



# Northern Ireland Assembly

## COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday 1 July 2020**

**Room 29, Parliament Buildings**

Present: Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)  
Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Andy Allen MBE MLA  
Robin Newton MBE MLA

Present: Starleaf Fra McCann MLA  
Mark Durkan MLA  
Sinéad Ennis MLA

Apologies: Jonathan Buckley MLA

In Attendance: Kevin Pelan (Assembly Clerk)  
Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Oliver Bellew (Clerical Officer)

*The meeting commenced in open session at 14:04 p.m.*

#### **1. Apologies**

As above.

#### **2. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson provided members with a brief overview of her meeting with the Minister on 26 June. The Chairperson also advised members that the Minister is due to brief the Committee at its meeting on 8 July and that a list of issues had been forwarded for the Minister to address.

The following interest was declared:

Andy Allen MBE MLA declared an interest as a Charity Trustee and subsequently raised an issue regarding the current position of the Charity Commission in relation to charity registration given a recent court judgement.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to raise the issue with the Minister at its meeting on 8 July.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to forward to the Committee Clerk any additional issues they would like the Minister to address on 8 July.

The Chairperson advised members that she had attended the cross-party meeting on the Arts Sector on 29 June. The Chairperson also welcomed the announcement that the Arts Sector will receive an additional £4m Covid-19 funding from the June Monitoring Round.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to write to the department to ask for details on how this funding will be rolled out and for details of the application criteria.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 25 June 2020.

### **4. Matters Arising**

The Chairperson advised Members that they had been provided with a departmental response to Committee queries on the Sports Hardship Fund criteria.

A member welcomed the £2m funding and queried if this was in addition to the Sport NI £3m Lottery funding.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the department asking if the £3m Lottery funding is in addition to the previous announcement of £2m departmental funding.

Members noted a departmental response to Committee queries on the Covid-19 emergency food parcel scheme.

The Chairperson advised members that the Committee had received a second briefing request from the Ulster Orchestra.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request a written briefing and to reconsider an oral briefing in the autumn when Committee priorities are clearer.

## **5. Solace update briefing on the impact of Covid-19 on local councils**

The following Solace representatives joined the meeting via Starleaf at 14:12 p.m.:

Ms Jacqui Dixon, Solace Chair

Ms Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive, Belfast City Council

Mr Alfie Dallas, Lead Finance Officer, Derry City and Strabane District Council

Mr Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources, Belfast City Council.

The representatives provided the Committee with an update on the impact of Covid-19 on local councils.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to write to councils and Land and Property Service to encourage collaborative working and data sharing to develop a robust rates forecasting model.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to write to the Ministers for Communities, Economy, Finance and Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs asking what, if any, planning has taken place around future rates guarantees.

*Agreed:* Member agreed to write to councils asking if they were aware of the significant number of businesses not paying commercial rates prior to Covid-19 crisis.

The Chairperson thanked the Solace representatives for their attendance.

## **6. Homeless Providers briefing on the Supporting People Programme**

The following representatives joined the meeting via Starleaf at 15:14 p.m.:

Mr Jim Dennison, Chief Executive, Simon Community NI

Mr David Carroll, Chief Executive, DePaul

Mr Kevin Wright, Chief Executive, First Housing Aid and Support Services

The representatives briefed the Committee on the Supporting People Programme and the impact of Covid-19 on the homeless sector.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the department and to the Department for Health to encourage multi-agency working to continue beyond the current health crisis.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the NI Housing Executive (NIHE) to request an update on the Homeless Strategy.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the department to request an update on the status of the concordat between the NIHE and voluntary and community sector and whether any revised concordat will include full cost recovery.

## **7. Correspondence**

The Committee considered a copy of a Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) - Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal Bill). Members noted that that the Committee would be considering a draft report on the LCM at next week's meeting.

The Committee considered correspondence regarding an issue with pre-application to Sport NI to represent NI on a national and international stage.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to forward the correspondence to Sport NI for comment.

The Committee considered a departmental response to correspondence from Home NI.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to forward a copy of the response to Home NI.

The Committee considered a request from Upskill Enterprise INC to brief the Committee on their work.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to consider the request again in the autumn in context with Committee priorities at that time.

The Committee noted the following:

- I. Departmental response to correspondence from the Trussell Trust.
- II. Response from the Minister for Infrastructure to a Solace briefing paper on the impact of Covid-19 on local councils.
- III. Copy of Economy Committee's letter to the Minister on guidance for safe re-opening of businesses.
- IV. Copy of Definition of Affordable Housing – Further Stakeholder Engagement.
- V. Minister of Finance response to correspondence from the Trussell Trust, which had been forwarded by the Committee.
- VI. Copy of Delegated Powers Memorandum and Impact Assessment for the Pensions Bill 2020.

## **8. Forward Work Programme**

Members noted that, at the meeting on 8 July, the Committee will be briefed by the Minister on departmental priorities and by the NI Union of Supported Employment.

## **9. Any Other Business**

A Member raised a query regarding the Changing Places Toilet Fund.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the department asking if there were any Barnett implications stemming from the £30m Changing Places Toilet Fund in England.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ask if there were any plans to establish a dedicated Changing Places fund for NI.

A member raised concerns regarding Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL) and the financial impact to clubs as a result of Covid-19.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the IFA to ask if the UEFA Hat Trick Fund could be distributed to clubs to ensure their survival and recovery until football is able to fully return.

#### **10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 8 July at 14:00 p.m. in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting adjourned at 16:15 p.m.*

**Ms Paula Bradley MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Communities**