



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 17 September 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

- Mr Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)
- Ms Nicola Brogan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
- Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA
- Mr Paul Boggs MLA
- Mrs Pam Cameron MLA
- Mr Mark Durkan MLA (via Zoom)
- Mrs Sian Mulholland MLA

In Attendance:

- Mrs Emer Boyle (Assembly Clerk)
- Mrs Victoria Bourquin (Assistant Clerk)
- Mr Chris McAfee (Clerical Supervisor)
- Ms Katie Egan (Clerical Officer)
- Ms Patrice Morris (Senior Assistant Clerk)
- Ms Kathryn Black (Senior Assistant Clerk)



The meeting commenced in public session at 10.00 a.m.

1. Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared:

Colm Gildernew - Member's Bill on mitigating the threat of homelessness.

Andy Allen – Charity Trustee, Private Sector Landlord, Trade Union Member.

Kellie Armstrong – Associate of Chartered Institute of Housing.

Pam Cameron – Former Junior Minister with sight of Executive and cross-departmental policy, strategy and legislation.

2. Apologies

Mr Maurice Bradley MLA

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson welcomed Nicola Brogan MLA back to her previous Committee role of Deputy Chairperson and wished her well in her role.

The Chairperson also placed on record the Committee's thanks to Cathy Mason for her hard work on the Committee. The Chairperson then proposed that the Committee write to her accordingly.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to Cathy Mason thanking her for her work on the Committee.

The Chairperson welcomed Paul Boggs MLA to the Committee and wished him well in his role.

The Chairperson then highlighted a change to the agenda in regards to the rescheduling of the Anti-Poverty Strategy briefing session. The Chairperson advised Members that it will now take place at the Committee Meeting on 24 September 2026, in closed session.



Northern Ireland Assembly

The Chairperson further advised that following Committee agreement at the meeting on 10 September, he, and the Deputy Chairperson will attend an informal meeting on 21 September 2026 with the Permanent Secretary to raise Members' concerns on behalf of the Committee.

Finally, the Chairperson highlighted that agenda items 8 Housing (Amendment) Bill: Agreement of Committee Stage arrangements and 9 Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill: Agreement of Committee Stage arrangements and acknowledged that, as these bills did not complete their second stage during Plenary on Tuesday 15th September, that agenda items 8 and 9 could not proceed as scheduled.

The Chairperson then acknowledged, the further knock-on impacts of the delay from the Committee's perspective including the need for the Committee stage timelines to be re-calculated for each of the Bills at a future date, in the event that they do pass 2nd stage.

4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the Committee meeting on 10 September 2026.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. Impact of Local Growth Fund Cuts on the Voluntary and Community Sector: Oral briefing from NICVA

The Chairperson welcomed the following Officials to the meeting:

Jenny Potter, Director of Policy & Insight, NICVA

Kathy Maguire, Policy & Public Affairs Manager, NICVA

Dr Georgia Stanley, Policy Officer, NICVA



Northern Ireland Assembly

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

- Discussions with the Minister for Communities
- Rural Impact
- Investment Plan
- Priorities
- Loss of services by Council Areas
- Loss and impact of employed individuals
- Organisations affected
- Quantified impact on Public Services
- Engagement with Sector regarding future planning
- Transformation Programme
- Regional Balance Bill engagement

Agreed: That a letter is sent to The Executive Office (TEO) to request a copy of the Investment Plan for the Local Government Fund that was agreed between TEO and the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and to further request a copy of the associated Memorandum of Understanding.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Northern Ireland Office to request a copy of its consultation responses in relation to the Local Growth Fund in Northern Ireland.

6. Charities (Amendment) Bill: Oral evidence from RalSe

The Chairperson welcomed the following Officials to the meeting:

Kathryn Barr, Research Officer, Assembly Research and Information Services (RalSe)

Ross Connolly, Research Officer, Assembly Research and Information Services (RalSe)

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



Northern Ireland Assembly

- Bill clauses and potential areas for Committee scrutiny
- Review of Costs
- Safeguards around proposed enhanced enforcement powers of the Commission
- Stakeholder responses to DfC consultation

Members then considered a Clerks memo including suggested stakeholders from which the Committee may want to receive oral evidence during its scrutiny of the Bill.

Agreed: That the list of stakeholders, along with additional stakeholders identified by Members are asked to brief the Committee in relation to the Bill.

The Chairperson then informed Members that the next agenda item would take place in closed session for the Bill Clerk to brief the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session to receive the briefing.

The meeting moved into closed session at 11.20a.m.

7. Charities (Amendment) Bill: Bill Clerk briefing

The Chairperson welcomed the following Official to the meeting:

Stephanie Mallon, Bill Clerk, NI Assembly Bill Office

The Bill Clerk briefed the Committee on the Clauses of the Bill and a question-and-answer session followed the briefing.

The meeting resumed in open session at 11.58 a.m. with all Members present.

The Chairperson, Colm Gildernew MLA left the meeting at 11.58 a.m.

As the Chairperson left the meeting, the Deputy Chairperson, Nicola Brogan MLA, assumed the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

8. Housing (Amendment) Bill: Agreement of Committee Stage arrangements

9. Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill: Agreement of Committee Stage arrangements

The Deputy Chairperson advised that Agenda Items 8 and 9 would not be progressed, as discussed at Agenda Item 3 (Chairpersons Business), that the Committee move directly to Agenda Item 10.

10. End of Session Report - Consideration of End of Session Report 2025/26

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a draft copy of the report for review and consideration.

Agreed: That the report is deferred for consideration at the Committee meeting on 24 September 2026, to allow Members further time to consider the draft Report.

11. SL1 - The Social Fund (Child Funeral Fund) (No. 2) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Deputy Chairperson reminded Members that the SL1 was received on 9 September 2026 and provided Members with an overview of the SL1.

