



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 14 October 2021

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

- Ms Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
- Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Mr Andy Allen MLA
- Ms Ciara Ferguson MLA
- Mr Paul Frew MLA
- Ms Aíne Murphy MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

- Mr Stephen Dunne MLA
- Mr Mark Durkan MLA

Apologies: Mr Fra McCann MLA

In Attendance:

- Dr Janice Thompson (Assembly Clerk)
- Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Clerk)
- Ms Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Supervisor)



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The meeting began in closed session at 9.08 am. The Deputy Chairperson, Kellie Armstrong, assumed the Chair. The following Members were present at the start of the closed session: Kellie Armstrong, Aine Murphy, Andy Allen, Ciara Ferguson and Mark Durkan.

1. Briefing by the Independent Review Panel on Charity Regulation on the Charities Bill

Paul Frew joined the meeting at 9.16am.

Paula Bradley joined the meeting at 9.22am.

Stephen Dunne joined the meeting at 9.27am.

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Dr Oonagh Breen

Rev Dr Lesley Carroll

Noel Lavery

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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

The meeting went into open session at 9.54am and Paula Bradley assumed the Chair.

2. Apologies

Mr Fra McCann MLA



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3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson extended the Committee's best wishes to Fra McCann on the recent announcement of his retirement from the Assembly.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 14 October 2021.

5. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental response in relation to its Business Plan 2020-2022. Members noted the response.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental response in relation to potential legislation. Members noted the response.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental response in relation to the Review of Welfare Reform Mitigations. Members also considered a tabled paper from the Minister on this issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office in support of the Minister's call for the Executive to press for an early decision to approve the introduction of this vitally important legislation without further delay.

The Committee would also like to know why there has been a reluctance at the Executive Office for this issue to be discussed fully and for a decision to be made on



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it and if this is due to the lack of a termination date being included for the mitigation measures. The Committee emphasised the importance of legislation being brought forward in as timely a manner as possible to ensure that Members can carry out their scrutiny role effectively.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to express its disappointment at the need for accelerated passage for the relevant legislation to extend the mitigations schemes.

The Committee would also like to know if, in the absence of the necessary legislation, there will be a gap in mitigation payments and, if so, is there a way for payments to continue through the use of technical accounting arrangements.

In relation to the review of welfare reform mitigations, Members requested details of the membership of the Advisory Panel and reminded the Department that they would appreciate a copy of the terms of reference when available.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to ask for a reconsideration of the decision to withdraw the £20 per week Universal Credit uplift. The Committee would also like DWP to consider a review of the effectiveness of Universal Credit, and the amount of the benefit, particularly with recent cost of living increases such as the rise in energy and fuel costs.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a response from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in relation to leasehold properties. The Committee noted that a fuller response would follow in due course.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a response from the Department for Justice in relation to the Transfer of Functions Order.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 10.25am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Disability Strategy Expert Panel and Departmental Officials for comment.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Ministerial response on post Covid recovery for the Arts Sector. Members noted the response.



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The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Ministerial response on the High Street Voucher Scheme. Members welcomed the response.

The Chairperson informed Members that, at the meeting on 7 October 2021, there were queries raised in relation to the current status of the Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Chairperson informed Members that they been provided with a Departmental response that had issued as part of the Committee correspondence during the summer.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for details of the membership of the Co-design Group and the Cross-departmental Working Group. The Committee would also like to know the timeframe for completion of this work and whether the Welfare Reform Mitigation Panel is included in this work. The Committee expressed concern that if the work is not completed as soon as possible, there may be an issue with the funding of the strategy as there will be a move to 3 year budgets and the strategy might not be funded if it is not finalised in time for the introduction of 3 year budgets.

6. Charities Bill

Andy Allen re-joined the meeting at 10.32am.

Andy Allen declared an interest as a Charity Trustee.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a response from the Charity Commission NI to Committee queries on the Bill. Members noted the response.

Paul Frew left the meeting at 10.33am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Charity Commission NI to ask if details such as a charity trustee's date of birth and a charity's bank account will be published on the online public register.



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The Chairperson also informed Members that they had been provided with summary tables of the written evidence received on the Bill. Members noted the summary tables.

7. Briefing by Social Enterprise NI on the Charities Bill

Paul Frew re-joined the meeting at 10.36am.

The following representative joined the meeting:

Colin Jess

Mr Jess briefed the Committee and took part in a question and answer session with Members.

The Chairperson thanked the representative for his attendance.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.50am

The meeting resumed at 11.02am with the following Members present: Paula Bradley, Kellie Armstrong, Mark Durkan, Aine Murphy, Paul Frew, Andy Allen, Stephen Dunne and Ciara Ferguson.

The Deputy Chairperson, Kellie Armstrong, assumed the Chair.

8. Departmental Briefing on the Charities Bill

The following Officials joined the meeting:

Martin Ireland

Sharon Russell

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



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Paula Bradley left the meeting at 11.31am.

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

9. Departmental Briefing on October Monitoring Round bid to mitigate for withdrawal of £20-per-week Universal Credit uplift

The following Officials joined the meeting:

Anne McCleary

Paddy Rooney

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

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Departmental Officials agreed to provide the Committee with details of the exact timeframe for previous changes to the DWP computer system to allow fortnightly payments of Universal Credit in Northern Ireland.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 12.44pm.



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10. SL1 – The Social Security (Amendment)

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed rule will correct a deficiency in existing legislation following EU Exit and the end of the Transition Period. It amends the legislation in order to continue to make payments of the Christmas Bonus to eligible people in Switzerland. The Christmas Bonus is an annual payment of £10 made to people entitled to a qualifying benefit in the first week of December.

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

11. Correspondence

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a request to brief from the Women's Sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the group to a future stakeholder event.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with an invitation to attend a conference on the future of high streets.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask a member of the Assembly Research team to attend and report back.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- i. Departmental response to The Executive Office Committee on European Commission Proposal on Pay Transparency Copy of Imtac Annual Report 2021
- ii. Copy of SR 2021 277 -The Social Security (Switzerland) Order (Northern Ireland) 2021
- iii. Copy of Community Development Network's Forum and the Covid Challenge briefing paper



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- iv. Correspondence from Chairpersons' Liaison Group regarding Information on Proposals for New or Amended EU Laws
- v. Local Government Pension Scheme (NI) Public Consultation
- vi. Departmental letter regarding EU Exit Secretary of State Reciprocal Agreement Order with Switzerland
- vii. Departmental Correspondence re Public Consultation Proposals for the delivery of an Intermediate Rent Policy and Model.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson informed Members that, at the meeting on 21 October 2021, the Committee will commence its deliberations on the clauses of the Charities Bill.

13. Any Other Business

The Deputy Chairperson raised the issue of a proposal submitted by Advice NI and National Energy Action NI entitled "Fuel Poverty, a perfect storm".

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for an update on its consideration of this proposal.

14. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 21 October 2021 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings, at 9.00 am.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:54pm.



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Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities