



Northern Ireland Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday 15 October 2020
Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:	Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson) Andy Allen MBE MLA Robin Newton MBE MLA Fra McCann MLA
Present: Starleaf	Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson) Jonathan Buckley MLA Mark Durkan MLA Sinéad Ennis MLA
In Attendance:	Janice Thompson (Assembly Clerk) Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk) Oliver Bellew (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in open session at 10:02 a.m.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies to record.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson encouraged Members to attend future meetings by Starleaf where possible as due to social distancing there remains a limitation on numbers allowed in the Committee room at any one time. This will be more important in the coming weeks as Departmental officials will need to attend in person as the Committee conducts its clause by clause scrutiny of the Pension Schemes Bill.

The Chairperson informed Members that the 'Effective Questioning' workshop had been arranged to be held after the Committee meeting on 19 November 2020.

Fra McCann joined the meeting at 10.03a.m.

The Chairperson informed Members that the first informal stakeholder briefing event has been arranged and will take place on the afternoon of Tuesday 24 November.

The Chairperson informed Members that she will make a speech in plenary on Tuesday 20 October 2020 on behalf of the Committee on the Second Stage of the Budget (No 3) Bill.

Robin Newton joined the meeting at 10.05a.m.

The Chairperson informed Members that a short training session had been arranged with the Bill Office following the meeting.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 8 October 2020.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Ministerial reply on the Sports Hardship Fund. Members noted that the Minister had asked officials to introduce measures to ensure that the Committee is kept informed of future developments in relation to the Department's support for the sports sector.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a written update on areas covered by the Minister at the briefing session on 30 September. Members noted the written update.

The Chairperson informed Members that, following a Committee query at the meeting on 8 October, the Department had advised that Inland Waterways are not the responsibility of the Department for Communities but the Department for Infrastructure (DfI). During the reorganisation of departments, DfI inherited responsibility for Inland Waterways from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). Members noted the reply.

5. Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL) briefing on the impact of Covid-19 on local football

Robin Newton declared an interest as his daughter is an office holder with NIFL.

The following NIFL representatives joined the meeting:

Gerard Lawlor, Interim NIFL Board Chairman
Andrew Johnston, Managing Director
Steven Mills, Development Manager.

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

The Chairperson thanked the NIFL representatives for their attendance.

The meeting adjourned at 10.58a.m.

The meeting recommenced at 11.03a.m.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Communities, the Minister for Finance and the Irish Football Association to support NIFL's call for more funding to support clubs during this pandemic and to highlight the looming crisis in senior and grass roots football with a number of clubs potentially folding by Christmas 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the NIFL Report to the Executive Office to support their call for more funding and for the Executive Office to comment on the issues raised within the report.

6. Retail NI briefing on the future of town centres post Covid-19

The following Retail NI representative joined the meeting:

Mr Glyn Roberts, Chief Executive, Retail NI

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

The Chairperson thanked the representative for his attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office to ask for an update on the status and progress of the High Street Taskforce Group and the reason for the delay in its formation and progress.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a research paper on models of best practice on high street and town centre regeneration in other jurisdictions before deciding on whether to seek briefings from other High Street Taskforce groups.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Finance to ask if there is a 'shop vacancy strategy' or if there are plans to produce one and what discussions there have been with local councils over vacant shops.

7. Departmental Briefing on additional Legislative Consent Motion on the Westminster Pension Schemes Bill

The following Departmental officials joined the meeting:

Mr Gerry McCann, Grade 7, State & Private Pensions & EU

Ms Doreen Roy, Grade 7, State & Private Pensions

The Departmental officials briefed the Committee on the additional Legislative Consent Motion on the Westminster Pension Schemes Bill. This was followed by a question and answer session with Members.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

8. SL1 - The Universal Credit (Earned Income) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The proposed rule provides a remedy to the Court of Appeal Judgment where a person may have two sets of calendar monthly earnings from the same employer taken into account in the same Universal Credit assessment period and may lose out on the benefit of a work allowance.

It also makes provision for the way information, in particular information reported to HMRC by Real Time Information Employers, is to be used in calculating a person's earned income.

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

9. S.R. 2020 NO. 217 - The Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit (Coronavirus)(Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/217 - The Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which will ensure that ESA claimants who satisfy the eligibility conditions and have Covid-19, or are self-isolating because of Covid-19, or are caring for a child (or qualifying young person) who has Covid-19 or is self-isolating, in line with government guidance, will continue to be supported.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/217 - Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the rule.

10. Correspondence

Members considered a request from the Cliff Edge Coalition to brief on Welfare Reform Mitigations at a future Committee meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the group is invited to brief at a future meeting.

Members considered a request from We Make Events to brief on the impact of Covid-19 on the arts sector at a future Committee meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the group is invited to brief at a future meeting.

Members considered a letter from the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) in relation to jobs and services in local councils.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the letter to the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Communities for comment.

The Committee noted the following:

- i. Departmental letter of response in relation to the Survival and Recovery of the NI Arts Sector.
- ii. Departmental letter in relation to the appointment of a new Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
- iii. Copy of British Library Annual Report and Accounts 2019-2020.
- iv. The WAVE Trust 70/30 Initiative and the Prevention of Adverse Childhood Experiences.
- v. Departmental First Day Brief and Organisational Chart.
- vi. Advice NI press release on the fears of Universal Credit chaos leading up to Christmas.
- vii. Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs response to Committee queries from 7 July regarding the financial position of councils.
- viii. Copy of letter to the Minister for Communities seeking Covid-19 financial support for the entertainment sector.
- ix. Copy of correspondence from the Committee for Finance to all Executive Ministers in relation to funding bids during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- x. Departmental Letter in relation to a Consultation on Pensions Improving Outcomes for Members of Defined Contribution Pension Schemes.
- xi. Departmental response to Committee queries in relation to a previous briefing by Sported.
- xii. Departmental round-up on activity from 11 September to 10 October 2020.

11. Forward Work Programme

Members noted that, at the meeting on 22 October, the Committee will be briefed by the Irish Football Association (IFA) on the impact of Covid-19 on local football and the ending of the 2019-20 football season. The Committee will also commence its deliberations on the clauses of the Pension Schemes Bill.

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Thursday 22 October at 10:00 a.m. in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 12.40p.m.

Ms Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities