circumstances of the pandemic.

The Chairperson raised concerns regarding those who work in the voluntary and community sector doing identical health and social care jobs to those employed in the statutory sector but have not received the £500 special recognition payment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister, Minister for Finance and to the Minister for Health asking if this can be resolved.

3. Draft minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 18th February 2021.

4. Matters Arising

Examiner of Statutory Rules report

The Committee noted the Twenty Fifth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules 2020 – 2021.

Departmental response on the Casement Park project and on the sub regional Stadia Programme

Members raised concerns regarding the Sub Regional Stadia Programme, namely the use of the phrase 'subject to available funds' as the Committee was under the impression that the funds for this programme had been ring fenced.



The Committee also expressed concern that, ten years later, nothing has happened in relation to this programme and that clubs had spent their own money on preparing plans and designs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to highlight its concerns and to ask that funds are released to eligible clubs as quickly as possible.

Response from the Minister for Infrastructure in relation to the Casement Park planning application

The Committee noted the response.

Response from the Minister for Finance in relation to budget pressures

The Committee noted the response.

Response from the Minister for Health to queries on minimum unit pricing

The Committee noted the response.

Response from the Minister for Finance to queries on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The Committee raised concerns that the Department of Finance had yet to receive any details on its allocation, priorities or delivery mechanisms for either the pilot or the Shared Prosperity Fund.

Members expressed disappointment at the Westminster Government's lack of engagement with the Department of Finance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Westminster in support of the Minister for Finance's efforts to secure this funding for groups in the voluntary and community groups and the wider community.

Members discussed the importance of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (to replace EU funds) to Northern Ireland, in particular, for the continuation of peace building projects across Northern Ireland.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to ask that he writes to Whitehall in support of the Finance Minister.

The Committee agreed to suspend Matters Arising and to move to agenda item 5 at 9.49 am.

5. NILGA briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Ms Karen Smyth, Head of Policy and Governance

Mr David Brown, Regional Vice Chair of the Institute of Licensing and officer from Ards and North Down Borough Council

Cllr Frances Burton, Vice President of NILGA and member of Mid Ulster District Council

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 10.29 am and restarted at 10.34 am.

6. PSNI briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

Kellie Armstrong declared an interest as a former member of the Alcohol on Buses Group.

The following representative joined the meeting:

Assistant Chief Constable Mark McEwan, Community Safety Department

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



The Chairperson thanked the representative for his attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an update on PSV Licences and alcohol on buses.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Committee Secretariat to forward to Members the relevant part of Justice Act in connection with alcohol on buses.

7. NI Alcohol and Drug Alliance (NIADA) briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Ms Pauline Campbell, NIADA Vice Chair and Director of Dunlewey Addiction Services

Ms Andrea Trainor, NIADA Support Officer

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: NIADA agreed to forward research papers on services users experience during lockdown.

8. Stirling University briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Ms Niamh Fitzgerald,

Ms Rachel O'Donnell,

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



Robin Newton left the meeting at 11.44 am

Robin Newton re-joined the meeting at 12.00 pm

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

9. SL1 – The Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

Andy Allen declared an interest as a war veteran.

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Communities to extend the scheme to include those in receipt of benefits which are deemed to overlap with social security benefits currently included in the eligibility for the Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposal for the Statutory Rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister and Departmental officials to convey its thanks for the extension of the scheme as requested by the Committee and for the speed and efficiency that the issue was dealt with.

10. SR 2021/38: The Pension Protection Fund and Occupational Pension Schemes (Levy Ceiling) Order (NI) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/38: The Pension Protection Fund and Occupational Pension Schemes (Levy Ceiling) Order (NI) 2021 which specifies the Pension Protection Fund levy ceiling for the financial year beginning on 1st April 2021.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/38: The Pension Protection Fund and Occupational Pension Schemes (Levy Ceiling) Order (NI) 2021 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the Rule.



The Committee agreed to return to Matters Arising at 12.49 pm

11. Matters Arising (Continued)

Departmental response on meetings with the voluntary and community sector

The Committee noted the response.

Departmental response in relation to Covid support for large leisure and entertainment businesses

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

Departmental response in relation to Covid sports funding

The Committee noted the response.

Response from the Minister for Finance on the Sports Sustainability Fund

The Committee welcomed the news that any separately constituted social club, which had not received support from the Sports Sustainability Fund (SSF), will be eligible to apply for support from Local Restrictions Support Scheme (LRSS).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance to ask if a directive has been issued to staff to ensure that they are aware that clubs unable to secure funding from the SSF can now submit an application to LRSS.

Departmental response on its 10 year sports strategy

Members welcomed the progress to date and the planned public consultation on a new strategy for Sport and Physical Activity.

Departmental response on local inclusive labour market partnerships



The Committee expressed disappointment that the impact of the draft budget allocation is such that the Department cannot guarantee at this time that funding will be made available to labour market partnerships.

A Member expressed grave concerns that programmes are not being progressed at a time when they are urgently needed, as the pandemic continues to impact on the numbers of people unemployed and dependant on Universal Credit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ask that she brings this matter to the attention of the Executive as more needs to be done to ensure funding is provided.

Departmental response on the definition of affordable housing

The Committee noted the response.

Departmental response on the food pallet scheme

The Committee noted the response.

Departmental response on labour market interventions

The Committee noted the response.

Departmental response on advice sector funding

The Committee noted the response.

Departmental response on the Sports Sustainability Fund

The Committee noted the response.

Departmental response on Covid-19 working practices in DfC

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members forward a copy of the response to those individuals who raised concerns with the Committee.



Departmental response on welfare reform mitigations engagement.

Members expressed their disappointment as they had previously received several responses on this issue and the information provided by the Department had been very general in nature.

Members again raised concerns that there had not been more engagement with organisations such as the Cliff Edge Coalition and UC:US. Members believe that these organisations have a wealth of knowledge on the issue and stand ready and willing to collaborate with the Department.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to express their disappointment particularly around the lack of action on the co-production and co-design commitment in New Decade New Approach.

Departmental response on concerns raised by UNISON

The Committee noted the response.

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

Response from the Minister for Communities in relation to pupils returning to school and their mental health

The Committee welcomed the Minister's commitment and support for a collective response to address the physical and mental health need of young people.

A Member discussed the importance of the recommencement of physical activity and sport for young people as things move forward beyond the pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Health asking if there is a plan or pathway to facilitate the return of children to sport.

Proposed primary legislation timetable from the Department

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the proposed primary legislation timetable in more detail at its meeting on 4 March 2021.



12. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a request from Drinkaware to brief the Committee on the Licensing Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Drinkaware to brief at the meeting on 4 March.

- ii. The Committee considered a memo from the Committee for Health in relation to correspondence it received from Queen's University Belfast on Discretionary Support Isolation Grants.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the memo to the Department for Communities for comment.

- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from participants in the Women Involved in Community Transformation Programme expressing concerns that the funding is due to end.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice to ask if it will continue to fund this programme.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence in relation to the lack of regulation of property management companies in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance to ask if it has any plans to introduce legislation to regulate property management companies.

- v. Copy of letter to the Minister for the Economy from the Federation of Master Builders regarding Retrofitting Homes in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the NI Housing Executive to ask if it has any plans in place for the retrofitting of homes.



- vi. A memo from the Public Accounts Committee regarding Primacy over Northern Ireland Audit Office Reports (NIAO).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss the memo further at its meeting on 4 March 2021.

The Committee noted the following:

- i. Copy of Hansard from the Executive Committee briefing from Northern Ireland Youth Forum.
- ii. Memo from Justice Committee seeking written evidence on Protection from Stalking Bill.
- iii. Copy of letter to the Department requesting that it keeps the Finance Committee updated on the development of support schemes for sports clubs.
- iv. Correspondence from the Department for Communities regarding the Local Government Auditor's Code of Audit Practice.

13. Forward Work Programme

Members noted that, at its meeting on 4 March 2021, the Committee will be briefed by The Institute of Public Health Ireland, The GAA and Drinkaware on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill.

The Committee will also be briefed by members of the deaf community on the Video Relay System.

14. Any Other Business

There was no other business.



Robin Newton left the meeting at 13.19 pm.

15. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 4 March 2021 at 9.15 a.m. in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 13.21 pm.

Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities