



Northern Ireland Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY 8 May 2014

Room 29, Parliament Buildings

- Present: Mr Alex Maskey MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Mickey Brady MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Paula Bradley MLA
Mr Gregory Campbell MLA
Mr Stewart Dickson MLA
Mr Fra McCann MLA
- In Attendance: Dr Kevin Pelan (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Claire McCanny (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stephen Todd (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stewart Kennedy (Clerical Supervisor)
Miss Allison Ferguson (Clerical Officer)
- Apologies: Mr Jim Allister MLA
Mr Michael Copeland MLA
Mr Sammy Wilson MLA

The meeting opened to the public at 10.03 am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as noted above.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 1 May were agreed.

3. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

4. Matters Arising

- 4.1 The Chairperson noted that the Simon Community has invited the Committee to hold a meeting at one of its sites, to discuss issues around homelessness in Northern Ireland. A letter has also been received from Chris Lyttle MLA, recommending that the Committee hear from YouthSpeak, an organisation that is currently campaigning on housing and homelessness issues that affect young people. Furthermore, the Committee noted a recent publication by Crisis and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation – 'The Homelessness Monitor Northern Ireland'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to take briefings on homelessness from these groups.

- 4.2 The Chairperson reminded members that, due to upcoming European elections, the meeting originally scheduled for 22 May has been rescheduled for Monday 19 May at 1.30pm. The Chairperson impressed upon members that they should endeavour to attend the rescheduled meeting.

- 4.3 The Chairperson reminded members that at last week's meeting, members were agreeable to the suggestion of attending a housing conference on 12 June, in lieu of the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to cancel the meeting of 12 June to allow members to attend the housing conference.

- 4.4 The Chairperson noted that a letter has been received from the BBC's Litigation Department in relation to the Committee's request for oral evidence in relation to its Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek legal advice in advance of next week's meeting, giving options as to how it might respond, and to return to further discussion on the matter next week.

- 4.5 The Chairperson noted that the Department has sent its Business Plan for the Committee's approval prior to being published.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from the Department on the Business Plan.

5. Committee Inquiry into allegations, arising from a BBC NI 'Spotlight' programme aired on 3 July 2013, of impropriety or irregularity relating to NIHE-managed contracts and consideration of any resulting actions – Evidence Session with Department for Social Development

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.12am:

- Will Haire, Permanent Secretary, DSD
- Jim Wilkinson, Director of Housing, DSD

The officials briefed the Committee on issues relating to Phase 2 of the Committee's Inquiry, 'The adequacy of actions proposed by the Minister, DSD and the NIHE to address previous well documented failings in relation to procurement and contract management'.

Stewart Dickson MLA joined the meeting at 10.18 am.

The officials answered questions from members of the Committee.

Stewart Dickson MLA left the meeting at 10.53am.

The officials left the meeting at 10.58am.

This session was recorded by Hansard.

6. Committee Inquiry into allegations, arising from a BBC NI 'Spotlight' programme aired on 3 July 2013, of impropriety or irregularity relating to NIHE-managed contracts and consideration of any resulting actions – Evidence Session with Northern Ireland Housing

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.59 am:

- Mags Lightbody, Interim Chief Executive, NIHE
- Siobhan McCauley, Director of Regional Services, NIHE
- Gerry Flynn, Director of Housing & Regeneration, NIHE

The officials briefed the Committee on issues relating to Phase 2 of the Committee's Inquiry, 'The adequacy of actions proposed by the Minister, DSD and the NIHE to address previous well documented failings in relation to procurement and contract management'.

Stewart Dickson MLA joined the meeting at 11.07am.

The officials answered questions from members of the Committee.

The officials left the meeting at 12.02pm.

This session was recorded by Hansard.

The Committee suspended at 12.03pm.

The Chairperson declared the meeting open to the public at 12.12pm.

Present: Mr Alex Maskey MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Mickey Brady MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Paula Bradley MLA
Mr Stewart Dickson MLA
Mr Fra McCann MLA

7. Statutory Rule – SR 52 The Domestic Energy Efficiency Grants (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

The following officials joined the Committee at 12.12pm.

The officials provided clarification that the aim of these regulations is to provide retrospective statutory cover for actions that have already been taken for the Boiler Replacement Scheme, the Affordable Warmth Pilot and an increase to the Warm Homes grant limit. Officials acknowledged that they should have been introduced sooner and that action had been taken to ensure this would not happen again. They also confirmed that once a revised Warm Homes Scheme had been agreed a new set of regulations would be required to place it on a statutory footing.

The Chairperson noted some comments in the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report and asked if the Department was taking steps to address issues raised. The officials confirmed that the issues had been resolved through meetings with the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

The Chairperson informed members that the regulations were subject to the negative resolution procedure and had already come into operation. He noted that the Committee's response should nevertheless be read formally into the record. Members had no objections.

The Chairperson read the following into the record:

That the Committee for Social Development has considered SR 52 The Domestic Energy Efficiency Grants (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and has no objection to the Rule.

The officials left the meeting at 12.23pm.

8. Social Housing Development Programme – Departmental Briefing

The following officials joined the meeting at 12.23pm:

- Stephen Martin, Deputy Director Housing Policy Delivery, DSD
- Beverley Bigger, Official, DSD
- Mark Graham, Official, NIHE

The officials briefed the Committee on the Social Housing Development Programme. Members expressed concerns over the apparent difficulty in assessing the demand for supported housing based on need and the resulting implications for setting appropriate targets. The officials also noted that there is a joint commissioning body which identifies priorities for the Supporting People programme.

The officials advised that, in terms of assessing housing need, there was a dedicated unit within the NIHE which looks at this. Officials informed members that the housing programme and re-lets were not the only solutions to addressing housing need and referred to the 'Housing Options' programme in Scotland.

The Chairperson noted that the framework the Department is currently working to is based on the requirement for 2000 houses per year, but indicated that the Committee would have to receive a more detailed briefing on how this figure was established given the high numbers of people on the housing waiting list.

The officials left the meeting at 12.59pm.

9. SL The Social Security (Maternity Allowance) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland)

The Department for Social Development proposes to make a Statutory Rule under powers conferred by the Child Support (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992, the Jobseekers (Northern Ireland) Act 2007.

Members expressed concerns around some of the conditions outlined in the proposed regulations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further clarification from the Department on the regulations.

10. Correspondence

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

11. Forward Work Programme

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

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The next meeting of the Committee for Social Development will take place on Thursday 15 May at 10.00am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.01pm.

Alex Maskey
Chairperson, Committee for Social Development

15 May 2014