



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 3 February 2022

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Ms Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Paul Frew MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Stephen Dunne MLA
Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
Mr Mark Durkan MLA
Ms Ciara Ferguson MLA
Ms Aisling Reilly MLA

Apologies: Áine Murphy

In Attendance: Dr Janice Thompson (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Rachel Ashe (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Officer)



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In Attendance by Video or Teleconference: Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Clerk)

The Chairperson, Paula Bradley, assumed the Chair. The meeting began at 9.06 am in open session. The following Members were present at the start of the public session: Paula Bradley (Chairperson), Kellie Armstrong (Deputy Chairperson), Andy Allen, Mark Durkan, Ciara Ferguson and Aisling Reilly.

Declaration of Interests

Ciara Ferguson declared an interest as a former employee within the community and voluntary sector which had previously contributed to the Warm Well and Connected initiative.

1. Apologies

Áine Murphy.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 27 January 2022.

Paul Frew joined the meeting at 9.07 am.

Stephen Dunne joined the meeting at 9.10 am.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson raised correspondence from the Irish Congress Trade Union (ICTU) regarding the gender pay gap.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an update on all social strategies, especially those related to the gender pay gap.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed the Committee that they had received a Departmental response regarding a number of queries related to the Private Tenancies Bill. The Committee was content to note.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that they had received a Departmental response regarding Changing Places.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting that it specifically highlights that funding for installation of Changing Places toilets in urban and rural areas can be accessed via the Access & Inclusion programme.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that they had received a Departmental response regarding the Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an update on any staffing level issues as a result of Covid, as the Committee seeks to support the Department, as well as scrutinise.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that they had received a Departmental response regarding the Proposed Legislative Power seeking to address Anti-Social Behaviour.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting clarification on how many people have been turned down for social housing due to previous anti-social behaviour as this is a real issue in communities.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that they had received a Departmental response apologising for a delay in getting documentation to the Committee on a specific SL1 and SR and apologising in advance as due to circumstances this may happen again. The Committee was content to note.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that they had received a Departmental response regarding the January Monitoring Revised Bids.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department enquiring what this response will mean operationally for Housing Executive tenants and how it will impact services provided to tenants.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that they had received a Departmental response regarding the Emergency Fuel Payment Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department enquiring;

- What further support the Department will make available in future years as the energy and fuel pricing issues could last for 36 months;
- What will happen to underspent money as this can be used to help those in need during times of crisis;
- Clarification regarding the 333 applications per day to the Emergency Fuel Payments Scheme, requesting whether the 333 represents the number of applications approved and paid, or just processed? If the latter, then the scheme will not reach its target; and
- Clarification on whether applicants to the Emergency Fuel Payments Scheme are getting processed and paid and how Bryson are coping with the scheme?

5. Committee Deliberations on the Support for Mortgage Interest etc. (Security for Loans) Bill

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee was still awaiting the response from the Department regarding queries raised at the Committee meeting on 1 February 2022.

Committee Deliberations would therefore continue at the meeting on Tuesday 8 February 2022.

6. SL1 – Licensing (Notice Relating to Local Producer’s License) Regulations (NI) 2022

Agreed: The Committee was content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.



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7. SL1 – The Licensing (Notice Relating to Restaurants and Guest Houses) Regulations (NI) 2022

Agreed: The Committee was content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

8. SL1 – The Licensing (Sample) Regulations (NI) 2022

Agreed: The Committee was content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

9. The Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (NI) 2021 Phase 2 Commencement Order

The Committee noted the commencement order as it is not subject to any Assembly procedure, however, also noted that Section 11 will not be commenced in phase 2 due to the court rules secretariat recently having identified a procedural issue in respect of section 11.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request the Department brief the Committee on this section 11 issue.

10. SR 2022/14 – Universal Credit, Employment and Support Allowance (Claimant Committee Exceptions) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2022

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2022/14 – Universal Credit, Employment and Support Allowance (Claimant Committee Exceptions) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2022 and recommended that it was affirmed by the Assembly.



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11. Correspondence

The Committee was content to note the following items of correspondence:

- i. Correspondence from the Cliff Edge Coalition regarding Closing the Mitigation Loopholes;
- ii. Correspondence from the Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment (NIUSE) regarding their concerns on the future of employment provision for disabled people;
- iii. Correspondence from the Women's Resource and Development Agency (WDRA) regarding its guide for public authorities;
- iv. A copy of letter from the Committee for Education to the Minister regarding the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill; and
- v. A copy of Department for Communities Investing Activity Report - 30 January 2022 from the Strategic Investment Board Limited.

The meeting went into closed session at 9.43 am to allow the Committee to discuss the forward work programme.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.12 am.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 10.12 am.

The meeting recommenced at 10.32 am in public session.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee discussed a range of requests to brief the Committee and the potential forward work programme based on the remaining meetings in the mandate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to;

- Focus the Committee meeting of Thursday 8 March 2022 on International Women's Day, with particular focus on women's sport;
- Invite the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Northern Ireland Heritage Trust to brief on the preservation of historic buildings;



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- Invite Leonard Cheshire to brief on assisted and supported living along with other such providers if possible;
- Request a briefing from the Assembly's Research and Information Service (RaISe) on funding for rural and urban community networks;
- Invite Save the Children to brief on the Two-Child limit; and
- Invite Carrickfergus Community Group to brief.

13.SL1 – The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit Housing Costs (Executive Determinations) (Amendments and Modifications) Regulations (NI) 2022

Agreed: The Committee was content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

14.SR 2022/15 – The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit Housing Costs (Executive Determinations) (Amendments and Modifications) Regulations (NI) 2022

Agreed: The Committee considered SR2022/15 – The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit Housing Costs (Executive Determinations) (Amendments and Modifications) Regulations (NI) 2022 and recommended that it was affirmed by the Assembly.

15. Community Places briefing on Participatory Budgeting.

The Chairperson welcomed the following representatives to the meeting:

Louise O'Kane

Noeleen Diver

Gemma McCaughley



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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

16. Briefing by Homeless Connect

The Chairperson welcomed the following representative to the meeting:

Mark Bailie

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

The Chairperson thanked the representative for his attendance.

17. Any Other Business

The Chairperson informed the Committee that the draft Press Release was ready for the Private Tenancies Bill for Committee approval.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Press Release for the Private Tenancies Bill for publication.

A Member raised the issue that during the meeting the Chancellor of Exchequer had announced a raft of measures to tackle the rising cost of living and the increasing fuel and energy prices.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to enquire whether it has engaged with the Department of Finance to devise a strategy ensuring that financial assistance is available to the so-called 'working poor' who are in employment and do not qualify for other financial support measures.



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18. Date, Time and Location of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 8 February 2022 at 9.00 am in room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.10 pm.

Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities