



# Northern Ireland Assembly

## COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**THURSDAY 20 March 2014**

**Bagenal's Castle, Newry**

Present: Mr Mickey Brady MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Paula Bradley MLA  
Mr Trevor Clarke MLA  
Mr Michael Copeland 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)  
Miss Allison Ferguson (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Alex Maskey MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Jim Allister MLA  
Mr Gregory Campbell MLA  
Mr Stewart Dickson MLA  
Mr Sammy Wilson MLA

The meeting opened to the public at 10.46am.

Mickey Brady declared an interest in today's meeting as a non-executive member of the Committee of the Confederation of Community Groups in Newry.

Dolores Kelly declared an interest in today's meeting as a member of the committee of the Loughshore Care Partnership.

#### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were as noted above.

## **2. Draft Minutes**

As the meeting was not quorate, consideration of the minutes was deferred. Minutes were subsequently agreed once quorum was reached (**point 7**).

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

The Deputy Chairperson welcomed members to Newry and noted that, following the meeting, council officials will deliver a presentation on town centre regeneration and neighbourhood renewal in Newry.

## **4. Matters Arising**

4.1 The Deputy Chairperson noted that, as last week's meeting was prematurely adjourned, the Committee Inquiry Session will reconvene on 3 April 2014.

Other issues under 'Matters Arising' were deferred as the meeting was not quorate.

## **5. Update on New Volunteering Arrangements – Departmental Briefing**

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.52am.

- Michael Donnelly, Head of VCU, DSD
- Jack O'Connor, Leader of VCU Voluntary and Community Engagement Team, DSD

The officials briefed the Committee on the new volunteering arrangements, which came into operation in October 2013.

*Paula Bradley MLA and Trevor Clarke MLA joined the meeting at 10.59am.*

The Committee questioned officials on the re-balancing of Volunteering Infrastructure funding, the Volunteer Small Grants Programme, the perceived disproportionate spending on specific projects from the Volunteering Innovation Fund and progress on collaboration between volunteer organisations.

The Committee also questioned officials on the workings of the Volunteer Infrastructure Strategy Group and how division of opinion among those organisations represented on the Group is addressed. The officials emphasised that any decision-making powers would ultimately be the responsibility of the Department and that this group was intended as a forum to hear views from a wide range of organisations.

The officials emphasised that their intention was to improve the volunteer programme, rather than to maintain the status quo, and to make the process of application for small grants more straightforward to encourage more groups to apply.

The officials left the meeting at 11.37am.

## **6. New Northern Ireland Executive Strategy for the Provision of Generalist Voluntary Advice Services in Northern Ireland – Departmental Briefing**

The following officials joined the meeting at 11.38am.

- Michael Donnelly, Head of VCU, DSD
- Elaine Downey, Leader of VCU Public Sector Engagement Team, DSD

Mickey Brady MLA declared an interest in this briefing due to previous affiliation with Advice NI.

The officials briefed the Committee on the strategy for the provision of generalist voluntary advice services in Northern Ireland. They stated that the evaluation carried out to date showed that there is a lot of work still to be done and noted that they had accepted most of the recommendations arising from the evaluation. They emphasised a desire to ensure uniform standards in advice services across Northern Ireland and noted that a pre-stakeholder consultation had begun, with a formal consultation to begin at the end of June.

Members expressed some concern about how the consultation and wider engagement with advice services would be conducted. Officials provided some reassurance that the structure of the consultation was such that a group sitting within the Department for Social Development would feed information into the other Government Departments, to be communicated to councils and subsequently to frontline services. The officials noted that this is a challenging structure to maintain, but is intended to include a wide range of deliverers of advice services.

Committee members noted that often it is those most in need of advice that find it the hardest to access, and that it is important that the Department focusses on genuine need being satisfied.

The officials noted that the strategy would focus on the Department for Social Development working collaboratively with advice services and providing signposting for clients to providers.

The officials left the meeting at 12.08pm.

## **7. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The draft minutes of the meeting held on 13 March were agreed.

## **8. Matters Arising**

8.1 *Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content for the draft Press Release regarding today's visit to Newry to be issued.

8.2 The Deputy Chairperson informed the Committee that responses had been received from Assembly Research Officers regarding queries raised at the Committee meeting of 20 February 2014 regarding the drawdown of European Funding and whether an equivalent to the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme exists for rural areas. Research Officers provided a short paper on the latter issue.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the information provided.

## **9. SL The Social Security (Habitual Residence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014**

## **10. SL The Housing Benefit (Habitual Residence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014**

The following officials joined the meeting at 12.12pm.

- Ms Anne McCleary, Director, Social Security, Policy & Legislation, DSD
- Mr Michael Pollock, Social Security, Policy & Legislation, DSD

The officials briefed the Committee, providing clarification on the purpose of SL The Social Security (Habitual Residence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and SL The Housing Benefit (Habitual Residence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Members addressed queries regarding the subordinate legislation to the officials.

The officials left the meeting at 12.31pm.

Following the briefing, the motion was proposed:

*"That the Committee for Social Development is content for the Department for Social Development to make the following subordinate legislation:*

- *The Social Security (Habitual Residence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014"*

The Committee divided:

Ayes 2;

Noes 4;

Abstentions 0.

AYES:

Ms Paula Bradley

Mr Trevor Clarke

NOES:

Mr Mickey Brady

Mr Michael Copeland

Mrs Dolores Kelly

Mr Fra McCann

The motion was not passed. The Committee noted that it is not content for the Rule to be made.

The Committee discussed SL The Housing Benefit (Habitual Residence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to defer consideration of this piece of subordinate legislation until the officials could be recalled to provide further clarification. Discussion resumed later in the meeting and this is recorded under **point 26**.

**11. SL The Occupational Pension Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014**

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

**12. SL The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014**

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

**13. SL Registered Rents (Increase) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014**

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

**14. SR 49 The Social Security Revaluation of Earnings Factors Order (Northern Ireland) 2014**

The Committee had no objections to the Rule.

The Deputy Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

*That the Committee for Social Development has considered Statutory Rule SR 49/2014 The Social Security Revaluation of Earnings Factors Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report has no objection to the Rule'.*

**15. SR 50 The Social Security Pensions (Low Earnings Threshold) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014**

The Committee had no objections to the Rule.

The Deputy Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

*That the Committee for Social Development has considered Statutory Rule SR 50/2014 The Social Security Pensions (Low Earnings Threshold) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report has no objection to the Rule.*

**16. SR 51 The Social Security Pensions (Flat Rate Accrual Amount) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014**

The Committee had no objections to the Rule.

The Deputy Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

*That the Committee for Social Development has considered Statutory Rule SR 51/2014 The Social Security Pensions (Flat Rate Accrual Amount) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report has no objections to the Rule.*

**17. SR 52 The Domestic Energy Efficiency Grants (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014**

The Committee had no objections to the Rule.

The Deputy Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

*That the Committee for Social Development has considered Statutory Rule SR52/2014 The Domestic Energy Efficiency Grants (Amendment) Regulations and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report has no objections to the Rule.*

**18. SR 61 The Pension Protection Fund and Occupational Pension Schemes (Levy Ceiling and Compensation Cap) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014**

The Committee had no objections to the Rule.

The Deputy Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

*That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR 61/2014 The Pension Protection Fund and Occupational Pension Schemes (Levy Ceiling and Compensation Cap) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report has no objections to the Rule.*

**19. SR 65 The Statutory Sick Pay (Maintenance of Records) (Revocation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014**

The Committee had no objections to the Rule.

The Deputy Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

*That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR 65/2014 The Statutory Sick Pay (Maintenance of Records) (Revocation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report has no objection to the Rule.*

**20. SR 73 The Social Security (Claims and Payments) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014**

The Committee had no objections to the Rule.

The Deputy Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

*That the Committee for Social Development has considered Statutory Rule SR 73/2014 The Social Security (Claims and Payments) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2014 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report has no objection to the Rule.*

**21. SR 75 The Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order (Northern Ireland) 2014**

The Committee had no objections to the Rule.

The Deputy Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

*That the Committee for Social Development has considered Statutory Rule SR 75/2014 The Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report has no objections to the Rule.*

**22. SR 76 The Pensions (2008 No. 2 Act) (Commencement No. 11) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014**

*Agreed:* The Committee was content to note the Commencement Order.

**23. SR 78 The Social Security Benefits Annual Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2014**

Members of the Committee expressed dissatisfaction with the Rule, noting that this represented a real-terms cut in benefits.

The Deputy Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

*That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR 78/2014 The Social Security Benefits Annual Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, recommends that it be confirmed by the Assembly.*

**24. SR 79 Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Disclosure of Information) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014**

The Committee had no objections to the Rule.

The Deputy Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

*That the Committee for Social Development has considered Statutory Rule SR 79/2014 The Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Disclosure of Information) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report has no objection to the Rule.*

**25. SR 80 The Social Security Benefits Annual Up-rating Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014**

Members of the Committee expressed dissatisfaction with the Rule, noting that this represented a real-terms cut in benefits.

The Deputy Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

*That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR 80/2014 The Social Security Benefits Annual Up-rating Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report has no objections to the Rule.*

**26. SR 81 The Automatic Enrolment (Earnings Trigger and Qualifying Earnings Band) Order (NI) 2014**

The Committee had no objections to the Rule.

The Deputy Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

*That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR 81 The Automatic Enrolment (Earnings Trigger and Qualifying Earnings Band) Order (NI) 2014 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, has no objections to the Rule.*



## **27. SL The Housing Benefit (Habitual Residence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014**

The following official joined the Committee at 12.55pm:

- Mr Michael Pollock, Social Security, Policy & Legislation, DSD

The Committee sought further clarification from Mr Pollock regarding the implications of this proposed subordinate legislation.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to defer its decision on whether to agree to the subordinate legislation being made until the Department provides a paper providing relevant worked examples.

The official left the meeting at 1.07pm.

## **28. Correspondence**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to seek comment from the Equality Commission regarding its view on the Department for Social Development not carrying out an EQIA with regards to its Facing the Future strategy.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note or respond to the rest of the correspondence as outlined on the correspondence memo.

## **29. Forward Work Programme**

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

## **30. Any Other Business**

One member noted that it would be useful for the Committee to hear stakeholder views on the Department's *Facing the Future* strategy.

The Deputy Chairperson reminded members that there will be no official Committee meeting next week, but that the Committee will instead hold a strategic 'Away Day' on Thursday 27 March.

The next meeting of the Committee for Social Development will take place on Thursday 3 April 2014 at 10.00am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Deputy Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.08pm.

**Alex Maskey**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Social Development**

**10 April 2014**