The Chairperson then informed Members that:

- The Committee team will issue a call for views on the SL1 using the standard survey on Citizen Space from 17 September 2026;
- The SL1, and any relevant papers from the Department will be published on the Committee website and notified to relevant stakeholders, where appropriate; and
- The Committee will next consider this SL1 on 8 October 2026 alongside a summary of any comments and feedback received via Citizen Space.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: That the Committee is content to publish the Citizen Space call for views, publish the Departmental documents in relation to this SL1, and notify relevant stakeholders as appropriate.

Agreed: That the Committee team check whether it is possible to add additional questions and context for an SL1 when uploading the Citizen Space call for views.

Agreed: That the Committee will next consider this SL1 on 8 October 2026 alongside a summary of any comments and feedback received via Citizen Space.

Agreed: That Departmental officials are asked to brief on the SL1 at the meeting on 8 October and that, in advance of this, the following information is sought (in writing) from the Department on:

- The process that the Department will use to process the HSC payment to ensure that there is no further administrative burden on grieving families
- The communication plan to liaise with Funeral Directors
- Whether there is a plan in place to mitigate payments in the event that there is a delay in HSC payments?
- Whether the Department can make full payment and claim back from HSC?
- What planning is ongoing in relation to wider public communications and messaging, given that the SL1 only applies to children and babies post 24 weeks and given recent progress around pre-24 week loss and certification?

12. Retention and Disposal Schedule – Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that this schedule had been considered by the Committee for the Economy on 1 July 2026 which had corresponded to confirm that it was content with the schedule.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Agreed: That the Committee is content to approve the schedule.

13. Matters Arising

Committee for Communities - Nil Return - Victims and Witnesses of Crime Bill

Agreed: That a nil return response is submitted to the Committee for Justice.

Committee for Communities - Response to Committee for the Economy on the Regional Balance Bill

Agreed: That the response is submitted to the Committee for the Economy.

The Committee noted the following item:

Source	Subject Matter
Department for Communities	Strategy and Funding for Supported Accommodation for Young People

14. Correspondence

Department for Communities - DWP – UK Government Plan for Carers

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask what specific engagement has taken place between the Department and DWP to reflect the perspective of carers across Northern Ireland and to further ask whether the Department will publish a Northern Ireland Impact Assessment.

Department for Communities - Liquor Licensing - Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (NI) 2021



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: That relevant Liquor Licensing (review) stakeholders are identified and asked to brief the Committee at a future meeting.

Department for Communities - Business Plan 2026-27

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask why the Business Plan outlines that the Housing (Amendment) Bill will proceed accelerated passage (subject to Executive scrutiny), therefore bypassing Committee scrutiny, when there is enough time left in the current mandate to facilitate Committee scrutiny of the Bill.

Hear Our Voices - Love Needs No Words Project NI - Northern Ireland Communication Access & Inclusion Initiative

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department as context and to request what mechanisms the Department uses to engage with the clients it supports who are non-verbal.

Committee for The Executive Office - NI Survivor Council - Books relating to consent

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask how Libraries can be involved in the provision of resources and books in relation to consent.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to Libraries NI to ask whether any books relating to consent have been removed or withdrawn from libraries?

Individual – Follow-up – charity regulation and independent religious organisations

Agreed: That the individual is asked to submit the papers relating to their concerns by way of a written briefing.

Individual - Protecting Access to Work NI and Deaf employment rights



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask what actions are currently being taken in relation to the emerging Guidance which could potentially address the concerns raised in the correspondence.

Individual - Systemic DHP Transition Gap + Safeguarding Failure

Agreed: That a response is sent to the individual to advise that the Committee is not enabled to get involved in individual cases and that they should contact their local MLA / MP.

OSCR – Scottish Charity Regulator - Response to Charities (Amendment) Bill; and

Committee for Justice - Charities (Amendment) Bill – nil response; and

Committee for Justice - Housing (Amendment) Bill - nil response; and

Committee for Justice - Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill; and

Committee for Infrastructure - Response to 3 Bills from Committee for Communities – nil response to the three Bills

Agreed: That each response is added to its relevant bill folder, collated with other responses to the relevant bill and returned to the Committee for consideration during committee stage scrutiny of each Bill.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
NI Fiscal Council	Invite to NIFSC Annual Conference 2026
National Lottery Community Fund	Call for Evidence - Fund What Matters to You



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Source	Summary of content
Law Centre NI	Community Voices, Community Solutions Report Roundtable
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission	Frontier Workers Case Studies Booklet Launch
Committee for Finance	Revised DoF and DoJ Section 59 Section 7 Authorisation letters
Committee for Finance	Costs associated with the application of provisions of Bills
Committee for Finance	Memo to all Stat Cttees re Outturn and Forecast Outturn (R3) Jun + (R4) Jul

The Committee noted the following items of tabled correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Executive Information Service	Press release - Minister welcomes 143 apprentices to Department for Communities
Executive Information Service	Press release - Lyons to drive once-in-a-generation system change on homelessness
Executive Information Service	Press release – REISSUE Lyons to drive once-in-a-generation system change on homelessness

15. Forward Work Programme

The Deputy Chairperson advised Members of the amended date of the briefing from the Department on the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The Deputy Chairperson then proposed that, a further external visit be provisionally rescheduled until early 2027, due to the Committee's legislative workload.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: That the Committee's further external visit in this term is deferred until early 2027.

The Deputy Chairperson then advised Members that the Department had requested advance topics for discussion during the briefing session with the Minister schedule for 12 November 2026, and any topics should be forwarded to the Clerk in advance of the briefing.

The Committee then noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

16. Any other business

There was no other business.

17. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 24 September 2026, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.22p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities