



Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 9 September 2021

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Ms Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Andy Allen MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:
Mr Alex Easton MLA
Mr Mark Durkan MLA
Ms Sinéad Ennis MLA

Apologies: Ms Pam Cameron MLA
Ms Karen Mullan MLA
Mr Fra McCann MLA

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



In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Oliver Bellew (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 09.04 am in open session.

1. Apologies

Apologies as above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister is proposing to host an event on 13 October 2021 for Olympians and Paralympians and was seeking MLAs to provide cross community support for the event.

The Chairperson informed Members that she was happy to provide support.

Andy Allen and Kellie Armstrong agreed to support the event.

The Chairperson informed Members that Housing Rights are holding an online seminar on the 29th September entitled "Where to next for security of tenure in Northern Ireland's Private Rented Sector?"

The Chairperson informed Members that the seminar will focus on the Private Tenancies Bill, in particular security of tenure and notice to quit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that a member of RalSe attends and reports back to the Committee as part of the evidence gathering for the Bill.



3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 8 July 2021.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson reminded Members that correspondence was issued regularly during summer recess and that Members were asked to highlight to the Committee team any correspondence they wished to discuss further. In advance of the meeting, Members had not highlighted any correspondence that they wished to discuss further.

The Chairperson then highlighted a Departmental response received over the summer on the Women Involved in Community Transformation (WICT) Scheme.

Members welcomed confirmation that further funding had been allocated to the WICT Scheme. However, the Committee expressed concern that there had been no decisions taken to date on how this funding will be used.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask why it is now taking a different approach in relation to the scheme, to ask if something has gone wrong with the scheme and, if so, has this been communicated to the scheme's delivery partners.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite representatives from The Women's Network to brief Members at the meeting on 16th September.

5. Charities Bill

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the delegated powers memorandum for the Bill



Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy to the Examiner of Statutory Rules for comment.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a letter from the Charities Regulator in relation to being unable to provide oral evidence to the Committee.

The Committee was content to receive a written submission from the Charities Regulator.

6. RaISe briefing on the Charities Bill

Andy Allen declared an interest as a Charity Trustee.

The following RaISe Officer joined the meeting:

Mr Stephen Orme

The Assembly Research Officer briefed the Committee and took part in a question and answer session with Members.

Alex Easton joined the meeting at 9.27 am.

The Chairperson thanked the researcher for his attendance and for his informative paper.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department a copy of the questions in the paper for comment.

7. Departmental briefing on the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Amendment) Bill

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Ciarán Mee

Ms Martina Campbell



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

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

Alex Easton left the meeting at 10.27 am.

8. SL1 - The Private Tenancies (Coronavirus Modifications) (No.2) Regulations

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed regulations will extend the emergency period to 4 May 2022, which is the final extension allowed under the Private Tenancies (Coronavirus Modifications) Act (Northern Ireland) 2020.

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

9. SL1 - The Social Security Benefits (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed regulations will provide the Department with the ability to make these payments in instalments, with the claimant's consent and will provide an additional safeguard for vulnerable claimants.

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

10. SL1 - The Universal Credit (Childcare Costs) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed regulations will amend the Universal Credit Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 by ensuring that an Adviser Discretion Fund payment from the Department for upfront childcare costs will be



included in the person's Universal Credit account for the purposes of calculating the award of the UC childcare costs element.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a copy of the discretionary criteria.

11. SR 2021/207 - The Social Security (Reciprocal Agreements) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (NI) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/207: The Social Security (Reciprocal Agreements) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (NI) 2021, which corrects deficiencies in NI legislation following the end of the transition period. It aligns the statute book with certain arrangements which are already set out in international agreements, and removes certain redundant provisions, so providing legislative clarity, with some savings provisions where appropriate.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/207: The Social Security (Reciprocal Agreements) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (NI) 2021 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, had no objection to the Rule.

12. SR 2021/215 - The Social Security (Fines) (Deductions from Benefits) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/215: The Social Security (Fines) Deductions from Benefits) Regulations (NI) 2021, which will provide for deductions to be made from Universal Credit where a fine or compensation order has been imposed upon a person (the offender) by a court to meet the sums due in respect of such fines and compensation orders.



Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/215: The Social Security (Fines) Deductions from Benefits) Regulations (NI) 2021 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, had no objection to the Rule.

13. SR 2021/232 - The Lotteries (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/232: The Lotteries (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021, which enables the Department to amend the Regulations to allow for the sale of a lottery ticket or chance by means of the internet.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/232: The Lotteries (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, had no objection to the Rule.

14. Correspondence

- i. Memo from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs regarding their call for views on the Climate Change Bill (No 2).

The Chairperson informed Members that the Bill would place a responsibility on all Executive Departments to ensure that greenhouse gas emissions do not exceed the set Carbon Budget for any period.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that a response is drafted focusing on the Department for Communities' responsibilities for agreement at a future meeting.

The Chairperson informed Members that in the final set of recess correspondence issued on 3rd September, Members were provided with a Ministerial response on the LOTS Scheme.



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

- ii. Correspondence from Electrical Safety First regarding ensuring that electrical safety clauses in the Private Tenancies Bill adequately protect tenants.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Electrical Safety First asking that they make a written submission to the Committee's future call for evidence on the Private Tenancies Bill.

- iii. Training for Women Network Ltd request to brief the Committee regarding their WICT Programme and future funding.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite representatives to brief the Committee at its meeting on 16th September.

- iv. Departmental response to queries forwarded on behalf of Boyle Bingo regarding the Licensing of Clubs (Amendment) Bill.

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

- v. Departmental response to queries regarding the Sports Sustainability Fund and funding for walking groups.

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

- vi. Departmental response to correspondence from the Training for Women Network regarding WICT Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response to the Training for Women Network.

- vii. Request from the All Party Group on Arts for evidence from the Arts Sector on the challenges faced due to the Covid pandemic, including, an invitation to attend the next All Party Group on Arts.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward all evidence received to date on the the challenges faced by the Arts Sector due to the Covid pandemic.

- viii. Letter from Cllr Dale Pankhurst regarding issues with finlock gutters in Ballysillan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the correspondence to the Department for comment.

- ix. Correspondence from Carnegie UK regarding a potential Committee motion.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss further at the Committee meeting on 16th September.

- x. Invitation to the Committee Chairperson to chair at the Policy Forum for Northern Ireland policy conference: Key priorities for Housing Policy in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed for the Chairperson to attend and chair the event, subject to diary commitments.

- xi. UK Public Health Network (UKPHN) invitation to attend 5 Nations Gambling Roundtable Webinar.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that a member of RaISe attends and reports back to Members.

- xii. Letter from Evangelical Alliance regarding Afghanistan refugees.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the correspondence to the Minister for comment.

- xiii. Letter of complaint regarding Foras na Gaeilge.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the correspondence to the Department for comment.

- xiv. Carrickfergus Community Forum request to brief the Committee on the work of the eleven community development networks funded by DFC /CIF fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Carrickfergus Community Forum to extend an invitation to a future stakeholder event.

- xv. Request to brief the Committee from The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) on the work of the fund and to visit a heritage site in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to The National Lottery Heritage Fund to extend an invitation to a future stakeholder event.

- xvi. Request to brief the Committee from Christians Against Poverty on their Report – Shipshape or Sinking Ship.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Christians Against Poverty to extend an invitation to a future stakeholder event.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- i. SR 2021 234 The Pension Schemes (2021 Act) (Commencement No 1 and Transitional Provisions) Order (NI).
- ii. SR 2021 239 (C 7) The Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 (Commencement No 15) Order 2021.
- iii. SR 2021 240 The Pension Schemes Act 2021 (Commencement No. 1) Order (Northern Ireland) 2021.



- iv. Departmental letter regarding SR 2021 209 The Universal Credit (Coronavirus) (Restoration of the Minimum Income).

15. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson informed Members that a draft forward work programme had been emailed to Members.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss the draft forward work programme at the meeting on 16th of September.

16. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed the situation in regards to refugees from Afghanistan, in particular the housing arrangements for refugees.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask what measures it intends to put in place for areas that fall under its remit, particularly in relation to housing arrangements for refugees.

The Committee expressed its disappointment and frustration that Welfare Reform Mitigation Measures to date, have still to be scheduled on The Executive Office (TEO) meeting agenda.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to TEO to express its disappointment and to ask for a full and frank explanation as to why legislation regarding Welfare Reform Mitigation Measures has not yet been brought forward.

The Committee discussed its concerns regarding the recent rise in energy costs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to ask if there is scope to increase the winter fuel payment and to expand the eligibility criteria.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to TEO to ask what actions, if any, it plans to take in relation to the recent energy price rises.

The Committee discussed the High Street Voucher Scheme, namely, its concerns regarding the on-line application process.

Members discussed the duplication of information required when completing the on-line application process and its availability on other databases.

Members also discussed the disadvantages of an on-line process to a range of potential applicants.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for the Economy (DfE) to outline the Committee's concerns.

Alex Easton re-joined the meeting at 10.39 am.

17. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 16 September 2021 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings, at 9.00 am.

Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities