



Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 25 March 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 Karen Mullan MLA
Ms Sinéad Ennis MLA
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)

Ms Claire McCanny (Assembly Clerk, Bill Office)

The meeting commenced at 9.18 am in open session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson raised the matter of recent issues and publicity in relation to the Sports Sustainability Fund.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister for Communities and Sport NI Officials had been requested to brief the Committee at a meeting week commencing 29 March. The date and time of the meeting is dependent on the Minister's availability.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to be briefed on the Sports Sustainability Fund at a meeting week commencing 29 March 2021.

3. Draft Minutes

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



4. Matters Arising

Ministerial response in relation to Covid Recognition Payment for the Voluntary and Community Sector

The Committee noted the response.

Ministerial response in relation to the proposed Football World Cup Bid 2030

The Chairperson informed Members that the Departmental reply advised that the Department for the Economy and Tourism NI are representing the Executive in the bid.

Members discussed the role that regional and sub-regional stadia could play in the provision of training venues etc. for participating international teams.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for the Economy to ask what work, if any, there has been in relation to this issue and to ask how long it will take for the bid to be prepared.

Ministerial response in relation to Welfare Reform Mitigation Measures

Members again expressed disappointment that the Department remained unable to provide a definitive timeline for the introduction of welfare reform legislation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification on how long existing measures can continue to be paid in the absence of legislation and to ask if the Department still has the legal basis to continue the payments beyond 31 March 2021.

Ministerial response in relation to the Sub Regional Stadia Programme

The Committee again expressed disappointment at the lack of progress and the failure to be provided with a definitive timeline on when funding will be released.



Members shared the frustration of clubs who have provided all of the information asked of them, with a number of clubs having already spent considerable sums on stadium designs and professional fees.

Members also raised concerns around the potential uplift of costs 10 years on from the scheme announcement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking for the funding to be released and to ask if there is any scope for an increase in allocations being offered. The Committee also feel that there should be a fair regional spread of funding.

Ministerial response in relation to the proposed Departmental Legislative Timetable

The Committee noted the response.

Ministerial response in relation to Local Inclusive Labour Market Partnerships

The Committee noted the response.

Departmental response in relation to the Draft Programme for Government

The Committee welcomed the Minister's commitment to seek a stand-alone Housing Outcome included in the PfG post-consultation discussions with Executive colleagues and noted that this Outcome was agreed in the New Decade, New Approach agreement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office in support of the Minister and to highlight the importance of the inclusion of this Outcome as a tool to measure progress in related cross-cutting areas such as education and health improvement.

Ministerial response in relation to the Deaf Campaign Group briefing on a Video Relay Service (VRS)

The Committee expressed concern that, without a Sign Language Act, translation services will only be available if the budgets for participating business areas allow for



it. Members agreed that translation services should be about an individual's rights to proper communication and not down to budgets.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if translation services are being considered within the Disability Strategy and to stress that translation services should be based on an individual's need, not on available budgets.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office to ask if translation services could be taken forward as a stand-alone issue by the Executive and not just as part of an overarching Disability Strategy.

Ministerial response in relation to the Model Engineers' Society

The Committee expressed its disappointment with the response.

The Chairperson informed Members that they were still awaiting a response from the National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) to Committee queries raised at the meeting on 18 March 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response and to consider the issue again at a future meeting once a response from NMNI had been received.

Departmental response in relation to the allocation of National Insurance Numbers

The Committee noted the response.

Response from the Minister for Finance in relation to the Sports Sustainability Fund

The Committee noted the response.

5. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a briefing paper from the Council for the Homeless NI on the Programme for Government Housing Outcome.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing after the Committee Stage of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill has concluded in May 2021.

- ii. The Committee considered further information from Belfast Metropolitan Residents' Group (BMRG) on the Living above the Shops Scheme (LOTS).

Members discussed the importance of the proposed scheme not only as part of an overall housing strategy, but as a means to assist in the recovery of local towns and city centres post-Covid.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Communities in support of LOTS and to ask if any work had been carried out on this issue and, if so, to provide details to the Committee.

- iii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Finance to Committee queries in relation to Property Management Companies.

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

The Committee noted the following:

- i. Copy of correspondence from the Chair of the Audit Committee to the Minister regarding a single auditor for the public sector.
- ii. Departmental letter regarding the City of Culture 2025.
- iii. Departmental letter regarding the Financial Services Bill Legislative Consent Motion for Statutory Debt Payment Plan Scheme in Northern Ireland.



- iv. Copy of the Charitable Donation and Bequests Year End Accounts March 2019.

6. Forward Work Programme

Members noted that, at its meeting on 1 April 2021, the Committee will continue its deliberations on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill.

The Chairperson informed Members that it is planned that the Bill will be the only agenda item at the meeting.

7. Any Other Business

A Member informed the Committee that he was aware that letters had been issued in recent weeks to individuals to advise of the pending closure of their Post Office accounts and the requirement to open a bank account.

The Member outlined the stress that this has caused, particularly to elderly and vulnerable individuals.

The Chairperson advised Members that the Committee had recently written to the Department for Communities on the issue and was awaiting a response

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Commissioner for Older People for an update on the issue and to ask for its opinion on the process of applying for a bank account for older people who may not possess the required documents of identification.



8. SL1: The Universal Credit (Extension of Coronavirus) Regulations (NI) 2021

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed regulations would extend the £86.67 uplift to the standard allowance of UC for a further 6 months and also extend the relaxation for the MIF until 31st July 2021.

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

9. SR 2021/66: The Automatic Enrolment (Earnings Trigger and Qualifying Earnings Band) Order (NI) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/66: The Automatic Enrolment (Earnings Trigger and Qualifying Earnings Band) Order (NI) 2021 which sets the amount of the upper limit of the automatic enrolment qualifying earnings band for the 2021-2022 year in line with the upper National Insurance contributions earnings limit for that year. It also specifies rounded figures for the earnings trigger and qualifying earnings band for that year.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/66: The Automatic Enrolment (Earnings Trigger and Qualifying Earnings Band) Order (NI) 2021 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the Rule.

Robin Newton left the meeting at 10.09 am

The meeting was suspended at 10.09 am and restarted at 10.15 am

10. Committee Deliberations on 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.



The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Liam Quinn

Ms Carol Reid

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with further information from the Institute of Public Health Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the paper and to include a copy of it in its report on the Bill.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a reply from the PSNI in relation to the possibility of introducing a late night levy.

Departmental Officials advised the Committee that a levy would require primary legislation and also secondary legislation to decide how the levy would be distributed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

The Chairperson advised Members that they had been provided with a tabled paper from Hospitality Ulster requesting that the Committee support its call for rural pubs to be able to diversify and provide a range of community services and local farmers' produce etc. and to do this through amending current regulations.

The Chairperson advised Members that this issue was not part of the proposed regulations.

The Departmental Officials informed Members that there were a range of legal issues surrounding the proposal and informed Members that the Departmental solicitor had urged caution.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to make a recommendation in its report for the Department to consider this idea in the future.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a tabled paper from The Market Inn, Draperstown, regarding concerns over taprooms.

The Chairperson also informed Members that two further letters had been received that morning from the same constituency and would be considered at the meeting on 1 April.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the letter and to consider the issue during its deliberations on Clause 8.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a tabled paper from the Department in response to questions raised by the Society of Independent Brewers regarding taprooms.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the Delegated Powers Memorandum from the Examiner of Statutory Rules (ESR).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the Delegated Powers Memorandum and the response from the ESR.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental response to Committee queries on several clauses following deliberations at the meeting on 11 March 2021.

The Chairperson informed Members that they needed to consider the response to each clause.

Clauses 1 and 23: Relating to Removal of Additional Restrictions at Easter

The Chairperson reminded Members that they had queried the issue of protections for those who did not wish to work additional hours at Easter.

Members indicated that they were content with the Departmental response.

Clause 4: Police Authorisations for Additional Hours

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister was minded to consider an amendment from the Committee to increase the number of police authorisations for additional hours.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Minister to bring forward an amendment to clause 4.



Clause 5: Extension on 'Drinking-up' Time

The Chairperson reminded Members that they had queried the building in of a review of this provision on to the face of the Bill.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister was content to provide a written commitment to a review of the extension of "drinking-up" time.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss Clause 5 further in the closed session with the Bill Office Official.

Clauses 15 and 30: Prohibition on Self-service and Vending Machines

The Chairperson reminded Members that they had asked the Department to confirm if an 'honesty box' in a guest house would be covered by these clauses.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Department believed that honesty boxes would be captured in the prohibition under these clauses.

Members indicated that they were content with the response.

Clause 16: Restrictions on Off-sales Drinks Promotions in Supermarkets etc.

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

The Chairperson reminded Members that they had sought clarity on the distribution of leaflets and brochures.

The Chairperson informed Members that the distribution of leaflets within a 200m radius would be captured under clause 16, however, that only leaflets/brochures which wholly or mainly promote the purchase on those premises are captured.

Members indicated that they were content with the Departmental response.

Clause 17: Prohibition on Loyalty Schemes

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee had requested further information on the different loyalty schemes across the UK in terms of the inclusion of alcohol sales.



The Chairperson informed Members that Sainsbury's no longer includes "spirits and liqueurs" in promotions and coupons and that Tesco points cannot be collected on some products due to various legal, regulatory or contractual reasons.

Members indicated that they were content with the response.

Robin Newton re-joined the meeting at 10.38 am

Clause 6 and 25: Major Events

The Chairperson informed Members that the Department had confirmed that, should there be a situation in the future where no Minister was in place, the power to designate a Major Event under clauses 6 and 25 could still be taken by a senior officer of the Department.

Members indicated that they were content with the Departmental response.

