



Northern Ireland Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY 24 October 2013

Room 29, Parliament Buildings

- Present: Mr Alex Maskey MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Mickey Brady MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Paula Bradley MLA
Mr Gregory Campbell MLA
Mr Trevor Clarke MLA
Mr Michael Copeland MLA
Mrs Dolores Kelly MLA
Mr Fra McCann MLA
- In Attendance: Dr Kevin Pelan (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Angela McParland (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stephen Orme (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stephen Todd (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Stewart Kennedy (Clerical Supervisor)
- Apologies: Mr Stewart Dickson MLA
Mr Jim Allister MLA

The meeting commenced in closed session at 10.00 am.

Paula Bradley MLA left the meeting at 10.01 am

The Chairperson declared the meeting open to the public at 10.40 am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as noted above.

2. Draft Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 October 2013

Agreed: The draft minutes of the meeting held on 17 October were agreed.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that a meeting between the Chairperson, deputy Chairperson and the Minister was likely to take place in early November (at the request of the Department) to provide an update on social housing reform. The Chairperson advised that the Committee will be subsequently briefed on 14 November.

The Chairperson informed Members that he will be speaking at an event at the Metropolitan Arts Centre held by the Housing Rights Service on Thursday 12 December. The Chairperson advised that this will begin at 9.30 am, but that he will join the Committee meeting shortly after 10 am.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson invited discussion on the preferred meeting day to accommodate the Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to alternate between holding the Inquiry on Thursday mornings and Thursday afternoons; after 2 months or 8 Committee meetings, this will be reviewed.

Following the statement by the Finance Minister on Monday 21st October regarding 'Estate Modernisation', the Committee considered writing to the Department for clarification on the outcome of the bids.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification on which bids were successful and unsuccessful, and to query the Capital Bid of £3 million for 'Estate Modernisation', which has not previously been brought to the attention of the Committee.

The University of Ulster wrote to the Committee asking for feedback on the impact of the research that they presented to the Committee on Business Improvement Districts. If agreed, this feedback would form part of a portfolio of their research activities which will be submitted to the Research Excellence Framework, which is the UK-wide assessment of research quality across all universities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a draft letter which outlined the impact.

5. Pavement Cafés Bill – Oral Evidence Session with NIIRTA and Pubs of Ulster

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.49 am:

- Mr Colin Neill, Chief Executive, Pubs of Ulster
- Mr Glyn Roberts, Chief Executive, NIIRTA

The officials briefed the Committee on their views of the legislation. Mr Neill welcomed the Bill but recognised the issues that other organisations had raised with the Committee, particularly in relation to the potential for pavements to become obstructed by such cafés. However, he felt that the Bill would address the current bad practice regarding pavement cafés and place on a sound regulatory footing the development of a pavement café culture and thus provide a balance acceptable to all interested parties.

Mr Roberts concurred with this position and advised the Committee of NIIRTA's view that town centres are becoming both shopping locations and social locations, and welcomed the Bill as a means of potentially strengthening the social appeal of town centres.

Members then questioned the officials on a range of issues.

This session was recorded by Hansard

The officials left the meeting at 11.13 am.

6. Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill – Departmental Briefing

The following officials joined the meeting at 11.13 am:

- Mr Liam Quinn, Head of Social Policy Unit, DSD
- Mr Gary McAlorum, Social Policy Unit, DSD
- Mr David Irvine, Social Policy Unit, DSD

The officials noted that the Bill had generally been welcomed by stakeholders. They addressed issues raised by stakeholders in the oral evidence sessions and provided clarification as required.

They emphasised that the Bill would allow all councils to respond to individual circumstances in their own areas and require councils to implement the requirements of the Bill including enforcement.

Members then questioned the officials.

Michael Copeland MLA left the meeting at 11.32 am

Paula Bradley MLA returned to the meeting at 11.36 am

Members expressed concerns over the necessity for sufficient disabled access on public pavements; the regulation of advertisement boards, smoking and drinking areas in and near pavement cafés; and the necessity of stringent enforcement of the Bill's legal provisions.

Officials advised that the department would issue guidance for councils on the implementation of the Bill that they would be expected to follow.

This session was recorded by Hansard.

Michael Copeland MLA returned to the meeting at 11.41 am

The officials left the meeting at 11.42 am.

7. Building of Social Housing – Departmental Briefing

The following officials joined the meeting at 11.43 am:

- Mr Michael Sands, Deputy Director of Housing, DSD
- Mr Mark Graham, Northern Ireland Housing Executive

The officials briefed the Committee on the barriers preventing the building of social housing and the steps the Department had taken to address these.

Members then questioned the officials. Of particular concern was the definition of a housing 'start'. The Department noted that a 'start' is taken as the point when the contractor goes on-site to begin work. Members noted that the PfG targets could therefore be determined as being achieved even though it is possible that houses haven't been allocated to tenants, or even completed.

A range of other issues were discussed such as land valuation, the capacity of housing associations to build social housing and the allocation of strategic sites for housing development.

Michael Copeland MLA left the meeting at 12.15 pm

This session was recorded by Hansard.

Mr Graham left the meeting at 12.25 pm.

8. Implementation of a Pilot, Housing Led Regeneration Programme – Departmental Briefing

The following official remained to brief the Committee at 12.26 pm:

- Mr Michael Sands, Deputy Director of Housing, DSD

Mr Sands briefed the Committee that the above mentioned programme was now called ‘Building Successful Communities’, and would aim to make individual ‘target areas’ desirable places to live. Mr Sands advised the Committee that the Minister was due to announce the specific target areas on Monday 28th October.

Mickey Brady MLA left the meeting at 12.37 pm

Members then questioned the official.

Members expressed concern about the Minister’s intention to announce the target areas on Monday 28 October despite the misgivings some members had about this programme and the apparent lack of detail provided on it. Other Members, however, cautioned against criticising the planned pilot project before any Ministerial announcement was made.

A discussion took place about the Department’s rationale for the pilot project, the centrality of ‘housing need’ in defining target areas for the project, the lack of any Equality Impact Assessment, and how the pilot programme would fit alongside the Social Housing Development Programme.

Agreed: The committee agreed to request definitions from the Department as to what constituted an ‘area of risk’ and an ‘area of need’ in relation to social housing.

Mr Sands left the meeting at 12.50 pm.

9. Proposed Subordinate Legislation

Statutory Rule: SR 243/2013 The Automatic Enrolment (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 the Statutory Rule 243/2013 The Automatic Enrolment (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report, has no objection to the Rule.

Statutory Rule: SR 246/2013 The Social Security (Miscellaneous 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 the Statutory Rule 246/2013 The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013, and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule.

10. Correspondence

The Department provided the Committee with a summary of responses to the Consultation on the PIP assessment.

The Office of Fair Trading wrote to inform the Committee that it has launched a consultation on draft guidance which aims to help professionals in the private sector, including letting agents and landlords, to comply with the law.

The Committee noted the rest of the correspondence as outlined in the Correspondence Memo.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee was content with the proposed Forward Work Programme.

12. Any Other Business

Trevor Clarke MLA requested further correspondence from the Committee Clerk regarding Members' availability for future inquiry meetings.

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place at 10.00 am on Thursday 7th November in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.54 pm.

Mr Alex Maskey

**Chairperson, Committee for Social Development
7 November 2013**