



Northern Ireland Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY 19 June 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
Mrs Dolores Kelly MLA
Mr Fra McCann MLA

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

Apologies: Mr Gregory Campbell MLA

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

1. Apologies

Apologies were as noted above.

2. Negotiations regarding NIHE Planned Maintenance Contracts

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.03am:

- Mr Nelson McCausland MLA, Minister for Social Development
- Ms Mags Lighbody, Chief Executive (Acting), NIHE
- Mr Will Haire, Permanent Secretary, DSD

- Mr Andrew Hamilton, Deputy Secretary, DSD

The officials briefed the Committee on the current position in relation to the agreement between the NIHE and contractors on alleged overpayments. In particular, officials explained the complex and detailed work required in accordance with established due diligence procedures before the Department, in conjunction with DFP, could give approval for any agreed settlement.

DSD officials stated that, if everything went to schedule, the agreement with the contractors could be approved by the end of July 2014.

The Acting Chief Executive of the Housing Executive updated the Committee specifically on the progress of the current planned maintenance contracts.

The Chairperson noted that the Committee wished for the approval process to be expedited by the Department and that, while it would welcome a resolution by the end of July, that based on previous experience, it did not have confidence in this being delivered,

The officials left the meeting at 11.05am.

This session was recorded by Hansard.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meetings held on 5 June and 10 June were agreed.

4. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 *Agreed:* The Committee agreed to hold its meeting of Thursday 26 June in Parliament Buildings, rather than at a Simon Community office as previously agreed, in order to accommodate a closed session on the Committee Inquiry in the afternoon if required.

5.2 *Agreed:* The Committee agreed to submit a nil response in respect of the Committee for Employment and Learning's request for comments on relevant clauses and schedules of the Work and Families Bill.

6. SR 150/2014 The Jobseekers Allowance (Schemes for Assisting Persons to Obtain Employment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 – Briefing by DEL and DSD officials

The following officials joined the meeting at 11.11am:

- Ms Anne McCleary, Director of Social Security Policy & Legislation, DSD
- Mr Brenda McCann, Department of Employment and Learning
- Mr Colum Boyle, Department of Employment and Learning

The officials briefed the Committee noted that the purpose of the above regulations is to facilitate the 'Steps 2 Success' programme and highlighted the implications if the regulations were not to go through.

Members noted that they had previously been unaware of the evidence regarding the implications of the regulations not being made.

The officials briefed the Committee on some of the details of the 'Steps 2 Success' programme and gave the Committee assurances that the scheme would be closely monitored and that the Committee would receive an update on the number of people receiving sanctions.

Agreed: Officials also agreed to advise the Committee regarding how a sanction is communicated to a person with a health issue.

The officials left the meeting at 11.30am.

The Committee agreed to rescind its previous motion to annul the Rule and the Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

That the Committee for Social Development agrees to rescind the motion, agreed at its meeting on 5 June 2014, to annul the Statutory Rule SR 150/2014 The Jobseekers Allowance (Schemes for Assisting Persons to Obtain Employment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014.

7. The Affordable Warmth Pilot Scheme – Departmental Briefing

The following officials joined the meeting at 11.31am:

- Ms Eilish O'Neill, Social Inclusion Housing Division, DSD
- Mr Stephen Martin, Deputy Director Housing Policy Delivery, DSD
- Mr Oliver McHugh, DSD

Trevor Clarke MLA declared an interest in the briefing as a private landlord.

The Chairperson left the meeting at 11.31am and the Deputy Chairperson took the Chair.

The officials briefed the Committee on the outcome of its consultation on the Affordable Warmth Pilot Scheme.

The officials outlined the definition of fuel poverty and the additional measures being introduced by Affordable Warmth to deal with it. There was discussion around quality benchmarks for installers of energy efficiency measures and about ensuring landlords made the relevant contribution within the private rented sector. Members welcomed eligibility based on income.

Dolores Kelly MLA left the meeting at 11.58am.

Jim Allister MLA left the meeting at 11.59am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward relevant papers, received from Bryson House, to the Department for comment.

The Chairperson joined the meeting at 11.52am and resumed the Chair.

The officials left the meeting at 12.02pm.

8. Review of Supporting People – Departmental Briefing

The following officials joined the meeting at 12.02pm.

- Ms Eilish O’Neill, Social Inclusion Housing Division, DSD
- Mr Stephen Martin, Deputy Director Housing Policy Delivery, DSD
- Mr Finbar Cummins, Social Inclusion Housing Division, DSD

The officials briefed the Committee on the Department’s plan for the review of the Supporting People programme.

The officials noted that the Committee may be interested to read the report on floating support and noted that this is on the Department’s website.

The Committee expressed surprise that a review of the programme had not been conducted since 2003 and welcomed this forthcoming review.

The officials left the meeting at 12.22pm.

9. SL1 The Pension (2012 Act) (Transitional, Consequential and Supplementary) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Agreed: Members were content for the Rule to be made.

10. SL1 The Pension Protection Fund (Entry Rules) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Agreed: Members were content for the Rule to be made.

11. SR 156/2014 The Social Security (Reciprocal Agreements) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014

The Chairperson advised that this Statutory Rule was made by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and is not subject to Assembly procedures.

The Committee noted the Rule.

12. SR 162/2014 The Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) (Lump Sum Payments) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

The Committee had no objections to the Rule.

The Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR 162/2014 The Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) (Lump Sum Payments) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, has no objections to the Rule.

13. SR 167/2014 The Child Support (Great Britain Reciprocal Arrangements) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

The Committee had no objections to the Rule.

The Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR 167/2014 The Child Support (Great Britain Reciprocal Arrangements) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

14. Correspondence

Agreed: The Committee agreed the rest of the correspondence as outlined in the correspondence memo.

15. Forward Work Programme

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

16. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The next meeting of the Committee for Social Development will take place on 24 June 2014 at 12.00noon in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.25pm.

Alex Maskey

Chairperson, Committee for Social Development

26 June 2014