Clause 8: Licence for Off Sales

The Chairperson reminded Members that they had asked the Department if the Minister would be minded to take forward an amendment to include a provision for taprooms.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister would not take forward such an amendment. However, should the Committee propose an amendment based on sound evidence then the Minister would consider all the information available.

Members expressed disappointment with the response.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss the issue of taprooms further in closed session.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 1 April 2021 at 9.15 a.m. in Room 29, Parliament Buildings, subject to the availability of the Minister to attend the meeting.



The meeting moved into closed session at 10.56 am to allow the Committee to be briefed by an Official from the Northern Ireland Assembly Bill Office.

The Chairperson informed Members that they needed to consider the Departmental response to Committee queries raised at the meeting on 18 March.

Clause 2: Public Houses and Hotels – Further Additional Hours

Agreed: The Committee agreed to put forward a proposed amendment.

Clause 2: In relation to ‘Permitted Hours’ on Sundays

Agreed: The Committee noted the Departmental response on the issue raised by Hospitality Ulster regarding late licences on Sunday and agreed that the Minister should now take forward an amendment to bring the legislation relating to an Article 44 ‘Permitted hours’ (late licence) on Sundays into line with the ‘Permitted Hours’ for the other late nights granted for premises.

Clause 3: Alignment of Closing Time for Liquor and Entertainment

The Committee was content with the clarification provided in the Department’s response regarding alignment of closing time for liquor and entertainment.

Clause 7: Licensed race tracks: Sunday sales

The Committee discussed the issue of Drumbo Park and was of the understanding that Clause 7, as drafted, will permit the sale of alcohol at the venue on a Sunday.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek clarification from the Department as to whether this clause allows the sale of alcohol at the venue on a Sunday if a race meeting is not taking place or if the sale is contingent on a race meeting.

Agreed: The Committee to write to the Department to advise that it is still deliberating on this issue and to request that the Department clarifies if Drumbo Park is to be classified/categorised as an outdoor stadium in the near future as its status will impact on any Committee decision in this regard.

Clause 8: Licence for off-sales



The Committee agreed to return to deliberations on this clause at its next meeting when the Bill Office will bring forward a number of proposals for consideration on taprooms as to how they might operate in a limited capacity in the context of tours, sample sizes, opening hours, review etc.

Clause 9: Requirement for Off-licence

The Committee noted the Department's response that the wording of the PSNI's proposed amendment was not suitable.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to advise that it is keen to see the gap addressed and to request that the Minister provides a suitably worded amendment to deal with the issue for the Committee's consideration.

Clauses 19 and 32: Code of Practice

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification on whether the clause as drafted allows for the existence of a number of codes of practice written by different sectors and approved by the Department.

Clauses 12 and 28

The Committee was content with the Department's clarification on the definition of a main meal.

Clause 29

The Committee noted that the Minister was minded to extend the time period in 29(1) and the number of award nights in 29(3).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that the Minister proceeds to make an amendment to extend the time period in 29(1) from 1st May to 30th September and the number of nights in 29(3) to "not more than three".

Clause 22

The Committee noted that the Minister was minded to consider the amendment regarding applications to the courts regarding alterations to premises.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request that the Minister proceeds to make the amendment to address the anomaly identified between clubs and other licensed premises.

Agreed: The Committee noted that the Minister was minded to consider the amendment regarding 1-day memberships and agreed to write to the Department to request that the Minister makes the clarifying amendment in that regard.

Potential New Clauses

Duty to Produce Guidance:

The Committee discussed the Department's response but remained of the view that such a new clause has considerable merit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request that the Minister provides a proposed new clause for the Committee's consideration.

Review Clause:

The Committee noted the written commitment of the Minister to review implementation of the Bill and that work has begun on an evaluation plan.

However, after discussion of the issue, the Committee remained of the view that it wished to see a separate 'review' clause in the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request that the Minister provides a clause which contains a review of the implementation of the provisions of the Bill and subsequent report to the NI Assembly by the end of three years of the Bill getting Royal Assent and, following that first review, subsequent reviews and a report should happen within five years of the previous report.

Additional Measures:

Entertainment Venues

The Committee queried if the Minister would be minded to include cinemas in the list of Places of Public Entertainment in order that they could serve alcohol, similar to theatres etc.



Agreed: It was agreed that the Assembly Bill Office would bring a proposal to the Committee for consideration at its next meeting.

Article 31

The Committee was content with the Department's response on the issue of court sittings over the summer in terms of Article 31 applications.

List of Licenses

The Committee was pleased to hear of the Minister's engagement with the Justice Minister on this matter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request that it is kept up to date with progress on this issue.

Minimum Unit Pricing

The Assembly Bill Office Official advised the Committee that the issue of Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) is potentially within the scope of the Bill.

Agreed: It was agreed that the Assembly Bill Office would work with the Committee on the potential for an amendment that would place a duty on the Minister for Health to introduce MUP within a certain timescale. The Committee agreed to deliberate further on this at its next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 13.08 pm.

Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities