



# Northern Ireland Assembly

## COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**THURSDAY 25 September 2014**

**Room 29, Parliament Buildings**

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

The Chairperson declared the meeting open to the public at 10.06am.

#### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were as noted above.

#### **2. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The draft minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2014 were agreed.

*Gregory Campbell MLA left the meeting at 10.07am.*

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

The Chairperson noted that he would attend a CO3 event arranged by Assembly Outreach on 7 October.

### **4. Matters Arising**

**4.1** The Committee noted a letter received by the Chairperson from the new Minister for Social Development, Mervyn Storey MLA, noting that he looked forward to working with the Committee. The Chairperson noted that he would arrange to meet with the new Minister in the near future.

**4.2 Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Members' attendance figures provided by the Central Committee Office.

*Gregory Campbell MLA joined the meeting at 10.09am.*

### **5. DSD Special Adviser – Fact-Finding Exercise**

The Committee discussed a letter received on 18 September 2014 from the Minister for Social Development regarding the fact-finding exercise into the DSD Special Adviser.

The following motion was proposed:

*That the Committee seeks legal advice in respect of the recent letter received from the former Minister to establish, inter alia, whether the former Minister was acting within the vires of his office in respect of the handling of the fact-finding exercise and options for the way forward.*

The Committee divided:

Ayes 7;

Noes 0;

Abstentions 0.

**AYES:**

Mr Jim Allister

Mr Mickey Brady

Mr Michael Copeland

Mr Stewart Dickson

Mrs Dolores Kelly

Mr Alex Maskey

Mr Fra McCann

The motion was carried.

**6. Committee Inquiry into allegations, arising from a BBC NI ‘Spotlight’ programme aired on 3 July 2013, of impropriety or irregularity relating to NIHE-managed contracts and consideration of any resulting actions, Phase 3 – evidence session with DSD Officials**

The following witness joined the meeting at 10.30am.

- Stewart Cuddy, Former Acting CEO, NIHE

The Committee took evidence from the witness.

*Trevor Clarke MLA joined the meeting at 11.21am.*

The witness left the meeting at 12.46pm.

*This session was recorded by Hansard.*

**Proceedings were suspended at 12.47pm**

**Proceedings recommenced in public session at 1.00pm, in Room 29 Parliament Buildings.**

Present:                    Mr Alex Maskey MLA (Chairperson)  
                                  Mr Mickey Brady MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
                                  Mr Jim Allister MLA  
                                  Mr Stewart Dickson MLA  
                                  Mr Fra McCann MLA  
                                  Mr Sammy Wilson MLA

The Chairperson declared the meeting open to the public.

**7. October Monitoring Round – Departmental Briefing**

The following officials joined the meeting at 1.01pm.

- Mr Andrew Hamilton, Deputy Secretary, DSD
- Ms Deborah Brown, Director of Financial Management, DSD

The officials briefed the Committee on the October Monitoring Round and the overall pressures on the Department’s budget.

The officials took questions from the Committee.

The officials left the meeting at 1.29pm.

*The session was recorded by Hansard.*

#### **8. Social Housing Reform Programme – Rent Policy for Social Housing in NI – Departmental Briefing**

The following officials joined the meeting at 1.30pm.

- Andrew Hamilton, Deputy Secretary, DSD
- Jim Wilkinson, Director of Housing, DSD
- Shane Clements, Rent, Regulation and Inspection Project, Project Manager, DSD

The officials briefed the Committee on the Department's initial research to inform the development of a rent policy for the social housing sector in Northern Ireland.

The members acknowledged the high standard of the Department's research, noting the detailed and comprehensive review of relevant issues.

The officials took questions from the Committee and noted that the Department would be undertaking further analysis and would return to the Committee in the new-year with a formal consultation paper putting forward proposals for a rent policy.

The officials left the meeting at 2.13pm

#### **9. SR226 The Jobseekers Allowance (Maternity Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014**

The Committee had no objections to the Rule. The Chairperson read the following into the record:

*That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR226/2014 The Jobseekers Allowance (Maternity Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, recommends that it be confirmed by the Assembly.*

#### **10. SR 235 The Social Security (Jobseekers Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance) Waiting Days (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014**

Members noted that the Department had provided a list of those categories of claimants who would be exempt from these regulations. Some members expressed concern over the implication of the increased waiting days that would apply if the regulations were introduced.

The following motion was proposed:

*That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR 235/2014 The Social Security (Jobseekers Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance) Waiting Days (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, has no objections to the Rule.*

The Committee divided:

Ayes 3;

Noes 0;

Abstentions 0.

AYES:

Mr Jim Allister

Mr Stewart Dickson

Mr Sammy Wilson

The motion was carried.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek an update on the impact of a number of Statutory Rules that the Committee had previously considered and to ask the Department to monitor the number of people subject to the 'Waiting Days' regulations and to ask that the committee be kept informed.

### **11. Correspondence**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note correspondence as outlined on the correspondence memo.

### **12. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme as drafted.

### **13. AOB**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek feedback on the Supporting People Programme.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an update on the progress made in respect of the transfer of DSD functions to local government.

### **14. Date, time and place of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Committee for Social Development will take place on 2 October 2014 at 10.00am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 2.18pm.

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

**25 September 2014**