



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**THURSDAY 12 September 2013
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 Michael Copeland MLA
Mr Fra McCann MLA
- In Attendance: Dr Kevin Pelan (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stephen Todd (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Ms Angela McParland (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stewart Kennedy (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Allison Ferguson (Clerical Officer)
- Apologies: Ms Pam Brown MLA
Mr Sammy Douglas MLA
Ms Judith Cochrane MLA

The Chairperson declared the meeting open to the public at 10.02am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Draft Minutes of the meetings held 4 July and 8 July 2013

Agreed: The minutes of the meetings held on 4 July and 8 July 2013 were agreed.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 The Chairperson welcomed Mr Allister to the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Mr McClarty and Mr Durkan to thank them for their input to the Committee and to wish them well in their new roles.

3.2 The chairperson reminded Members that the Away Day scheduled for 5 September had to be postponed and that this will instead be held as an informal meeting on 26 September following the Committee meeting.

3.3 The Chairperson informed Members that he will be speaking at a graduation event for young people who have gone through a mentoring programme managed by Business in the Community and Include the Young on Wednesday 18 September. The Chairperson suggested that Members could attend this event if they wish, in Room 115 from 12 – 1 pm.

3.4 The Chairperson advised the Committee that he has agreed to sponsor an event in the Long Gallery on 26 November – this is regarding the launch of a joint report between Bryson Energy and the University of Ulster entitled “Transforming Northern Ireland’s Heating Systems: A Plan to Retrofit Dwellings”.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 The Chairperson advised Members that the Committee has received a request from Unite Union, who wish to brief the Committee on NIHE response maintenance contracts and the future for staff in the private sector who have won tenders to carry out maintenance work.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from Unite Union

4.2 The Chairperson advised Members that the deadline for submissions for the call for evidence into the Pavement Cafes Bill is 13 September 2013 and the Committee Stage of the Bill ends on 1 October. The Chairperson proposed that the Committee brings a motion to the Assembly to extend the committee stage of the Pavement Cafes Bill until 13 December 2013

Motion read and agreed:

“That, in accordance with Standing Order 22(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) in relation to the Committee Stage of NIA Bill 24/11-15 Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill is extended to 13 December 2013”.

- 4.3 The Committee noted the official Members' attendance figures for Committee meetings ahead of their publication.
- 4.4 The Committee noted a paper by Assembly Research and Information Services on approaches that other jurisdictions have taken in preparing for the social housing 'size criteria'.
- 4.5 The Chairperson informed Members that the Assembly's official charity, Action Mental Health, will be holding an event on Thursday 8th October in the Senate Chamber. The Chairperson highlighted that they would like a Member of the Committee to speak at the event.
- 4.6 The Chairperson advised Members that the Committee meeting on 3 October will take place in the University of Ulster Magee campus. The Chairperson also advised that there will be a reception hosted by the CAL Committee on the evening of Wednesday 2 October, at which the Speaker will be present.

Mr Gregory Campbell joined the meeting at 10.16am

5 Alcohol Licensing – Departmental Briefing

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.14am.

- Mr Liam Quinn, DSD
- Ms Caroline Hobson, DSD

The officials briefed the Committee on the outcome of the consultation exercise and the department's next steps in relation to reform of Alcohol Licensing. This was followed by a question and answer session.

A number of members raised points regarding the nature and source of responses to the consultation including whether there was any evidence of a coordinated response from vested interests and the potential for respondents to make several submissions i.e. under the auspices of trade bodies and individually. While the department had not identified any evidence to suggest a 'round robin' response it was conceded that individuals could have inputted to the consultation more than once, although officials stressed that the consultation did not constitute a referendum on the department's proposals.

Members noted the difficulty in trying to establish a more general 'relaxed' licensing regime in order to support local businesses and the tourist industry while addressing the negative social and health effects of alcohol consumption.

It was also suggested that the department's interpretation of the responses represented 'spin' to support a more relaxed approach to alcohol licensing.

Members also queried whether the anonymous submissions might be from the drinks industry.

Some members sought clarification on proposals while other members indicated their support for specific proposals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add ‘Alcohol Licensing’ as a substantive agenda item at its meeting on 26 September in order to consider a Committee response.

The officials left the meeting at 11.01am.

6 SL1 The Insolvency (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

The chairperson advised Members that the Department of Justice is dealing with a piece of subordinate legislation, and seeks the Social Development Committee’s comments on the legislation prior to the Executive meeting on 19 September.

The following officials joined the meeting at 11.02am.

- Ms Leonora McLaughlin, DSD
- Ms Jo Wilson, Civil Justice Policy & Legislation Division, DoJ
- Mr Jack Reid, DETI

The officials briefed the Committee on the proposed Insolvency (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2013.

Following discussions on a number of issues, the Committee agreed that it was content with the underpinning principles of the Rules to protect the Social Fund so that money is directed to those most in need. On the basis of equity and fairness, the Committee agreed that it is supportive of the regulations being brought to the Executive meeting on 19 September 2013.

The officials left the meeting at 11.28am.

7. SL1 The Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

The Committee considered the above mentioned proposed legislation and was content for the Rule to be made.

8. SL1 The Jobseeker's Allowance (Domestic Violence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

The Committee considered the above mentioned proposed legislation and was content for the Rule to be made.

9. SR182 2013 The Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

The Committee considered the above mentioned Statutory Rule.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Social Development has considered Statutory Rule 182/2013 The Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report has no objections to the Rule

10. SR190 2013 The Child Support and Claims and Payments (Miscellaneous Amendments and Change to the Minimum Amount of Liability) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

The Committee considered the above mentioned Statutory Rule.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Social Development has considered Statutory Rule 190/2013 The Child Support and Claims and Payments (Miscellaneous Amendments and Change to the Minimum Amount of Liability) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report has no objections to the Rule.

11. SR191 2013 The Social Winter Fuel Payment (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

The Committee considered the above mentioned Statutory Rule.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Social Development has considered Statutory Rule 191/2013 The Social Winter Fuel Payment (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report has no objections to the Rule.

12. SR209 2013 The Housing Benefit (Executive Determinations) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

The Committee considered the above mentioned Statutory Rule.

The Committee expressed concerns about the growing disparity between the increase in Housing Benefit and the rent increases in the private rental sector.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee previously raised concerns regarding a number of items of subordinate legislation that deals with annual uprating. The Committee acknowledged that this is a wider issue for further discussion.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Social Development has considered Statutory Rule 209/2013 The Housing Benefit (Executive Determinations) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report has no objections to the Rule

13. SR211 2013 The Charities Act 2008 (Transitional Provision) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

The Committee considered the above mentioned Statutory Rule.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Social Development has considered Statutory Rule 211/2013 The Charities Act 2008 (Transitional Provision) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report has no objections to the Rule

14. 201 2013 The Child Maintenance (2008 Act) (Commencement No. 11 and Transitional Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

The Committee noted the above mentioned Commencement Order.

15. SR213 2013 The Pension Protection Fund and Occupational Pension Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

The Committee considered the above mentioned Statutory Rule.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Social Development has considered Statutory Rule 213/2013 The Pension Protection Fund and Occupational Pension Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report has no objections to the Rule

16. SR159 2013 The Fuel Allowance Payments Regulation Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

The Chairperson reminded the Committee that the above mentioned statutory rule previously came to the attention of Members as the Department did not follow correct procedures. At that time, the Committee were content for the regulations, seen as positive, to be made, but expressed its concern to the Department for this oversight.

The Chairperson drew members' attention to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report which refers to the department's failure to follow established procedures in making and laying this statutory rule.

The Committee noted the above mentioned statutory rule.

17. Correspondence

17.1 The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding the delay to the Landlord Registration Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from the Department on this issue.

17.2 The Committee considered correspondence from UNISON requesting an opportunity to brief the Committee on issues facing the community and voluntary sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from Unison on this issue.

17.3 The Chairperson drew Members attention to a conference on social housing to be held in Wexford on 17-19 September.

Agreed: Fra McCann indicated his intention to attend.

17.4 Members noted an invitation from NIPSA to the launch of a publication – Keep our housing public.

17.5 The Chairperson advised the Committee that he has been invited, as Chair, to attend a colloquium organised by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland. The Chairperson informed the Committee that he will be writing to decline the offer as the Committee will be meeting in Derry/Londonderry that day.

Members agreed action on the correspondence as per the Correspondence Memo.

18. Forward Work Programme

The Committee was content with the proposed Forward Work Programme.

19. Any other Business

19.1 The Committee discussed a recent independent review regarding the Housing Executive's allocation of public housing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request details of what the Department and the Housing Executive are doing to ensure that the appropriate checks and balances are in place so that the rules of housing allocation are not breached.

19.2 The Clerk to the Committee confirmed that the draft Terms of Reference and a paper from the Clerk Assistant relating to the Committee's inquiry will be available in Members' meeting packs on 16 September.

19.3 The Chairperson reminded the Committee of an item of correspondence previously received from Bronwyn McGahan, MLA regarding a planning application for Social Housing in Dungannon.

The Chairperson proposed that the Committee should write to the Department to question its policy on Town Centre Regeneration when retail accommodation is being replaced by social housing.

20. Date, time and place of next meeting

The next meeting will take place at 10.00am on Thursday 19 September 2013 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11.53am.

Mr Alex Maskey

**Chairperson, Committee for Social Development
12 September 2013**