



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Communities

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 29 February 2024

**Meeting Location:** Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:**

- Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson) MLA
- Ms Ciara Ferguson (Deputy Chairperson) MLA
- Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA
- Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
- Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
- Mr Maoliosa McHugh MLA
- Ms Sian Mulholland MLA

**Apologies:**

- Mr Brian Kingston MLA
- Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA

**In Attendance:**

- Mrs Emer Boyle (Assembly Clerk)
- Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Clerk)
- Mr Chris McAfee (Clerical Supervisor)
- Mrs Tracey McCaughey (Clerical Officer)



## Northern Ireland Assembly

The meeting commenced in open session at 10.03 a.m.

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies are listed above.

### **2. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson informed Members that RaISe would brief in closed session at the end of the meeting on the key areas of responsibility of the department and he encouraged all Members to stay for this session as it was a really critical first step for this Committee in the identification of areas of focus for the Committee's Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson further informed Members that an invitation had been received to a PRONI event on Friday 1 March and asked any Member of the Committee who would be able to attend if they could confirm attendance via the Committee team.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the draft minutes from the meeting on 22 February 2024.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes as drafted.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

### **4. Matters Arising**

The Chairperson informed Members that, at the meeting on 22 February, Officials had been asked to confirm the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rents for 2024.

The Department had replied to state that LHA rent levels depend on the number of bedrooms in a home, and on which of the eight Broad Rental Market Areas a home is located. The geographical areas and updated rates information were set out on the website link which was provided in the Department's response.

### **5. Correspondence**

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a correspondence memo with proposed actions detailed.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the correspondence memo as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for an update on measures attributed to it in the Strategic Investment Board Investing Activity Report which were marked as amber.

### **6. Briefing by Department for Communities Permanent Secretary on Departmental Priorities**

The following officials joined the meeting at 10.08 a.m:

Colum Boyle, Permanent Secretary

Paddy Rooney, Deputy Secretary, Work and Health Group; and



## Northern Ireland Assembly

Mark O'Donnell, Deputy Secretary, Housing and Sustainability Group.

The Permanent Secretary outlined the main departmental priorities.

A question and answer session with Members followed and the main topics of the discussion were housing, rates support grant, sub-regional stadia funding, regional stadia funding, social inclusion strategies, neighbourhood renewal, Supporting People and welfare mitigations.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for briefing the Committee and they left the meeting at 11.03 a.m.

### 7. Statutory Rules

The Chairperson informed members that the Committee was reaching the end of its consideration of the backlog of Statutory Rules (SRs) and that officials were again in attendance to provide the Committee with a brief overview of each Rule before Members made their decision on the Rules.

The Chairperson further informed members that they had also been provided with a list of Statutory Rules which had been laid since the end of the last mandate but which no longer required a decision for one of the following reasons:

- a. they had been revoked and re-enacted or superseded by subsequent Statutory Rules.
- b. the confirmatory period had expired; or
- c. the Department had indicated that it intended to revoke and re-make the Statutory Rule and the Committee will receive SL1 letters for these in due course.

The Chairperson welcomed David Tarr and John Noble to the meeting to brief the Committee on **SR 2024/6 - The Child Support Fees (Revocation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024**.

*Agreed:* That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2024/6 - The Child Support Fees (Revocation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 (Northern Ireland) 2022 and recommends that it is approved by the Assembly.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**8. SR 2024/15 - The Occupational Pension Schemes (Collective Money Purchase Schemes) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024**

The Chairperson welcomed Hayley Ward to the meeting and requested that she join David Tarr in briefing the Committee on this SR.

*Agreed:* That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2024/15 - The Occupational Pension Schemes (Collective Money Purchase Schemes) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and recommends that it is approved by the Assembly.

The Chairperson thanked all the Departmental officials who had briefed Committee in relation to the Statutory Rules at each of the meetings over the past 3 weeks, confirming that their assistance had assisted members in their effective scrutiny of the backlog of Rules.

**9. SL1 - The Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and technical remake in relation to 2023-24 amounts**

The Chairperson informed Members that the 2024 Regulations increase the amounts payable under the Mesothelioma Scheme by 6.7% in line with the up-rating of industrial injuries benefits from April 2024.

*Agreed:* The Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**10.SL1 - The Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024**

The Chairperson informed Members that these Regulations amend the 1988 Regulations to increase the amounts payable under the 1979 Scheme by 6.7% in line with the up-rating of industrial injuries benefits.

*Agreed:* The Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

**11.SL1 - The Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment No 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024**

The Chairperson informed Members that these Regulations make amendments to the 1988 Regulations to link the definition of disease.

*Agreed:* The Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

**12.SL1 - The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2024 and technical remake in relation to 2023-24 rates**

The Chairperson informed Members that the 2024 Order makes in relation to Northern Ireland only provision corresponding to provision contained in an Order made by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in Great Britain. The Department has no power to set different rates of benefits and pensions for Northern Ireland in the annual up-rating order.

*Agreed:* The Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**13.SL1 - The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and technical remake in relation to 2023-24 provisions**

The Chairperson informed Members that these Regulations contain technical provisions in consequence of the Up-rating Order and are replicated each year to ensure the correct implementation of the increased rates.

*Agreed:* The Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

**14.The Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Specified Diseases and Prescribed Occupations) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024**

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed rule makes changes to re-align the definitions of certain specified diseases in relation to the 1979 Order with the definitions of the corresponding prescribed diseases set out in Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit legislation.

*Agreed:* The Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

**15.SL1 - The Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (General Levy) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024**

The Chairperson informed Members that the general levy rates have not been increased in line with movements in inflation but are reviewed annually to ensure that an appropriate amount is being raised by the levy to meet the costs that are being incurred. The most recent review found that the levy is in deficit so a change to the general levy rates is needed to continue to recover the accruing deficit and meet forecasted relevant expenditure of the above bodies.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

*Agreed:* The Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

**16.SL1 - The Occupational Pension Schemes (Collective Money Purchase Schemes) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024**

The Chairperson informed Members that these Regulations make technical amendments to ensure that collective money purchase schemes can operate as originally intended, that they are run well and that the interests of members are protected.

*Agreed:* The Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

**17.SL1 - The Occupational Pension Schemes (Funding and Investment Strategy and Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024**

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed Rule will introduce measures to the occupational pensions defined benefit scheme funding regime that will support trustees and sponsoring employers to plan and manage their scheme funding over the long-term. The proposed Rule also enables the Pensions Regulator to intervene more effectively to protect members' benefits when needed.

*Agreed:* The Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.





Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**18. Forward work programme**

The Chairperson informed Members that, at next week's meeting, the Committee will receive briefings from the Deputy Secretary of the Corporate Services Group and the Deputy Secretary of the Engaged Communities Group.

The Committee will then receive briefings from the other Deputy Secretaries over the following 2 weeks.

**19. Any other business**

There was no other business.

**20. Date, time and location of the next meeting**

The next meeting is at 10am on Thursday 7 March 2024, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11.25a.m.

The meeting went into closed session at 11.32a.m.

**21. RaISe briefing on key issues for the Department for Communities**

*The following members were present for the closed session: Colm Gildernew, Ciara Ferguson, Andy Allen, Maurice Bradley, Maolísa McHugh, Kellie Armstrong, Sian Mulholland.*



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Eleanor Murphy and Stephen Orme from RalSe briefed the Committee and answered Members' questions on the areas of policy responsibility of the Department for Communities.

*Agreed:* That a letter is sent to the All-Party Group on Gambling to ask for copies of any reports it has produced and to ask for an update on its current work.

*Agreed:* That a letter is sent to Habinteg requesting information in relation to any potential for funding for Northern Ireland housing projects based on the Chief Executive's experience as a member of the Department of Trade and Industry working group.

The Chairperson thanked the RalSe officials for their comprehensive briefing.

The meeting ended at 12.39p.m.

**Colm Gildernew MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Communities**