



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 4 November 2021

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Andy Allen MLA
Ms Áine Murphy MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Mark Durkan MLA
Ms Ciara Ferguson MLA
Mr Paul Frew MLA

Apologies: Mr Stephen Dunne MLA

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



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The meeting began in open session at 9.01am. The Deputy Chairperson, Kellie Armstrong, assumed the Chair. The following Members were present at the start of the open session: Paula Bradley, Kellie Armstrong, Andy Allen, Ciara Ferguson.

1. Declaration of Interest

Andy Allen declared an interest as a Charity Trustee.

2. Ministerial briefing on the Support for the Mortgage Interest Bill

Mark Durkan joined the meeting at 9.04am

Paul Frew joined the meeting at 9.06am

Áine Murphy joined the meeting at 9.08am

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that the Minister had asked to brief the Committee on the Support for Mortgage Interest Bill at today's meeting.

The Deputy Chairperson welcomed the Minister, Deirdre Hargey and two other Officials from the Department, Una McConnell and Anne McCleary. The Minister briefed the Committee and she and her Officials took part in a question and answer session with Members.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and Officials for their attendance.

The meeting went into closed session at 9.19am to allow the Committee to take advice from Claire McCanny from the Bill Office.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to state that that the Committee will proceed as quickly as possible with its consideration of this Bill but that this cannot be rushed and, at the very minimum, will mean that the Committee will conduct a 30-day Committee Stage.



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The Committee also agreed that the letter should explain that, as advised by the Bill Office, under NI Assembly Standing Orders, an 'expedited Committee Stage' is not a recognised Bill Stage.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking for more information regarding SMIs and whether a bank can enforce a quick sale through an auction and how SMI is settled if a property does not meet its full value in an auction.

The meeting went into open session at 9.46am

3. Apologies

Mr Stephen Dunne MLA

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 21 October 2021.

5. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business to report.

6. Matters Arising

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a response from the NIHE Board in relation to leasehold properties.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write again to NIHE stating that this issue was not being treated with the urgency it deserves and requesting a more definitive timeline as to when the extension policy will be implemented.

7. Briefing by Capita on the Renewal of the Contract for PIP Assessments

The following representatives from Capita joined the meeting:

Antony King, Managing Director, Client Partner Health and Welfare

Huw Williams, Managing Director, Capita PIP

Laura Erskine, Clinical Director, Health and Welfare.

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

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Capita requesting the following information:

- Details of the efficiency and quality targets set for Capita staff;
- The number of assessors that are carers or who are registered disabled;
- The number of assessments that assessors complete per week;
- Reports of the findings of quality assessment audits and the number of complaints upheld;
- Why comments on physical appearance are always included in reports and whether this is a legislative requirement; and
- Details of the approval process and when assessors can carry out approvals on their own.

The Meeting was adjourned at 11.10am

The Meeting restarted at 11.20 with all Members present



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8. Departmental Briefing on the Renewal of the Contract for PIP Assessments

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Linda Williams

Mickey Kelly

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

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

9. SL1 – Social Security (Information Sharing in relation to Welfare Services etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that the proposed Rule will amend “The Social Security (Information sharing in relation to welfare services etc.) (Northern Ireland) 2016 regulations” to allow for the sharing of data between the “qualifying persons” which include the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and registered housing associations.

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



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10. SR 2021/287 – The Social Security (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/287 – The Social Security (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report, had no exception to the rule.

11. Correspondence

Letter from Leonard Cheshire requesting to brief the Committee regarding concerns around lack of accommodation in the community and bed blocking for people with an alcohol related brain injury.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the organisation to a future stakeholder meeting.

Invitation from National Museums Northern Ireland to visit the Ulster Folk Museum and the Ulster Transport Museum at Cultra, including the opportunity to hold an external meeting at one of their sites.

Agreed: The Committee noted the invitation and agreed to consider it again in early 2022 when the Committee will have completed its consideration of the Bills currently at Committee Stage.

Letter from the Director of the National Lottery Community Fund in Northern Ireland wishing to discuss the role the Fund can play in helping local communities emerge from the pandemic.

Agreed: It was agreed that the Chair and Deputy Chair would meet the organisation on the Committee's behalf.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- i. Copy of results of latest Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry & BDO Quarterly Economic Survey (QES).



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- ii. Copy of Armagh Observatory and Planetarium Annual Report and Accounts 2021-2021.
- iii. Copy of letter from the Speaker to the CLG regarding legislative pressures on Assembly time and a copy of RaiSe Digital Strategy.
- iv. Copy of Local Government Auditor's Code of Audit Practice.
- v. Copy of the Pensions Regulator Code of Practice No 12 Contribution Notices.
- vi. Correspondence regarding Integra Spec Insulating Concrete Formwork Building System.
- vii. Copy of Investing Activity Report for Department for Communities – October 2021

12. Forward Work Programme

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that there will be a meeting on 9 November 2021 at 9.00am to hear evidence on the Private Tenancies Bill. The Deputy Chairperson also informed Members that, at the meeting on 11 November 2021, the Committee will undertake 'Effective Questioning' training and will then continue with its deliberation on the Charities Bill.

13. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

14. Deliberations on the Charities Bill

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that the Committee had intended to continue deliberations on the Charities Bill at today's meeting. However, as the Departmental responses requested by the Committee are still outstanding,



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deliberations on the Charities Bill had been postponed until the meeting on 11 November 2021.

Members noted correspondence from Trevor McKee in relation to the Charity Commission.

15. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 9 November 2021 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, at 9.00 am.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:52pm.

Kellie Armstrong MLA
Deputy Chairperson, Committee for Communities