



Northern Ireland Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY 13 February 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 Trevor Clarke MLA
Mr Michael Copeland MLA
Mr Stewart Dickson MLA
Ms Dolores Kelly MLA
Mr Fra McCann MLA

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

Apologies: Mr Gregory Campbell MLA
Mr Sammy Wilson MLA

The meeting began in closed session at 10.06 am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the NIHE and DSD to advise that it would treat the draft Campbell Tickell as confidential until negotiations between NIHE and contractors were concluded.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to refer reports of a breach of confidentiality in relation to the draft Campbell Tickell Report to the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

The Chairperson declared the meeting open to the public at 11.13 am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as noted above.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting of 6th February were agreed.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 The Chairperson informed Members that the Pavement Cafés Bill is scheduled for Consideration Stage on 4th March, and for Further Consideration Stage on 25th March.

3.2 The Chairperson advised members that he has been invited to the NIPSA Social Security Agency Conference on 27 March.

3.3 The Chairperson advised members that 'Business in the Community' have approached the Committee, asking that it sponsors the graduation event for their 'Aiming Higher' programme, which mentors 16-20 year olds with a view to improving their employability skills.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to sponsor the event.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 *Agreed:* The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from Departmental officials on the progress of legislation relating to Alcohol and Gambling Reform.

4.2 The Chairperson advised Members that Committee staff met with the Permanent Secretary and Departmental officials last Friday. The officials indicated that the memorandum and papers requested in respect of Phase 2 of the Inquiry would be provided to the Committee by 28 February.

The Chairperson indicated his concerns about how the Department has handled requests for information pertaining to the Inquiry, stating that the approach taken is proving obstructive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service advising him of their concerns and to also notify the Speaker. The Committee agreed to issue a press release on this issue.

4.3 The Chairperson reminded Members that, at the meeting of 9th January, the Committee considered correspondence from the OFMDFM Committee requesting comments on the European Commission Work Programme,

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this item to next week's agenda for substantive discussion.

4.4 The Chairperson advised Members that a number of similar requests have been received recently from Committees, seeking the Committee's comments on papers and Inquiries.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule substantive discussion and on these papers at the meeting of 20 February.

5. Housing Conference – Briefing by RaISe

The following official joined the meeting at 11.22 am:

- Eleanor Murphy, Research Officer, Assembly Research and Information Service

The official presented a summary of the 2014 Housing Conference and recommended issues that the Committee may wish to consider as part of its work programme on the issue, including the possibility of study visits to other jurisdictions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider these issues further in conjunction with the departmental briefing on Social Housing Reform on 27 February.

The official left the meeting at 11.30 am.

6. SL1 The Statutory Sick Pay (Maintenance of Records) (Revocation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee first considered this SL1 on 23 January. The proposed Statutory Rule removes the Statutory Sick Pay record keeping obligations of employers, following the abolition of the Statutory Sick Pay Percentage Threshold Scheme in Great Britain & Northern Ireland.

Several members indicated some concern about the abolition of the specific Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) record keeping obligations on employers.

Agreed: Having noted these concerns the Committee agreed that it was content for the Rule to be made.

7. SL1 Annual Up-Rating of Pensions and Benefits

The Chairperson drew members' attention to this proposed Statutory Rule. This is the first of a series of Statutory Rules which the Department is proposing, in order to make the appropriate changes to benefits for the incoming financial year. These rules will tie the increase in most benefits to the Consumer Prices Index (CPI), apart from those benefits which fall under the Welfare Benefits Up-Rating Act 2013, which will rise by 1%.

Several members expressed discontent at the fact that, by up-rating benefits either in line with the CPI or at 1%, this was effectively a real-terms cut.

Agreed: Having recorded these concerns the Committee agreed that it was content for the Rule to be made.

8. Correspondence

- 8.1 Members discussed the letter received by the Committee from the Housing Rights Service, which requested the Committee to meet with their Private Tenants' Forum.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a meeting with the Forum, as part of the Committee's broader strategic consideration of housing.

Mr Stewart Dickson MLA left the meeting at 11.37 am.

- 8.2 The Chairperson drew members' attention to a briefing paper received from the Committee for Finance and Personnel, concerning the Budget Bill (NI) 2014 and the accompanying Spring Supplementary Estimates (SSEs) 2013-14.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this paper to the Department, and ask that it considers following this model in future briefings to the Committee.
- 8.3 The Chairperson noted that Lloyds Banking Group has invited members to open proceedings at a mentoring training event, planned and delivered in conjunction with CO3. This will take place at Lloyds Banking Group on 12th March.
- 8.4 The Chairperson noted that the Committee for Finance and Personnel has written to all Statutory Committees regarding the recent Northern Ireland Audit Office report on Sickness Absence in the Public Sector, which has been referred to it for consideration.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department to provide a copy of its response to the report's findings in the first instance, with a briefing from the Audit Office to potentially follow.
- 8.5 The Committee noted the correspondence as outlined in the correspondence memo.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee was content with the Forward Work Programme as drafted.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Adjourn

The next meeting of the Social Development Committee will take place on Thursday 20th February 2014 at 10.00 am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11.40 am.

Mr Alex Maskey

**Chairperson, Committee for Social Development
20th February 2014**