



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Communities

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 12 June 2025

**Meeting Location:** Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

- Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson) MLA
- Ms Nicola Brogan (Deputy Chairperson) MLA (via Zoom)
- Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
- Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA
- Ms Sian Mulholland MLA (Via Zoom)
- Mr Brian Kingston MLA
- Mr Maolfiosa McHugh MLA
- Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
- Mr Maurice Bradley MLA

**In Attendance:**

- Mr James Gilsenan (Assembly Clerk)
- Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Clerk)
- Mr Chris McAfee (Clerical Supervisor)
- Ms Katie Egan (Clerical Officer)
- Ms Patrice Morris (Senior Assistant Clerk)

The meeting commenced in public session at 10.02a.m.



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### 1. Declarations of Interest

Kellie Armstrong – member of Deaf Community

Brian Kingston – member of Committee for the Executive Office

### 2. Apologies

There were no apologies.

### 3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson and members appealed for calm following the recent disorder, most notably in Ballymena and Larne.

Daniel McCrossan joined the meeting at 10.28a.m.

Maolíosa McHugh proposed a vote of no confidence in the Minister following his social media post on this issue.

The Committee divided:

AYES

NOES

ABSTAIN

Colm Gildernew

Maurice Bradley

Andy Allen

Nicola Brogan

Brian Kingston

Kellie Armstrong

Daniel McCrossan

Maolíosa McHugh

Sian Mulholland

The Committee Clerk summarised the outcome of the vote and advised members that the vote was carried.



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The Chairperson made reference to two statements made by the Minister to the House on Tuesday 9 June. The Committee anticipates an SL1 on the winter fuel payment changes recently confirmed by the Chancellor.

The Chairperson welcomed Junior Minister Cameron's answer on Monday to a question on the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Delivery Plan 2024-2026.

The Chairperson thanked Departmental officials for their follow up informal session on Universal Credit which took place on Tuesday 10 June.

The Chairperson noted the BBC story last weekend regarding the leaked Anti-Poverty Strategy, the response of some stakeholders and his hope that the strategy will be published very soon so that meaningful consultation can begin.

The Chairperson made reference to the Spending Review which provided some detail on the UK Government's proposed day-to-day spending over the next three years and capital budgets for the next five years.

Finally, the Chairperson mentioned Armagh's Olympic gold medallist, Daniel Whiffen, giving £25,000 from an Olympic grant to his former school, St Patrick's Grammar. The Chairperson said that it was a great story and the school will use the money to fund a new gym.

### 4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the meeting on 5 June 2025.

**Agreed:** That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

### 5. Matters Arising

DfC - letter re Fresh Start Programmes and Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime

**Agreed:** That a briefing on this issue is arranged for a future meeting.

NICCY - Follow up information



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**Agreed:** That a joint briefing session with Department for Communities and Department of Finance officials on the Children's Services Co Operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 is arranged for a future meeting.

DWP - Pathways to Work Green Paper

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Minister to ask what work he is carrying out in engaging with young people on the anticipated withdrawal of the health top-up element of Universal Credit for those under 22 years of age.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Derry City and Strabane District Council	Anti-Poverty Strategy response
Strategic Investment Board	Newry regeneration projects updates clarifications

## 6. Correspondence

Deaf Interpreters Northern Ireland - request to provide oral evidence on the Sign Language Bill

**Agreed:** That Deaf Interpreters Northern Ireland are invited to give evidence on the Bill at a future meeting.

Chapter One - Request to brief Committee on the Chapter One initiative

**Agreed:** That Chapter One are asked to provide a written briefing.

Child Poverty Action Group - Safety Nets Annual Policymaker Report May 2025

**Agreed:** That a briefing is requested at a future meeting.

Equality Commission Northern Ireland - loss of EU funding and its impact on equality groups in Northern Ireland – research discussion invitation



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**Agreed:** That the Equality Commission is invited to brief the Committee on the final report on this issue when it is published.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Department for Communities	Funding of the North South Language Body.
Clerk to Committee for Finance to all Statutory Committees	NIFC Launch - The Sustainability of funding for NI Water
Examiner of Statutory Rules	41st Report Of the Examiner of Statutory Rules

The Committee agreed a short suspension to allow interpreters to get in place for the first evidence session on the Sign Language Bill.

The meeting was suspended at 10.41a.m.

The meeting resumed in open session at 10.47a.m. with all members present.

### 7. **RNID evidence session on the Sign Language Bill**

The Chairperson welcomed the following representatives to the meeting:

Teri Devine, Association Director for Inclusion and Employment

Mariette Mulvenna, Development Manager

A question and answer session followed the briefing and the main areas of discussion were:

- The need for consultation with more than one group
- Stigma towards deaf people and whether the Bill will address this



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- Promotion of sign language by government in legislation in other jurisdictions
- Clause 3 (Duties) and affordability 'when determining how...to comply'
- Clause 5 (Formal Guidance) and 'reasonable' steps
- Clause 2 (Promotion of Interests) and accreditation
- The need for awareness across frontline staff
- The need for a robust complaints mechanism

**Agreed:** That RNID forwards written evidence on language deprivation.

The Committee agreed a further suspension.

The meeting was suspended at 11.13a.m.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 11.13a.m.

The meeting restarted at 11.19a.m. with the following members present:

Colm Gildernew, Nicola Brogan, Maurice Bradley, Brian Kingston, Daniel McCrossan, Kellie Armstrong, Sian Mulholland, Maolíosa McHugh

### **8. National Deaf Children's Society evidence session on the Sign Language Bill**

The Chairperson welcomed the following representatives to the meeting:

Déirdre Vaughan, Government Relations Advisor

Jacqueline Melville, Head of Policy and Influencing in Northern Ireland

Andy Allen rejoined the meeting at 11.25a.m.

A question and answer session followed the briefing and the main areas of discussion were:

- Clause 3 and the threshold for reasonable steps
- Engagement on legislative development
- Clause 5 and prescribed organisations having regard to guidance
- Timescale for regulations



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- Clause 6 (Best Practice to be in Guidance) and whether there is a need for a baseline
- Promotion of sign language
- Clause 11 (Accreditation) and the definition of the deaf community and whether it is appropriate
- Reporting periods on the operation of the legislation

Sian Mulholland left the meeting at 11.34a.m.

**Agreed:** That the National Deaf Children's Society provides the Committee with definitions relating to the term 'deaf community'.

**Agreed:** That the Committee seeks advice from the Bill Office on drafting language and definitions used in the Bill.

The Committee agreed to a brief suspension at 12.10p.m.

The meeting restarted at 12.13p.m. with the following members present:

Colm Gildernew, Maurice Bradley, Brian Kingston, Daniel McCrossan, Kellie Armstrong, Nicola Brogan, Maolíosa McHugh

### 9. **Disposal Of Documents Order 1925: Strategic Investment Board Retention and Disposal Schedule**

The Chairperson informed members that the Justice Committee has sought further information on the PSNI schedule and the Committee will be informed once this has been considered.

Following a request for, and receipt of, clarification on entries in the Strategic Investment Board Retention and Disposal Schedule, the Executive Office Committee approved the schedule at its meeting on 4 June 2025.

**Agreed:** That the Committee is content to approve the retention and disposal schedule.

### 10. **Forward Work Programme**

The committee noted a copy of the forward work programme.



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### 11. Any other business

The Chairperson informed members that he was aware of the Minister's concerns regarding a rise in fraudulent activity following the announcement of a partial u-turn on Winter Fuel Payments and attempts to use the news to scam people. The Chairperson asked members if they were content that he puts out a brief message via the Committee X account urging people to be vigilant.

**Agreed:** That a message urging people to be vigilant is put out on the Committee's X account.

Kellie Armstrong raised a query in relation to the publication of the Irish Language Strategy.

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for a timeline for the publication of the strategy.

### 12. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 19 June 2025, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.15p.m.

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