



# Northern Ireland Assembly

## COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday 8 July 2020**  
**Room 29, Parliament Buildings**

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

Present: Starleaf Fra McCann MLA  
Mark Durkan MLA  
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 13:59 p.m.*

#### **1. Ministerial update briefing on departmental priorities**

The Minister for Communities, Carál Ni Chuilín MLA joined the meeting via Starleaf at 14:00 p.m.:

The Minister provided the Committee with an update on departmental priorities.

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

The following interest was declared:

Andy Allen MBE MLA declared an interest as a Charity Trustee. Mr Allen raised the issue of today's High Court Ruling on the legal definition of terminal illness in relation to benefit claimants.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to write to the department asking that the Committee is kept informed of the implications of the court judgement.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to forward any additional issues they wished to raise with the Minister to the Committee Clerk.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister for her attendance.

## **2. Apologies**

There were no apologies to record.

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

The Chairperson advised members that it was normal practice for committees to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson during periods of recess to submit views on the releasing or withholding of information in any non-routine or contentious Freedom of Information requests received.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to continue with this practice.

## **4. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 1 July 2020.

## **5. Matters Arising**

The Chairperson advised members that they had been provided with a copy of the Fourteenth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

The Examiner stated that SR 2020/89 – The Statutory Sick Pay (General) (Coronavirus Amendment) (No. 4) had breached the 21day. However, the Examiner was content with the Department's explanation for this which was the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak. Members agreed to note the Report.

The Chairperson advised Members that they had been provided with a response from Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL) in relation to Committee queries on the return of football following the Covid-19 outbreak.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the NIFL requesting the following information:

- Explanation of the members' code of conduct and code of ethics
- An explanation of how the final positions in the Irish League were decided, including the relegation of clubs

Members noted a departmental response to Committee queries on the review of welfare reform mitigation measures.

The Chairperson advised members that they had been provided with a briefing paper from the Ulster Orchestra in relation to the Impact of Covid-19.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to consider a briefing in early September when the Committee will consider a forward work programme in the context of departmental priorities.

The Chairperson advised members that the Pension Schemes Bill is now at Committee Stage and that they had been provided with a signposting ad to go into the three main newspapers for the Committee's call for evidence on the Bill.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that the ad is issued to the three main newspapers for publication.

## **6. Briefing by Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment (NIUSE) on Future Funding for Disability Employment Services**

The following representatives joined the meeting via Starleaf at 15:11 p.m.:

Mr Norman Sterritt, NIUSE Chairperson  
 Mr Stephen Mathews, CEO, Cedar Foundation  
 Ms Claire Lavery, Action on Hearing Loss  
 Ms Elaine Armstrong, Cedar Foundation

The representatives briefed the Committee on future funding for Disability Funding Services.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State to raise NIUSE concerns, also to seek clarification on the new UK Shared Prosperity Fund and to seek assurances that there will be no funding gaps.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to all Executive Ministers to make them aware of the issue and to encourage cross-departmental working to develop a clear plan for the full implementation of the NI Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Chairpersons' Liaison Group to make them aware of the issue.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to the UK Minister overseeing the proposed new UK Shared Prosperity Fund for clarification on funding arrangements for disability projects to replace the existing European funds.

## **7. Committee Report on LCM on the Immigration and Social Security (EU Withdrawal) Bill**

The Committee considered the draft report on the Legislative Consent Motion – Immigration and Social Security (EU Withdrawal) Bill.

### **Powers and Membership**

The Committee considered the Powers and Membership section of the report (paragraphs 1-3) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Powers and Membership section of the report.

### **Background**

The Committee considered the Background section of the report (paragraphs 4-11) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Background section of the report.

### **Part 2 of the Bill: Social Security Co-ordination**

The Committee considered the Social Security Co-ordination section of the report (paragraph 12-20) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Social Security Co-ordination section of the report.

### **Amendments to the Bill**

The Committee considered the Amendments to the Bill section of the report (paragraphs 21-25) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Amendments to the Bill section of the report.

### **Committee Consideration of the Bill and Legislative Consent Motion**

The Committee considered the Committee consideration of the bill and Legislative Consent Motion section of the report (paragraphs 26-47) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Committee consideration and LCM section of the report.

### **Appendix 1 – Explanatory Notes**

The Committee considered Appendix 1 of the report (pages 10-29) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with Appendix 1 of the report.

### **Appendix 2 – List of Amendments**

The Committee considered Appendix 2 of the report (pages 30-31) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with Appendix 2 of the report.

### **Appendix 3 – Legislative Consent Memorandum**

The Committee considered Appendix 3 of the report (pages 33-37) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with Appendix 3 of the report.

### **Appendix 4 – Hansard Official Report**

The Committee considered Appendix 4 of the report (Page 38) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with Appendix 4 of the report.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content for the Report on the Legislative Consent Memorandum on the (NIA/35/17-22) to be printed.

## **8. SR 2020/120 - The Local Government (Accounts and Audit) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/120 - The Local Government (Accounts and Audit) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2020, which amends The Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 by extending the deadlines for relevant authorities to certify and publish their annual accounts and supporting documents in relation to the financial year beginning on 1 April 2019. This will allow the relevant authorities greater flexibility as to how they deploy their resources and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Agreed:* The Committee considered SR 2020/120 - The Local Government (Accounts and Audit) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the rule.

## **9. SR 2020/129 - The Universal Credit (Great Britain Reciprocal Arrangements) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/129 - The Universal Credit (Great Britain Reciprocal Arrangements) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which provides for the

introduction of a new working age income-related social security benefit Universal Credit and the abolition of income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit.

*Agreed:* The Committee considered SR 2020/129 - The Universal Credit (Great Britain Reciprocal Arrangements) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the rule.

## **10. Correspondence**

The Committee considered a briefing request from Belfast Chamber on their policy paper 'Building Belfast Back Better'.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to consider this, and other requests that the Committee has received, at a meeting in early September when the Committee will consider a forward work programme in the context of departmental priorities.

The Committee considered a departmental response to correspondence from the Music Venues Trust on the impact of Covid-19.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to forward a copy of the response to Music Venues Trust.

The Committee noted the following:

- I. Copy of June Investment Activity Report for Department of Communities.
- II. Letter from the Department for Communities regarding the Loans for Mortgage Interest (Transaction Fee) Regulations (NI) 2020.
- III. Details and link to new Pivotal report – 'A New Economic Vision' – impact of Covid on the NI Economy.
- IV. Correspondence from the Finance Committee regarding the Department of Finance Review of Arm's Length Bodies.
- V. Departmental letter regarding the Review of the default charge cap and standardised cost disclosure.
- VI. Departmental letter regarding a Design Guide for Travellers Sites in NI.

## **11. Forward Work Programme**

The Chairperson advised members that this would be the last meeting, unless urgent matters arise, until after summer recess. The Chairperson also advised members that, after recess, the Committee would consider their forward work programme.

## **12. Any Other Business**

A member discussed the need for a Committee planning day early in September.

*Agreed:* Members agreed to schedule a strategic planning day once department priorities have been established.

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

To be confirmed.

*The meeting adjourned at 15:56 p.m.*

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