



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 16 October 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

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

In Attendance:

- Mrs Emer Boyle (Assembly Clerk)
- Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Clerk)
- Mrs Victoria Bourquin (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 10.01a.m.



Northern Ireland Assembly

1. Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared:

Pam Cameron – former Junior Minister with sight of Executive and Cross Departmental policy, strategy and legislation. Member of Committee for the Executive Office

Maoliosa McHugh – Chairman of pre-school Naíscoil na Deirge, Treasurer Conrad na Gaeilge na Deirge

Sian Mulholland – family member is on board of governors of a gaescoil and family members attend gaescoils

2. Apologies

Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA

Mr Maurice Bradley MLA

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that there would be a closed session briefing towards the end of the meeting to receive legal advice. The Chairperson also reminded Members that an event on the Sign Language Bill with young people was scheduled for directly after the meeting and the Chairperson encouraged as many Members to attend as possible.

The Chairperson also informed Members that he had spoken on the debate on child poverty in plenary earlier in the week and reflected the Committee's position as set out in the Committee's response to the Department on the very important issue of child poverty. It was a very useful debate and is an issue that the Committee will continue to keep a keen interest in.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department seeking the specific information which the Minister had made reference to during the debate on child poverty on Tuesday 14 October. In that debate the Minister had stated that targets and measures relevant to the Anti-Poverty Strategy and which have funding allocated to them are set out in a range of other strategy documents and that



Northern Ireland Assembly

more will be set out in the forthcoming action plan as well. The Committee agreed to ask the Department to provide a comprehensive list of these targets and the specific strategies in which they are contained.

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that she had attended an Ulster Rugby game at the weekend and thanked the rugby club for the invitation to attend and congratulated the team on their convincing win.

4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the meeting on 9 October 2025.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. Matters Arising

Department for Work and Pensions - Winter Fuel Payments Regulations and Reciprocal Disregards for Compensation

The Chairperson welcomed these thorough responses and told Members that it's clear that feeding the work and queries from this Committee through to Westminster in relation to these two very important issues is important and is being seen and heard. The Chairperson noted that, in relation to the Republic of Ireland Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme, DWP is continuing to consider this carefully and he stated that he hopes that there is a positive outcome in the not too distant future.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for an estimate of the numbers of individuals affected by the Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme and whether the Department would have the estimated costs of a mitigation scheme should DWP not proceed with a disregard.

SOLACE NI - Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy

Agreed: That a letter is sent to each individual Council Chief Executive to ask them to attend a future meeting to discuss their Council's response to the draft strategy.

The Committee noted the following item:



Northern Ireland Assembly

Source	Subject Matter
Department for Infrastructure	Disability and Work Strategy

6. Correspondence

Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) - Review Of Assembly Committee Engagement On Cross Cutting Executive Strategies

Agreed: That a copy of the Committee's response to AERC on this issue is forwarded to the Department as Members considered that the extent of the Committee's experience and concerns were not reflected in the Department's response to AERC.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Summary of content
Committee for Finance	Programme for Government - Alignment to Final Budget 2025-26 Report
Matthew Lloyd Architects	Mackie's Site - Take Back The City Briefing Document
Consumer Council NI	Invitation - Household Expenditure Tracker 23 October 2025
Assembly Communications	Communities - Media Clippings: Casement, Language, Abuse of Politicians, Sunday Trading

The Chairperson stated that, in regards to correspondence with the Department, he felt that timeliness of responses back to the Committee is still an issue. For instance, a letter was sent to the Department on 24 September in relation to the briefing on the Football Fund. The letter contained numerous requests for information following the Committee session the previous Thursday and, as of today, no reply had been received.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: That this issue is raised with the Minister when he appears before the Committee at the meeting on 23 October.

The Committee further noted the following items of tabled correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Department for Communities	Competition open for the appointment of a Chair and members to the Board of the NI Museums Council
Department for Communities	DfC launches public consultation on Disability and Work: A Strategy for Northern Ireland

As a Member was experiencing an IT issue in opening their meeting papers, the Chairperson decided to suspend the meeting to allow the problem to be addressed. The meeting was suspended at 10.14a.m.

The meeting resumed at 10.16a.m. with all Members present.

7. Briefing by Association of British Insurers on the Pensions Bill LCM

The Chairperson welcomed the following representative to the meeting:

Justin Wray, Interim Assistant Director, Long Term Savings, Association of British Insurers

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

- Contractual override
- Value for money data
- Better outcome versus no worse outcome
- The role of the Pensions Ombudsman
- Changes to pensions for those with a terminal illness
- Pensions dashboard
- Payment protection fund



Northern Ireland Assembly

- Accrued benefits
- Potential consequence of not consenting to the LCM

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask what support is available if an individual in an end of life situation but is not a member of the pension schemes listed in the Bill to which the LCM relates.

8. Consideration of Committee End of Session Report 2024/25

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with an amended draft copy of the report, to reflect changes suggested at the meeting on 16 October, for consideration.

Agreed: That the report is published.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for a timeline for an update on the progress of the Department's key strategic priorities.

The Chairperson informed Members that, to allow for interpretation services to be put in place, he proposed, and Members agreed to, a short break.

The meeting was suspended at 10.45a.m.

The meeting resumed at 10.52a.m. with all Members present.

9. Briefing by Irish Language Strategy Co-Design Group on the Irish Language Strategy

The Chairperson informed Member that Departmental officials were asked to attend today's meeting to brief on this issue and advised that they were unavailable.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask when officials will be able to brief on this issue.

The Chairperson welcomed the following representatives to the meeting:

Liam Ó Flannagáin, Coiste Forbartha Charn Tóchair



Northern Ireland Assembly

Maria Thomasson, CEO, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta

Ciarán Mac Giolla Bhéin, Language Planning Coordinator, Glór na Móna

Dr Pádraig Ó Tiarnaigh (Co-Chair, CDG), Conradh na Gaeilge

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

- Blockages in preventing the strategy's adoption
- The co-design process and Conrad na Gaeilge's understanding of its role in the process
- The need to take on board the work of the co-design group and its recommendations
- The benefits of an Irish Language Strategy for Irish medium education
- The importance of the strategy to the overall development of the Irish language
- The impact on the community of not adopting the Irish Language Strategy
- The group's relationship with the Department
- Costings for the funding of the strategy

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for the following:

- A timeline for publication of the Irish Language Strategy
- The membership of the Cross Departmental Working Group and the outcomes of its work to date
- The date of the establishment of the Cross Departmental Working Group as there were different dates being quoted
- A list of strategies that will have overarching targets and those that will not
- Information on the Department's policy on dealing with co-design groups

Agreed: That a visit to and the feasibility of holding a Committee meeting in Charn Tóchair is explored for a future meeting.



Northern Ireland Assembly

The Chairperson informed Members that, as the next agenda item was a briefing from Assembly Legal Services, he proposed, and members agreed, that the meeting go into closed session.

The meeting went into closed session at 12.05p.m.

10. Briefing by Assembly Legal Services on the potential use of Section 44 powers and freedom of information issues

The Chairperson welcomed the following Assembly official to the meeting:

Simon Kelly, Legal Adviser, Assembly Legal Services

The meeting resumed in open session at 12.22p.m.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for a reply in relation to the NI Football Fund which has now passed the agreed deadline of 10 working days for a response. The Committee would like to know what the delay has been in responding, when a response can be expected and to remind the Department of its obligations under Section 11 of the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2021.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson informed Members that there would be a Ministerial briefing at the meeting on 23 October and asked if Members had any comments or topics that they wished to discuss with the Minister in order to notify his office of these issues in advance.

The Committee noted a copy of the forward work programme.

12. Any other business

There was no other business.

13. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 23 October 2025, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.23p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities