



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 2 December 2021

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

- Ms Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
- Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
- Mr Paul Frew MLA
- Ms Áine Murphy MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

- Mr Stephen Dunne MLA
- Ms Ciara Ferguson MLA
- Ms Aisling Reilly MLA
- Mr Mark Durkan MLA

Apologies:

In Attendance:

- Dr Janice Thompson (Assembly Clerk)
- Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Clerk)
- Ms Rachel Ashe (Clerical Supervisor)



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In Attendance by Video or Teleconference: Ms Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Officer)

The Chairperson, Paula Bradley, assumed the Chair. The meeting began at 09.10 am in open session. The following Members were present at the start of the open session: Paula Bradley, Kellie Armstrong, Andy Allen, Mark Durkan, Stephen Dunne, Ciara Ferguson, Paul Frew, Aisling Reilly, and Áine Murphy.

Declaration of Interests:

Andy Allen declared an interest as a private landlord and as a charity trustee.

Stephen Dunne declared an interest as a private landlord.

Paul Frew declared an interest as a private landlord and as a qualified electrician.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 25 November 2021.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that, as per the announcement in the Chamber earlier in the week, the Minister has planned a review of the entire Caravans Act and a 12-week consultation will be launched before the end of this year.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting a timeline for the review and querying what progress the Department hopes to achieve before the end of the Mandate.

The Committee also agreed to write to the Committee for the Economy requesting its Members collaborate in due course with the Committee in scrutinising the Act, as caravans/caravan sites currently also fall under the remit of the Department for the Economy.

The Chairperson informed Members that a Departmental briefing on Fuel Poverty payments that had been scheduled for this meeting was postponed until next week as the Department could provide a fuller briefing following a meeting that Officials were to attend on this issue. The Committee was content to note.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Accelerated Passage Motion and Second Stage Debates on the Social Security (Terminal Illness) Bill are on Tuesday 7 December and the deadline for Members' proposed amendments is 9.30 am on Wednesday 8 December. The Committee was content to note.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that the Young Person's Zoom event on the 'Betting Bill' will be held on 15 December at 7pm and Members were encouraged to attend. The Committee was content to note.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed Members they had received a Departmental response regarding the Changing Places fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department, requesting a review of council facilities to address the lack of Changing Places funded services in certain councils and emphasising the desire for more than minimum standards; enquiring whether SOLACE and NILGA are aware of, and have access to, the Changing Places fund and whether they are working with the Department to identify and resolve gaps in facilities; and whether any aspect of the Changing Places fund is being included in the current budget exercise.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to SOLACE enquiring how many new facilities councils had installed and, of those, how many were funded through the Changing Places fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance enquiring whether access to Changing Places facilities was covered by building regulations.

The Chairperson informed Members they had received a Departmental response regarding the Covid-19 heating payment. The Committee was content to note.

The Chairperson informed Members they had received a Departmental response regarding the Shared Prosperity Fund. The Committee was content to note.

The Chairperson informed Members they had received a response from the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations regarding the proposed ban of boilers in new-build homes in England from 2025.

The Committee discussed needing clarification on NI's exclusion from this proposal, expressing its concern that NI could be left behind the other Home Nations, and subsequently miss funding that could be available for retro-fitting properties.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department enquiring whether NI was missing out on any money through the Barnett Consequential by its exclusion from the proposal to ban boilers in new-build homes from 2025.

The Chairperson informed Members they had received a Departmental response regarding the Support for Mortgage Interest Bill and default payments. The Committee was content to note.

The Chairperson informed Members they had received a Departmental response regarding Universal Credit and the HC1 claim form.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the ongoing amendments to the Universal Credit system in its End of Session Report for a future Committee to remain aware of this issue.



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5. Support for Mortgage Interest, etc. (Security for Loans) Bill

The Chairperson informed Members they had been provided with a draft motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Support for Mortgage Interest, etc. (Security for Loans) Bill until 11 February 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to take advice on this issue from Claire McCanny, Bill Office Clerk, during a closed session later in the meeting.

6. Consideration of the draft Committee Report on the Charities Bill

The Committee considered its draft report on the Charities Bill.

Powers and Membership

The Committee considered the Powers and Membership section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Powers and Membership section of the report as drafted.

Executive Summary

The Committee considered the Executive Summary section of the report.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Executive Summary and Recommendations section of the report as drafted.

Introduction

The Committee considered the Introduction section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Introduction section of the report as drafted.

Committee Consideration of Wider Issues and Recommendations

The Committee considered the Committee Consideration of Wider Issues and Recommendations section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Committee Consideration of Wider Issues and Recommendations section of the report as drafted.

Committee Consideration of the Bill

The Committee considered the Committee Consideration of the Bill section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Committee Consideration of the Bill section of the report as drafted.



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Committee Deliberations on the Clauses of the Bill

The Committee considered the Committee Deliberations on the Clauses of the Bill section of the report.

Clause by Clause Consideration of the Bill

The Committee considered the Clause by Clause Consideration section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee was content with the Clause by Clause Consideration section of the report, subject to a minor correction.

Appendices

The Committee considered the Appendices Bill section of the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content that the Appendices be included in the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to approve the Minutes of Proceedings from today's meeting that covers the consideration of the Committee report. These will be published in the report.

The Chairperson informed Members that this now concluded Committee Stage of the Bill.



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The Chairperson thanked Members for their in-depth scrutiny of the Bill and put on record the Committee's thanks for all those that made submissions and gave oral evidence.

The Chairperson also thanked again the Departmental Officials and the Assembly Bill Office Officials for their hard work and help during the Committee's consideration of the Bill.

7. Committee Deliberations on the Private Tenancies Bill

The Chairperson reminded Members that this was not the formal Clause by Clause stage, but rather an opportunity for Members to continue to discuss Clauses comprehensively with Departmental Officials.

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental Officials to the meeting:

David Polley

Eilish O'Neill

Karen Barr

The Officials participated in a question and answer session with Members and the Departmental responses regarding Clauses 1 to 5 were considered by the Committee.

Clause 1. Tenant to be given more notice relating to the tenancy

After clarification was given by the Officials on a number of queries, regarding the importance of this Clause specifically for families, the Committee did not raise any issues on this clause.

Clause 2. Tenant to be given notice regarding certain past matters

After clarification was given by the Officials on a number of queries the Committee did not raise any issues on this clause.



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The meeting was adjourned at 10.05 am due to technical difficulties with the teleconference system.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 10.05 am.

The meeting resumed at 10.13 am following the resolution of all technical difficulties.

The Officials continued the question and answer session with Members.

Clause 3 – Tenant to be provided with a rent receipt for payment in cash

Officials responded to queries raised by the Committee on 25 November regarding the implementation of a timeframe in the Bill, such as the 28 days used in Clause 1, for a receipt to be provided to the tenant. Officials noted that a timeframe will result in an offence being automatically committed if a receipt is not supplied within the time period. The Officials agreed to seek the Minister's view and inform the Committee.

A Member queried the necessity for having 5(3)(B) in the Bill and Officials agreed to seek the Minister's view and inform the Committee.

The Committee had queried on 25th November on what other payments in cash the Minister would consider this Clause could include in terms of a receipt being required (must be payments in connection with the private tenancy). The Officials apologised for overlooking the query and agreed to write to the Committee with a response.

A Member highlighted that the old rent book system (to be replaced by this new Clause 3) covered payments of all types to the landlord and therefore this new Clause is not as 'tight' so the Member will be keen to see a receipt for all payments covered in connection with the tenancy.

Officials confirmed the Bill will not prohibit landlords from solely requesting cash payments. The Committee requested the Minister considers such an amendment to ensure tenants are given a range of payment options.

Clause 4. Limit on tenancy deposit amount; Breach of tenancy deposit limit; recoverability of excess

After clarification was given by the Officials on a number of queries the Committee did not raise any issues on this clause.

Clause 5. Tenancy deposit schemes: time limits



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After clarification was given by the Officials on a number of queries the Committee did not raise any issues on this clause.

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

The meeting went into closed session at 10.35 am to allow Members to receive advice from Claire McCanny, Bill Office Clerk

Andy Allen returned at 11.05 am.

The meeting went into open session at 11.35 am with all Members present.

The Committee agreed that the amendments to Schedule 2 were done to improve and future proof the clause regarding the need to move to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. However, the Committee noted its dissatisfaction regarding the late amendments to Schedule 2 and its imposition on proper Committee scrutiny of the Bill. The Committee requested that Officials send the amended Schedule 2 as early as possible in advance of the meeting on 9 December.

Agreed: During the closed session, the Committee agreed the motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Support for Mortgage Interest, etc. (Security for Loans) Bill to 18 February 2022.

8. RalSe briefing on the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Amendment) Bill

The Chairperson welcomed the following representative from RalSe to the meeting:

Eleanor Murphy

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

The Chairperson thanked the representative for her attendance.



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9. Departmental briefing on the Sub-Regional Stadia Programme

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental Officials to the meeting:

Kathryn Hill

Nicola Leckie

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

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) regarding the Sub-Regional Stadia Programme, enquiring how many bids were being considered and the corresponding sums of funding requested.

10. Departmental briefing on LCM – The Pension Schemes (Conversion of Guaranteed Minimum Pensions) Bill 2001

Áine Murphy left the meeting at 12.42 pm

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental Officials to the meeting:

Anne McCleary

Doreen Roy

Richard Jordan

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

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee was content for the Department to proceed with the LCM.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 12.53 pm



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11. SR2021/302 – The Universal Credit (Work Allowance and Taper) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021

The Committee for Communities considered SR 2021/302 - The Universal Credit (Work Allowance and Taper) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report, has no objection to the rule.

12. SR2021/303 – The Universal Credit (Exception to the Requirement not to be receiving Education) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021

The Committee for Communities considered SR 2021/303 - The Universal Credit (Exception to the Requirement not to be receiving Education) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report, has no objection to the rule

13. Correspondence

The Chairperson informed Members the Committee had received a request from the Northern Ireland On-Course Bookmakers Association to brief the Committee on the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Amendment) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Northern Ireland On-Course Bookmakers Association to brief at a later date to be arranged.

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

- i. A copy of the response from the Minister for Health to Advice NI regarding the Help with Health Costs Scheme;
- ii. A copy of the correspondence from the Committee for the Economy sent to the Department regarding the Small- Scale Green Energy Bill;
- iii. An invitation from the Commission for Victims and Survivors to the launch of PEACE IV- funded research, 'Better Together: Reviewing the needs of Victims and Survivors';



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- iv. A memo from the NI Assembly CAMS Office informing Members of a Personal Security Session scheduled for 15 December 2021;
- v. A copy of the Investing Activity Report sent to the Department for Communities from the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) on 28 November 2021;
- vi. A letter from the Minister for Communities regarding the cancellation of the Tyrone GAA Celebration Event in response to the latest Covid-19 guidance on public gatherings.

14. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson advised Members that, at the meeting on 9 December, the Committee will continue its deliberations on the Private Tenancies Bill and receive the postponed Departmental briefing on Fuel Poverty payments.

15. Any Other Business

There was no other business to report.

16. Date, Time, and Location of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 7 December 2021 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, at 9.00 am.

The meeting was adjourned at 01.00 pm.

Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities



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