



Northern Ireland Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY 10 April 2014

Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Alex Maskey MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Mickey Brady MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister MLA
Ms Paula Bradley MLA
Mr Gregory Campbell MLA
Mr Trevor Clarke MLA
Mr Michael Copeland MLA
Mr Stewart Dickson MLA
Mr Fra McCann MLA
Mr Sammy Wilson MLA

In Attendance: Dr Kevin Pelan (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stephen Todd (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stewart Kennedy (Clerical Supervisor)

Apologies: Mrs Dolores Kelly MLA

The meeting opened to the public at 10.10am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as noted above.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 3 April were agreed.

3. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's business.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 The Chairperson noted that, following today's regular business, the Committee would convene in closed session to review evidence gathered to date in relation to its Inquiry.

4.2 The Chairperson noted that a number of Committees are not meeting on the week commencing 19 May 2014 due to elections and suggested to members that the Committee could convene earlier that week depending on plenary business. He indicated he would bring this back to Committee after the Easter recess when the situation regarding plenary business was clarified.

4.3 The Chairperson noted that the Department has indicated that it is ready to publish the Pensions Bill EQIA, unless the Committee wishes to make comment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to submit a nil response to the Department in respect of the Pensions Bill EQIA.

Stewart Dickson joined the meeting at 10.14am

4.4 The Chairperson noted that the minutes for the meeting of 20 March 2014, agreed at last week's meeting, contained an omission of one of the agreed pieces of subordinate legislation. An amended version of the minutes was considered by the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to the minutes as amended.

4.5 The Committee considered a letter from Exorna expressing concern about the unresolved negotiations between the NI Housing Executive and contractors and the impact this was having on other businesses.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to express its concern over this matter and urge a swift resolution of negotiations.

5. Financial Inclusion including work with Credit Unions – Departmental Briefing

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.17am:

- Brian Doherty, Director of Universal Credit, DSD
- Sinead Crossan, Head of Social Welfare Policy, DSD

The officials briefed the Committee on the planned delivery of the Financial Capability Strategy – an outworking of PfG. They noted that new measures are currently being piloted in Jobs and Benefits Offices in Strabane, Omagh and the Falls Road and also touched on the proposed delivery of targeted support through a Financial Support Service.

Sammy Wilson joined the meeting at 10.19am.

The officials answered questions from the members and advised that they would return to brief the Committee on the outcomes of the pilot programmes in September or October.

The officials left the meeting at 10.51am.

6. Child Maintenance Reform – Departmental Briefing

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.52am:

- Bernie Rooney, Director of Northern Ireland Child Maintenance Service, DSD.
- Anne McCleary, Director, Social Security, Policy & Legislation, DSD
- David Malcolm, Deputy Director of Operations CMED, DSD

Gregory Campbell joined the meeting at 10.53am.

Trevor Clarke joined the meeting at 10.59am.

The officials briefed the Committee on the reformation of Child Maintenance in Northern Ireland and took questions from Committee members. The officials agreed to provide the Committee with written clarification on a number of issues including the amount of money owed in arrears.

Fra McCann left the meeting at 11.42am.

The officials left the meeting at 11.47am.

7. SL The Business Improvement Districts (General) Regulations (NI) 2014

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

8. SL The Social Security (Invalid Care Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

A member lodged concern that the stated increase was the very minimal possible and there ought to be a sliding scale in benefits paid out to carers, rather than an absolute threshold earnings value. It was noted that carers often earn a fraction of the minimum wage whilst providing significant savings to the government.

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

9. SR 102/2014 Maternity Allowance (Wife or Partner of Self-Employed Earner) Regulations (NI) 2014

The Committee had no objection to the Regulations and the Chairperson read the following into the record:

‘That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR 102/2014 Maternity Allowance (Wife or Partner of Self-Employed Earner) Regulations (NI) 2014 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules’ report has no objections to the Rule.’

10. SR 103/2014 The Secure Tenancies (Notice) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

The Committee had no objection to the Regulations and the Chairperson read the following into the record:

‘That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR 103/2014 The Secure Tenancies (Notice) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules’ report has no objections to the Rule.’

11. SR 101/2014 The Registered Rents (Increase) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014

The Committee had no objection to the Regulations and the Chairperson read the following into the record:

‘That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR 101/2014 The Registered Rents (Increase) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules’ report has no objections to the Rule.’

12. SR 105/2014 The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

The Committee had no objections to the Regulations and the Chairperson read the following into the record:

‘That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR 105/2014 The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules’ report has no objections to the Rule.’

13. Correspondence

- 13.1 The Committee noted the rest of the correspondence as outlined in the correspondence memo.

14. Forward Work Programme

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

15. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The next meeting of the Committee for Social Development will take place on Thursday 1 May at 10.00am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11.56am.

Alex Maskey

Chairperson, Committee for Social Development

1 May 2014