



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday 22 October 2020
Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Andy Allen MBE MLA
Sinéad Ennis MLA
Robin Newton MBE MLA
Fra McCann MLA
Jonathan Buckley MLA

Present: Starleaf Mark Durkan MLA

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

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 raised an issue in relation to the Video Relay Service used in Northern Ireland by hearing impaired and visually impaired people to communicate via the telephone, as she had reports that the service was not working well for some. The Chairperson proposed that a Departmental briefing on this issue is arranged for a future meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Departmental officials to brief on this issue at a future meeting and to also invite representatives from the deaf and visually impaired communities to brief.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 15 October 2020.

4. Matters Arising

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to seek more details on the Job Start Scheme and when it might come into operation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to request more flexibility on the financial thresholds around programmes such as the Boiler Replacement Scheme. There are concerns that pensioners' incomes are pushing them marginally above the threshold to claim under these schemes. Members feel there should be a greater degree of flexibility around the threshold to enable more to claim, particularly in the current Covid-19 health crisis. The Committee also requested details on the current thresholds for eligibility.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental update on the application process for funding to the arts sector. Members noted the update.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental breakdown of capital funding bids.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a Departmental briefing on the Sub-Regional Stadia Programme at a future meeting.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental briefing paper on Main Estimates. Members noted the paper.

5. Irish Football Association (IFA) Briefing on the Impact of Covid-19 on Local Football

The following IFA representatives joined the meeting:

Patrick Nelson, Chief Executive
David Martin, President

Robin Newton joined the meeting at 10.23a.m.

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

The Chairperson thanked the IFA representatives for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ask for more details on the Covid-19 funding package for sport that will be presented to the Executive and for information on how it will be distributed to organisations.

Agreed: The IFA agreed to provide the Committee with a breakdown of the allocation of the \$1m fund provided to it by FIFA.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the IFA to request a briefing paper on the work carried out by the IFA Foundation.

The meeting adjourned at 11.36a.m.

The meeting restarted at 11.43a.m.

6. Committee Deliberations on the Clauses of the 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 provided Members with a brief overview of each of the clauses before the Chairperson asked Members for their views on each clause.

Clause 1 - Master Trust schemes: definition

The Committee was content with Clause 1.

Clause 2: Relevant public service pension schemes

The Committee was content with Clause 2.

Clause 3: Prohibition on operating a scheme unless authorised

The Committee was content with Clause 3.

Clause 4: Application for authorisation

The Committee queried the length of time required to file accounts.

Agreed: The Departmental officials agreed to provide further clarification in time for the meeting on 5 November.

Clause 5: Decision on application

The Committee asked a question on whether a 6-month period is a standard period. The Departmental officials advised that this time period is to allow The Pensions Regulator sufficient time to consider all information presented.

The Committee was content with the Department's explanation and was content with Clause 5.

Clause 6: Referral to Tribunal of refusal to grant authorisation

The Committee was content with Clause 6.

Clause 7: Fit and proper persons requirement

The Committee queried the definition of a person connected. The Departmental officials advised that an example of this would be a person involved in the same business and that personal connections were not an issue. Subsection 5 of the clause sets out the definitions of a person connected.

The Committee was content with the Department's explanation and was content with Clause 7.

Clause 8: Financial sustainability requirement

The Committee was content with Clause 8.

Clause 9: Financial sustainability requirement: business plan

The Committee asked for more information on the process for the approval of a business plan. The Departmental officials advised that the approval of business plans was the responsibility of The Pensions Regulator.

The Committee was content with the Department's explanation and was content with Clause 9.

Clause 10: Scheme funder requirements

The Committee was content with Clause 10.

Clause 11: Systems and processes requirements

The Committee was content with Clause 11.

Clause 12: Continuity strategy requirement

The Committee was content with Clause 12.

Clause 13: List of authorised schemes

The Committee was content with Clause 13.

Clause 14: Requirement to submit annual accounts

The Committee was content with Clause 14.

Clause 15: Requirement to submit supervisory return

The Committee was content with Clause 15.

Clause 16: Duty to notify Regulator of significant events

The Committee was content with Clause 16.

Clause 17: Fixed penalty notice for failure to comply with request for information

The Committee was content with Clause 17.

Clause 18: Escalating penalty notice for failure to comply with request for information

The Committee was content with Clause 18.

Clause 19: Withdrawal of authorisation

The Committee was content with Clause 19.

Clause 20: Triggering event: duties of trustees

The Committee was content with Clause 20.

Clause 21: Triggering events

The Committee was content with Clause 21.

Clause 22: Notification requirements

The Committee was content with Clause 22.

Clause 23: Continuity options

The Committee was content with Clause 23.

Clause 24: Continuity option 1: transfer out and winding up

The Committee was content with Clause 24.

Clause 25: Continuity option 2: resolving triggering event

The Committee was content with Clause 25.

Clause 26: Approval of implementation strategy

The Committee was content with Clause 26.

Clause 27: Content of implementation strategy

The Committee was content with Clause 27.

Clause 28: Duty to pursue continuity option

The Committee was content with Clause 28.

Clause 29: Prohibition on winding up except in accordance with continuity option 1

The Committee was content with Clause 29.

Clause 30: Periodic reporting requirement

The Committee was content with Clause 30.

Clause 31 and Schedule 1: Pause orders

The Committee was content with Clause 31.

Clause 32: Prohibition on new employers during triggering event period

The Committee was content with Clause 32.

Clause 33: Prohibition on increasing charges etc. during triggering event period

The Committee raised an issue in relation to whether charges continue to apply during a triggering event. The Departmental officials agreed to provide further information on this for consideration at the meeting on 5 November.

The Committee was content with Clause 33 subject to this further information being provided.

Clause 34: When it becomes clear that authorisation not to be withdrawn

The Committee was content with Clause 34.

Clause 35: When a decision to withdraw authorisation becomes final

The Committee was content with Clause 35.

Clause 36: Fraud compensation

The Committee was content with Clause 36.

Fra McCann left the meeting at 12.47p.m.

Clause 37 and Schedule 2: Master trusts in operation on commencement: transitional provision

The Committee was content with Clause 37.

Clause 38 and Schedule 3: Minor and consequential amendments

The Committee was content with Clause 38.

Clause 39: Interpretation of Part 1

The Committee was content with Clause 39.

Clause 40: Regulations modifying application of Part 1

The Committee was content with Clause 40.

Clause 41: Power to override contract terms

The Committee was content with Clause 41.

Clause 42: Regulations: general provisions

The Committee was content with Clause 42.

Clause 43: General interpretation

The Committee was content with Clause 43.

Fra McCann rejoined the meeting at 12.55p.m.

Clause 44: Commencement

The Committee was content with Clause 44

Clause 45: Short title

The Committee was content with Clause 45.

Mark Durkan left the meeting at 12.57p.m.

7. Draft Committee Report on additional Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Westminster Pension Schemes Bill

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a draft report on the Committee's deliberations on the additional Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Westminster Pension Schemes Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the contents of the report and ordered it to be printed.

8. SL1 - The Fines (Deductions from Benefits) Regulations (NI) 2020

The Chairperson informed Members that the Department had forwarded a response to queries raised at the meeting on 30 September as to whether the payment of a fine or a loan takes precedence.

The reply stated that the priority order for debt recovery only takes effect if there is insufficient benefit (standard allowance) to allow for payment of all liabilities then a

decision is made on a case by case basis regarding which ‘debts’ should take precedence.

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

9. Correspondence

The Chairperson drew members’ attention to correspondence from CO3 highlighting a survey to help understand the impact Covid-19 is having on the third sector six months on.

Andy Allen declared an interest as a Charity Trustee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite representatives from the Charity and Voluntary Sector to brief at a future meeting.

The Chairperson drew members’ attention to correspondence from Peter Corry requesting to brief the Committee on the impact of Covid-19 on the Arts Sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Mr Corry to brief the Committee at a future meeting.

The Committee considered a Departmental response to Arts Sector Groups’ concerns in relation to Covid-19 restrictions.

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

The Committee considered a Departmental response to concerns from the events and music sectors.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response to the original correspondents and to ask the Department for further information on the application criteria for the fund.

The Committee noted the following:

- i. Link to Department for Communities website to access the New Design Guide for Travellers Site and Supporting People and Homelessness.
- ii. Copy of letter from Gambling with Lives to the Minister for Communities in relation to priorities for the Gambling Bill.
- iii. Invitation to the Committee Chair to attend Girlguiding Zoom Event.

10. Forward Work Programme

Members noted that, at the meeting on 5 November October, the Committee will be briefed by the Department on policy proposals for a Gambling Bill and will commence formal clause by clause consideration of the Pension Schemes Bill.

11. Any Other Business

A member raised the issue of the IFA building a training centre on the site of the old Avoniel Leisure Centre in Belfast.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask about the extent of the Department's involvement in this project with the IFA and Belfast City Council and whether the Department is providing funding for the project.

A member raised the issue of a Departmental briefing that the Committee had requested on the Charities Commission.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for an update on when the Department will be in a position to update on the implications of the recent court judgement on the Charities Commission.

A Member raised concerns that DJs had been unable to access the recently announced individual artists Covid-19 fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask why DJs are not able to access this fund.

12. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Thursday 5 November 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