



# Northern Ireland Assembly

## COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**THURSDAY 1 May 2014**

**Room 29, Parliament Buildings**

Present: Mr Alex Maskey MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Mickey Brady MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Paula Bradley MLA  
Mr Trevor Clarke MLA  
Mr Michael Copeland MLA  
Mrs Dolores Kelly MLA

In Attendance: Dr Kevin Pelan (Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Stephen Orme (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Stephen Todd (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Miss Allison Ferguson (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Stewart Dickson MLA  
Mr Fra McCann MLA  
Mr Sammy Wilson MLA

The meeting opened to the public at 10.14 am.

#### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were as noted above.

#### **2. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The draft minutes of the meeting held on 10 April were agreed.

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

- 3.1 The Chairperson noted the passing of David McClarty MLA, formerly a member of the Committee, on 17 April 2014.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to send a letter to the family of Mr McClarty, offering members' condolences.

- 3.2 The Chairperson noted that he will be speaking at a seminar on 'Challenges and opportunities for public and private housing in Northern Ireland' on 12 June. He noted that the seminar will be relevant to the Committee's work and suggest that the Committee meeting on that day be postponed or cancelled to allow members to attend the seminar.

*Agreed:* The members agreed to this in principle and will return to the matter at next week's meeting to take a formal decision on whether to postpone or cancel the meeting on 12 June.

### **4. Matters Arising**

- 4.1 The Chairperson noted that the Committee Clerk receives a daily round-up of news articles relevant to the work of the Committee and asked members if they would be interested in receiving this.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed for articles to these articles being forwarded to them for a trial period – this service to be reviewed in the coming weeks.

- 4.2 The Chairperson reminded Members that they are expected to receive a briefing on 'Top Tips' for using their electronic tablets, delivered by Committee staff.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to schedule this presentation to be delivered at the start of next week's meeting.

- 4.3 The Chairperson noted that a letter has been received from the Department in response to queries raised following Will Haire's recent evidence session with the Committee.

- 4.4 The Chairperson noted that Michael Sands will not be available to give evidence to the Committee until 11<sup>th</sup> June, at the earliest.

- 4.5 The Chairperson reminded members that the Committee had previously agreed to consider rescheduling the meeting of 22<sup>nd</sup> May to either Monday 19<sup>th</sup> or Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup>.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to hold its meeting on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> May.

### **5. Social Housing Reform – Landlord Indicative Investment Requirement – Departmental Briefing**

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.20 am:

- Deirdre Ward, Deputy Director, Housing Division, DSD
- Madeleine Nelson, Landlord Project Director, DSD
- Mr Ronan O'Hara, DSD

Dolores Kelly MLA declared an interest in this matter, as a landlord.

Officials noted that this would be the first in a series of briefings to the Committee on specific aspects of the Social Housing Reform Programme.

The officials briefed the Committee on their research carried out to date in relation to income and expenditure requirements of the Housing Executive to maintain its existing stock with a view to determining viable options for the provision of social housing in the future.

Some members expressed concern that the Department may be presenting a fait accompli, with no option of keeping social housing stock in Housing Executive ownership. The Department reassured members that this was preliminary research and that all options were being explored – furthermore that this initial research was desk-based and that more research would be carried out in the next year to determine the effectiveness of each option.

The Department provided reassurance to members that if any social housing were to be transferred to Housing Association ownership, rent regulation would be put in place. The Department also noted that they were about to commence their EQIA.

A query was raised regarding the NIHE's financial status and limited ability to borrow. The officials noted that the decision on that lies with the Treasury and that the Department will clarify this with the Treasury at the next phase.

Members noted the vital role that Housing Executive district managers play in some, if not all, local communities and noted that this role may not be factored into costing analysis. Members stressed the importance of the Department finding an appropriate way to encapsulate this qualitative information into its research.

The Committee also noted that on 24 March, the Assembly made a commitment to building additional social housing and asked how the Department would meet this. The Department assured the Committee that it would look at all options and emphasised that this initial research is the start of a process that will look at options in much more detail.

The officials left the meeting at 10.50 am.

## **6. Jobseekers Allowance (Schemes for Assisting Persons to Obtain Employment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 – Departmental Briefing**

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.51 am:

- Brendan McCann, DEL
- Anne McCleary, Director SSPLD
- Michael Pollock, Assistant Director SSPLD
- Colm Boyle, DEL Employment Service Director

The officials briefed the Committee, and took questions from Members.

*Trevor Clarke MLA joined the meeting at 11.09am.*

Following discussion, the Chair read the following motion:

*That the Committee for Social Development is content for the Jobseekers Allowance (Scheme for Assisting Persons to Obtain Employment) Regulations (NI) 2014 to be made.*

The Committee divided:

Ayes 2;

Noes 4;

Abstentions 0.

AYES:

Ms Paula Bradley MLA

Mr Trevor Clarke MLA

NOES:

Mr Alex Maskey MLA (Chair)

Mr Mickey Brady MLA (Vice Chair)

Mrs Dolores Kelly MLA

Mr Michael Copeland MLA

The motion fell.

The officials left the meeting at 11.26 am.

*Michael Copeland left the meeting at 11.26am.*

## **7. The Business Improvement Districts Act (Northern Ireland) 2013**

The Department proposes to make a Statutory Rule under powers conferred by the Business Improvement Districts Act (Northern Ireland) 2013.

*Agreed:* The Committee was content for the regulations to be made.

## **8. SR121 The Social Security (Invalid Care Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014**

The Department has made a Statutory Rule under powers conferred by the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992.

Some members of the Committee recorded their dis-satisfaction with the level of support provided to carers.

The Chair read the following into the record:

*‘That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR121 The Social Security (Invalid Care Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules’ report, has no objections to the Rule.’*

#### **9. Correspondence**

The Committee noted the correspondence as outlined in the correspondence memo.

#### **10. Forward Work Programme**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme as drafted.

#### **11. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

The next meeting of the Committee for Social Development will take place on Thursday 8 May at 10.00am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11.29am.

**Alex Maskey**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Social Development**

**8 May 2014**