



Northern Ireland Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday 3 June 2020
Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present, Senate: Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Andy Allen MBE MLA

Present, Teleconferencing: Mark Durkan MLA
Sinéad Ennis MLA
Carál Ní Chuilín MLA
Robin Newton MBE MLA
Fra McCann MLA
Jonathan Buckley MLA

In Attendance: Kevin Pelan (Assembly Clerk)
Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced in open session at 13:01 p.m.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies to record.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised members that she had appeared on the Politics Show, in her role as Chairperson of the Committee, on Sunday 31 May with a representative from CO3 to discuss the impact of Covid-19 on the charity sector.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 27 May 2020.

4. Matters Arising

Members noted a response from the Minister for Finance on Covid-19 funding for councils.

The Chairperson advised members that they had received a response from the Director of Parliamentary Services on the use of teleconferencing at Committee meetings. The Chairperson informed members that she had raised the Committee's issue during the Chairpersons' Liaison Group meeting, and that the new Starleaf system would be operational week commencing 8 June.

One member noted the need for the Assembly to provide reasonable adjustments for those members with a hearing impairment.

Members discussed their experiences of using teleconferencing facilities across committees and agreed to support all efforts to improve broadcasting quality.

The Chairperson informed members that they had been provided with a copy of the Eleventh report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules. The Examiner had drawn the Committee's attention to SR 2020/49 - The Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (General Levy) (Revocation) Regulations 2020 and SR 2020/51 - The Automatic Enrolment (Earnings Trigger and Qualifying Earnings Band) Regulations (NI) 2020. The Examiner stated that the Department had breached the 21-day rule. However, the Examiner was content with the Department's reason for doing this. Members agreed to note the Report.

5. Briefing by the Sport NI on the impact of Covid-19

The following interest was declared:

Carál Ní Chuilín MLA declared an interest as a former Minister of DCAL.

The following Sport NI representatives joined the meeting via teleconference at 13:10 p.m.:

Antoinette McKeown, Chief Executive
Colm Jennings, Information Officer

The representatives provided the Committee with an overview of the impact of Covid-19 on the Sports sector.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Sport NI requesting the following information:

- A fuller explanation of phase 4 ‘Stimulating through development recovery projects’.
- The future plans that Sport NI has to assist clubs in getting capital projects back on track.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to encourage her to bid for additional funds as part of the June Monitoring Round to ensure that as many clubs as possible receive some financial support during the Covid-19 crisis.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives of Sport NI for their attendance.

Jonathan Buckley MLA left the meeting at 14:34 p.m.

6. Briefing by Women’s Aid Federation NI (WAFNI) on the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill

The following representatives of WAFNI joined the meeting via teleconference at 14:35 p.m.:

Sonya McMullan, Regional Services Manager
Sara Mason, Chief Executive Officer

The representatives provided the Committee with their views on the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill.

Robin Newton MBE MLA left the meeting at 14:47 p.m.

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

Andy Allen MBE MLA left the meeting at 14:54 p.m.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Committee for Justice highlighting the absence of any reference to housing in the Bill and to seek inclusion in the form of a revised explanatory memorandum reflecting the importance of safe and secure homes in the prevention and protection of women and children from domestic abuse.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives of Women’s Aid Federation NI for their attendance.

Members considered a paper from Women's Aid Federation on the Tampon Tax and their submission to the Department of Health.

Agreed: Members agreed to forward a copy of the papers to the Women's Caucus for information.

7. SR 2020/87 - The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Electronic Communications) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/87 - The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Electronic Communications Amendment) Order (NI) 2020, which would allow a claim to be made electronically for state pension in addition to the existing methods.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/87 - The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Electronic Communications Amendment) Order (NI), and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, has no objection to the rule.

8. SR 2020/89 The Statutory Sick Pay (General) (Coronavirus Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations (NI) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/89 - The Statutory Sick Pay (General) (Coronavirus Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations (NI) 2020, which would provide that a person who has been advised, by a relevant notification, that they have had contact with a person who has symptoms of coronavirus or has been infected, that they should stay at home and self-isolate as a result.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/89 - The Statutory Sick Pay (General) (Coronavirus Amendment) (No. 4) Regulations (NI) 2020), and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, has no objection to the rule.

9. Correspondence

The Committee considered a copy of research "Countering Paramilitary and Organised Criminal Influence on Youth – A Review".

Agreed: Members agreed to forward a copy of the report to the Department for Communities for information.

The Committee noted the following:

- I. Copy of letter to the Minister for Health supporting the Committee's call for cross-departmental strategic approach to help councils following Solace NI briefing.
- II. Copy of Spotted's report, Community Pulse.

10. Forward Work Programme

Members noted that the Committee will be briefed by the Minister on current and future support for councils and departmental officials on the June monitoring round/departmental reprioritisation at its meeting on 10 June.

Members also noted that the Committee will be briefed by the department on 17 June on the Covid-19 funding to 'Supporting People' and by departmental officials on the reform of Liquor Licensing.

Members noted that the Committee will receive an update briefing from Solace on 24 June on Covid-19 funding to local councils.

11. Any Other Business

A member suggested the Committee should get an update from the NI Housing Executive on issues relating to Corporation Tax.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to get a written update but noted that the future of the NIHE would be considered by the Committee in detail as part of the Forward Work Programme.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 10 June at 13:00 p.m. Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 15:21 p.m.

Ms Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities