



# Northern Ireland Assembly

## COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Tuesday 13 January 2015**  
**Room 21, Parliament Buildings**

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

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

Apologies: Ms Paula Bradley MLA  
Mr Gregory Campbell MLA  
Mr Michael Copeland MLA  
Mr Maurice Devenney MLA

The Chairperson declared the meeting open to the public at 9.37am.

#### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were as noted above.

#### **2. Matters Arising**

**2.1** The Committee agreed to defer its planned discussion of issues raised in relation to the Pensions Bill until it takes evidence from Cruse Bereavement Care on 22 January.

### **3. Pensions Bill – Briefing by the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI)**

The following officials joined the meeting at 9.39am:

- Claire Keatinge, Commissioner for Older People, COPNI
- Emer Boyle, Head of Legal and Policy Advice, COPNI

The officials briefed the Committee on their response to the Pensions Bill, speaking to their written submission.

The briefing raised a number of issues including an appropriate level of state pension – and their view that this should be set at least 5% above the current guarantee level for pension credit – to address pensioner poverty; the apparent inequality in the provision of the single-tier pension between some men and women born on the same day; the need for the impact of the Bill to be based on NI-specific data; greater safeguards for those who don't meet the 10-year qualifying period; concerns about clause 27 (assessed income period); and the need for a clear and comprehensive communications strategy regarding the provisions of the Bill.

*Jim Allister MLA joined the meeting at 9.45am.*

*Dolores Kelly MLA joined the meeting at 9.55am.*

The officials took questions from the Committee.

The officials left the meeting at 10.16am.

*This session was recorded by Hansard.*

### **4. Pensions Bill – Departmental Briefing**

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.16am:

- Gerry McCann, Social Security, Policy and Legislation Division, Department for Social Development
- Seamus Cassidy, Social Security Policy and Legislation Division, Department for Social Development

The officials briefed the Committee on issues raised during the briefing from COPNI and took questions from the Committee.

*Jim Allister MLA left the meeting at 10.28am.*

*Mickey Brady MLA left the meeting at 10.35am.*

Officials stated that they would contact the Commissioner regarding the proposed communications strategy.

Officials agreed to provide information on how the Department is working with the Department of Health regarding the uptake of carers' allowance.

The officials left the meeting at 10.43am.

*This session was recorded by Hansard.*

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

The next meeting of the Committee for Social Development will take place on 15 January 2015 at 10.00am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 10.43am.

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

**22 January 2015**