



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

**THURSDAY 19 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 Trevor Clarke MLA  
Mr Michael Copeland 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 Judith Cochrane MLA  
Mr Fra McCann MLA  
Mr Sammy Wilson MLA

The Chairperson declared the meeting open to the public at 10.14am.

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were as indicated above.

**2. Draft Minutes of the meeting held 12 September 2013**

*Agreed:* The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2013 were agreed.

### **3. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson noted that Sammy Douglas MLA and Pam Brown MLA have been replaced on the Committee by Sammy Wilson MLA and Trevor Clarke MLA. The Chair welcomed Mr Clarke to the Committee.

### **4. Matters Arising**

- 4.1** Members were provided with a copy of the draft Terms of Reference for the inquiry into allegations made by the Spotlight programme on 3 July 2013. The Chair advised that these were provided for members' consideration and would be discussed at the meeting on 26 September, to be agreed on 26 September or 3 October.
- 4.2** The Chair informed Members that there will be training for all Committee members on effective questioning, delivered by Politics Plus, following the meeting on 7 November.
- 4.3** The Chair drew members' attention to the draft End of Session Report. Members agreed that they were content for the report to be published on the NI Assembly website.
- 4.4** The Chair informed members that the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection would meet with the Committee informally on 17 October in Parliament Buildings.
- 4.5** The Chair drew members' attention to marketing material for the event 'Kids Space', held as part of Belfast Culture Night on 20 September 2013, and supported by the Department for Social Development.
- 4.6** The Chair reminded members that the Committee for Culture Arts and Leisure would be hosting an evening event on 2 October in the Shirt Factory in Derry~Londonderry, the night before the Committee meeting in Magee Campus. The Chair asked Members to indicate whether they would be attending the evening event.
- 4.7** The Chair reminded members that the Committee would hold its meeting at the Everglades Hotel in Derry on 28 November, coinciding with the Conference of the Isles, a major housing conference held by the University of Ulster.

The Chair informed members that Professor Paddy Gray asked for members of the Committee to participate in a 'Discussion Forum' as part of the conference.

**4.8** The Chair reminded the Committee that the Assembly's official charity, Action Mental Health, is holding an event on 8 October and the Committee is asked to provide a representative to participate.

## **5 Discussion on the Fourth Independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment**

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.26am.

- Dr Paul Litchfield, BT Group plc
- Ms Emma Varley, Department of Work and Pensions

Dr Litchfield briefed the Committee on his work on the fourth review of the Work Capability Assessment, carrying on from work conducted by Professor Harrington. He expressed a desire to take evidence from the Committee, as well as providing it with a progress update.

The Chair noted the Committee view that the WCA system was flawed, as highlighted by the number of successful appeals, and that there needed to be a focus on discovering why the correct assessment and decision is not made early on in the process.

Dr Litchfield acknowledged the need for improvement and emphasised the importance of gathering good and wide-ranging medical evidence at the outset of the process in order to get the initial decision right and therefore reduce the number of appeals. He indicated that he attended a meeting with the British Medical Association. The BMA agreed with this point and noted that the processes related to evidence gathering and reporting of medical evidence by medical practitioners needed to be made easier.

Members took the opportunity to express their concerns regarding WCA and cited personal examples, based on representing constituents, to emphasise specific points.

Particular issues that Dr Litchfield agreed needed addressed related to descriptors on the WCA form to more effectively address assessment of mental health conditions and those with long term or lifetime disabilities and, more broadly, to make the process more compassionate.

The Chair thanked Dr Litchfield for meeting with the Committee.

The officials left the meeting at 11.09am.

*Michael Copeland MLA left the meeting at 11.09am.*

## **6 Consultation on interim reporting requirements for charities – briefing by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland**

The following officials joined the meeting at 11.10am.

- Ms Frances McCandless, Chief Executive, Charity Commission NI
- Mr Tom McGrath, Chief Charity Commissioner, Charity Commission NI

The officials briefed the Committee on their proposed consultation for interim reporting requirements for registered charities and briefly explained the need for these to help the Commission carry out its regulatory and monitoring work.

*Gregory Campbell MLA left the meeting at 11.15am.*

Members noted that the Charity Commission proposals wouldn't come into operation until April 2014 and would likely be shortly followed by a DSD consultation on full statutory accounting and reporting regulations.

The Commission emphasised that the focus of their consultation was on interim arrangements in respect of the annual monitoring return and that the monitoring form they developed as part of the consultation would remain in place when the full regulations were implemented.

Members queried what work the Charity Commission had been able to carry out whilst waiting for the Charities Act to come into operation. The officials commented that the Commission had engaged in a range of activities including providing advice to charities, carrying out preparatory work to aid registration of charities, as well as taking some enforcement action against charities etc.

They emphasised the need for a proportionate system, placing lesser requirements on smaller organisations, and expressed a wish for this to be kept in place following the Department's consultation.

*Michael Copeland MLA joined the meeting at 11.20am.*

Members noted that organisations seeking charitable status must deal with HMRC and asked if there was any evidence that this caused delays in getting charitable status. The officials indicated that they did not have the evidence to indicate this.

The officials left the meeting at 11.21am.

## **7. SL1 The Housing Benefit (Local Housing Allowance and Executive Determination) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013**

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

### **8. Correspondence**

**8.1** The Committee considered correspondence from the SSA regarding the Ipsos MORI research into Benefit and Tax Credit recipients and noted that the revised segmentation report is available on the Department's website and Assembly library.

**8.2** The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel regarding its call for evidence on the Public Service Pensions Bill.

*Agreed:* That Committee Members would consider the submissions to the Call for Evidence in their own time and discuss at next week's meeting whether to send a response to the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

**8.3** The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel detailing the Department's current position with regard to Post Project Evaluations (PPEs). It noted that the overall number of outstanding PPEs had reduced, but that there were a number of additional projects in certain categories.

*Agreed:* That the Committee would write to the Department seeking clarification on the outstanding projects.

**8.4** The Committee noted an invitation from the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors to attend a reception and awards launch on 26 September.

*Agreed:* That the Committee would decline the invitation as it coincided with the Committee's informal planning day.

**8.5** The Committee noted an invitation from Advice NI to a session entitled 'Overview of the Welfare Reform'

*Agreed:* Members to inform Committee staff if they wish to attend.

**8.6** The Committee considered correspondence from Queen's University to attend a conference hosted by QUB Management School and the Charity Commission in relation to charity accounting, reporting and regulation.

*Agreed:* Members to inform Committee staff if they wish to attend.

**8.7** The Committee considered a letter from the Minister to the Chair of the Committee in relation to the Minister's position on the Charging and Case Closure Order for the 2012 Child Maintenance Scheme and stating that a Press Release on this would be issued on Friday 26 September.

*Agreed:* The Committee was content to schedule a briefing once the SL1 is received.

**9. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee was content with the proposed Forward Work Programme.

**10. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

**20. Date, time and place of next meeting**

The next meeting will take place at 10.00am on Thursday 26 September 2013 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11.27am.

**Mr Alex Maskey**

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