



## Northern Ireland Assembly

### COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES

#### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday 19 November 2020**  
**Room 29, Parliament Buildings**

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

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

In Attendance: Janice Thompson (Assembly Clerk)  
Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Oliver Bellew (Clerical Officer)

*The meeting commenced in open session at 9:00 a.m.*

#### **1. Ministerial briefing on the Housing Executive investment challenge**

The Chairperson welcomed the Minister, Carál Ní Chuilín and officials, to the meeting. The Minister then briefed Members on the Housing Executive investment challenge.

The Minister and officials took part in a question and answer session with Members.

*The Minister left the meeting at 9.40a.m. and the officials carried on the question and answer session with Members.*

At the end of the briefing session, the Chairperson thanked the Minister and officials for their attendance.

*The meeting was suspended at 10.14a.m. and restarted at 10.21a.m.*

## **2. Apologies**

There were no apologies to record.

## **3. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson informed Members that Effective Questioning Training would take place after the meeting.

The Chairperson informed Members that at the meeting on 12 November, a query was raised in relation to an underspend of £6m which Members felt should be released to Community and Voluntary Sector.

Departmental officials have advised that the £6.7m is the remainder of the £15.5m and is not an 'underspend' and that all eligible applications to the Charities Fund for the period 1 April – 30 September were funded.

## **4. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 12 November 2020.

## **5. Matters Arising**

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply to Committee queries on the Fuel Poverty Fund.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to encourage that the changes are publicised widely.

Members noted a Departmental response to Committee queries on the support package for sport.

Members noted a Departmental response to Committee queries on Engagement with the deaf community and VRS.

Members noted a Departmental response to Committee queries on the Covid-19 Charities Fund.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a response from the Finance Minister to Committee queries on the Dormant Accounts Fund.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Finance to ask for the plans for the Fund when they are finalised.

The Chairperson informed Members that she was concerned with the length of time that was being taken in allocating Covid-19 funds to the Arts Sector.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department for an update on the allocation of funds.

*The meeting was suspended at 10.32a.m. and restarted at 10.34a.m.*

## **6. Briefing by the Cliff Edge Coalition on Welfare Reform mitigation measures**

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Ursula O'Hare, Law Centre

Ciara Fitzpatrick, Law Centre

Patrick Thompson, Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations

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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Minister requesting an urgent update on the ongoing work in relation to the review of Welfare Reform mitigations and to emphasise the need for the Committee to be involved in the co-design of the process for the review and development of the mitigations.

The Committee is also concerned to hear that the Cliff Edge Coalition has not been involved in the co-design process and urges the Minister to ensure that the group is consulted in the review and development of mitigation measures. The Committee also calls for the loopholes on the benefits cap and the bedroom tax to be closed as soon as possible and would like to know what the timetable is for the review of the Welfare Reform mitigation measures.

The Committee believes that the Contingency Fund is not as visible as it could be and needs to be publicised better as it should be a first option for claimants and might also need to be renamed.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department for information on the underspend on Welfare Reform mitigations.

## **7. Briefing by Drumbo Park on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill**

The following representative joined the meeting:

John Connor, Operations Director.

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

The Chairperson thanked the representative for his attendance.

#### **8. Draft Committee report on the Pension Schemes Bill**

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the draft Committee report on the Pension Schemes Bill.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that the report is published.

#### **9. SL1 – The State Pension Debits and Credits (Revaluation) (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020**

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

#### **10. SL1 - The State Pension Revaluation For Transitional Pensions (No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020**

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

#### **11. SL1 - The Occupational Pensions (Revaluation) Order 2020**

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

#### **12. SR 2020/245 - The Personal Independence Payment (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/245 which corrects an unintentional gap in Regulation 27 of the Personal Independence Payment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (S.R. 2016 No. 217) ("the PIP Regulations") to ensure that it fully underpins and accurately reflects the longstanding policy of restricting access to a new or enhanced award of the mobility component of Personal Independence Payment ("PIP") for claimants over State Pension age (SPa) where their award is revised or superseded.

*Agreed:* The Committee considered SR 2020/245 - The Personal Independence Payment (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the rule.

#### **13. Correspondence**

The Committee considered an Executive Office briefing paper on the High Street Task Force.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the briefing paper to Retail NI for information and to write to the Executive Office requesting regular updates on the work of the Task Force.

The Committee noted the following:

- i. Copy of NICCY Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20.
- ii. Departmental letter regarding the Public Consultation on Proposed Amendments to the Local Government Pension Scheme.
- iii. Copy of COPNI Annual Report and Financial Statements 2019 to 2020.
- iv. Copy of letter from Committee for Health to the Department regarding COVID-19 Support Payment.
- v. Copy of letter to Michael Gove MP, Minister for the Cabinet, requesting written evidence on issues relating to the UK's future relationship with the European Union.
- vi. Correspondence from the Committee for Finance in relation to the Peace Plus programme.

#### **14. Forward Work Programme**

Members noted that, at the meeting on 26 November, the Committee will be briefed by Assembly Research on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill. The Committee will also be briefed by the Department on the Financial Wellbeing Strategy and by C03 on the impact of Covid-19 on the Charities Sector.

#### **15. Any Other Business**

A Member raised an issue of a letter being issued to people in receipt of the Personal Independence Payment which indicated that their award would be extended until October 2021. However, recipients had since received a letter advising that a form needed to be completed by the end of November 2020 to enable their award to continue.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for an explanation on this issue.

#### **16. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be on Thursday 26 November at 10:00 a.m. in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting adjourned at 11.58a.m.*

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