



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 18 September 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 Kellie Armstrong MLA
Ms Sian Mulholland MLA
Mr Brian Kingston MLA
Mr Maolfósa McHugh MLA
Mr Mark Durkan MLA
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA

In Attendance:

Mrs Emer Boyle (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Chris McAfee (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Katie Egan (Clerical Officer)
Ms Patrice Morris (Senior Assistant Clerk)



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The meeting commenced in public session at 10.01a.m.

1. Declarations of Interest

Andy Allen – Charity trustee

Brian Kingston – Member of NILGOSC pension scheme

Colm Gildernew - Secretary, Brantry Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

Maolíosa McHugh – Member of NILGOSC pension scheme, Chairman of pre-school Naíscoil na Deirge

Nicola Brogan – Member of Committee for Infrastructure

Mark Durkan – family member is a member of NILGOSC pension scheme

Maurice Bradley and Kellie Armstrong joined the meeting at 10.03a.m.

Maurice Bradley – Member of Harry Gregg Foundation, Member of Coleraine and District League Management, Member of North West Football Association, Member of Irish Football Association Council

Kellie Armstrong – Member of NILGOSC pension scheme

Sian Mulholland – Recipient of NILGOSC pension

2. Apologies

There were no apologies.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson noted the removal of the trilingual logo from official Departmental correspondence which he felt was a retrograde step.



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Executive Office to ask if there is an Executive policy on the visibility of minority and indigenous languages which can be implemented across all NICS Departments which could mitigate against individual Departments taking a siloed approach on language matters.

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

- When the decision was made to remove the trilingual logo?
- Was financial advice / forecast cost savings in relation to the decision to remove the trilingual logo requested within the Department? and
- What are the forecast cost savings associated with the decision to remove the tri-lingual logo?

The Chairperson informed members that the Committee had asked for a Departmental briefing on the Irish Language Strategy. The Department had replied to say that officials are not available to brief on the proposed date of 2 October and advised that they will come back with another date.

The Chairperson also informed members that he had raised concerns in relation to Irish Language in the chamber on Tuesday and he felt that this was yet more delay by the Department in relation to progressing this.

The Irish Language Strategy Co-Design Group have asked to brief the Committee and the Chairperson informed Members that it made sense to ask the Department to be there at that same session. The Chairperson asked Members if they were content for the Committee team to proceed to schedule the Briefing, in the absence of confirmation from the Department.

Agreed: That the Irish Language Strategy Co-Design Group is invited to brief at a future meeting.

The Chairperson informed Members that Brian Kingston would be leaving the Committee, thanked him for his hard work whilst a member and wished him well in the future.

4. Draft Minutes



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The Chairperson informed members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the meeting on 11 September 2025.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. Matters Arising

Committee for Communities - draft Response to AERC call for evidence

Agreed: That a further week is taken to consider the draft response and the Clerk seeks an extension.

Draft Committee response to Anti-Poverty Strategy Consultation

Agreed: That the response is sent to the Department subject to some minor amendments.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Department for Communities	Asset Transfer of Land

6. Correspondence

Matthew Lloyd Architects - request to brief Committee on Mackies housing site

Agreed: That a detailed written briefing paper is requested in the first instance.

Department for Communities - Update on Building Safety Policy Development – Request to Brief

Agreed: That a briefing session is arranged for a future meeting.

Department for Communities - The Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for more information on the geographical extent of the communication of information in relation to this launch event.

Assembly Communications - Arts Council funding of Bands



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for its response to this newspaper article.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask if there is a policy on the establishment of memorials constructed without planning permission on council and NI Housing Executive land, seeking clarification in relation to the councils' role in this issue and the extent of the Minister's engagement with councils on this issue.

Agreed: That the Arts Council is invited to a future meeting to brief on the funding of bands after receipt of replies to Committee correspondence regarding the issues above.

Brian Kingston wished it to be noted that he did not agree with this action.

Anonymous correspondence - Visitor services issues at Ulster Folk and Ulster transport museum

Agreed: That a copy of the correspondence is sent to the Department for comment.

Department for Communities - Business Plan 25-26

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask, following recent sectarian and racist incidents, what proactive work it is undertaking on community relations.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Summary of content
Advice NI	Sustainable Energy Communities NI Showcase Event Invitation 22 Oct 2025
Assembly Business Office	Letter to Assembly Business Office - laying Prisoner Ombudsman for NI retention and disposal
Assembly Business Office	Letter to NI Assembly for laying of NILGOSC accounts 2024-2025
Assembly Communications	Media Clippings – Languages



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Source	Summary of content
Committee for Finance	24-25 Provisional Outturn & June Monitoring Round
Committee for Finance	Casement Park

The Committee further noted the following items of tabled correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Examiner of Statutory Rules	44th Report Of the Examiner of Statutory Rules
Department for Communities	Committee Briefing - The Pensions Bill LCM
Minister for Communities	Minister for Communities Oral Statement - The Olympic Legacy Fund
Law Centre NI	Response to the Anti-Poverty Strategy
Equality Commission NI	Response to the Anti-Poverty Strategy
Department for Communities	Press release - DfC Business Plan for 2025-26
Department for Communities	DfC Press release - HERoNI announce their annual Lecture Series 2025 to 2026
Department for Communities	Press release - Minister Lyons opens £29m housing development in Ballymena

7. Sign Language Bill – Overview of evidence received to date

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a memo in relation to an overview of the evidence received to date.

The memo provided Members with an update on the work progressed to compile evidence received and information on the proposed next steps regarding the Committee Stage of the Sign Language Bill.



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Members had also been provided with 2 further documents which are a clause by clause summary of the evidence received and a summary of the oral evidence received to date and any requests for further clarification.

The Committee was content with the proposed next steps.

8. SR 2025/142 - The Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Regulations (NI) 2025

Maurice Bradley left the meeting at 10.40 a.m.

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/142 - The Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Regulations (NI) 2025 and has no objection to the Rule subject to the report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

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

- If there have been any policy changes on this issue to maintain parity with GB
- If the Minister has raised the issue of payments to those in border counties with DWP as the number no longer eligible for the payment is very high
- If there are reciprocal agreements in place in relation to winter fuel payments
- How the Department is collating information on those people not ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland as people move abroad in the winter months to live
- How the Department is providing information on the opt-out option as this payment is not a disregard and may have tax implications for those eligible for the payment.
- The Committee would also like to know if the Department will have a longer lead-in communications plan in future for the option to opt-out

9. Department for Infrastructure Retention and Disposal schedule

The Chairperson informed Members that this schedule had been considered by the Committee for Infrastructure who were content with the schedule.

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

Maurice Bradley rejoined the meeting at 10.46 a.m.



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10. Departmental briefing on the Northern Ireland Football Fund

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental officials to the meeting.

Emer Morelli, Deputy Secretary, Engaged Communities Group

Joanna Gray, Director Active Communities Division

Claire Tobin, Head of the Northern Ireland Football Fund Performance Programme

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

- Regional balance/weighting
- Budget allocation for the 3 strands of the fund
- Publication of the scoring criteria and the options paper provided to the Minister
- The application process
- The announcement of the successful applications
- The decision making process
- Role of independent moderator
- Next stages of the process

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

- The budget levels for each strand of the fund and for grass roots football, women's and girls' football and disability football
- For a copy of the feedback report from the external moderator
- If any scores were changed subsequent to external moderation and a breakdown of any changes
- For evidence of any Ministerial engagement undertaken with the aim of securing alternative sources of funding for all sports
- If there was an option to take forward more than 20 applications
- Why the Sub Regional Economic Plan was disregarded when it came to criteria and decisions for the programme
- For a copy of the briefing paper provided to the Minister prior to the announcement in August, to include:



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- the range of options presented to the Minister;
- whether Ministerial direction or advice from officials was included in the options and
- whether there was a recommendation around the need for regional balance
- What liaison is ongoing with the Department of Finance regarding budgets for the fund and what assurances, if any, were given on the budget and the extent of over planning associated with this fund?

The Chairperson suspended the meeting at 11.59 a.m

Andy Allen left the meeting at 11.59 a.m

The meeting restarted at 12.07 p.m with the following Members present:

Brian Kingston, Maurice Bradley, Mark Durkan, Sian Mulholland, Kellie Armstrong, Maolíosa McHugh, Nicola Brogan, Colm Gildernew

11. Departmental briefing on the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Emer Morelli, Deputy Secretary, Engaged Communities Group

Iain Greenway, Director of Culture

Manus Deery, Director Historic Environment

John Ball, Heritage, Culture and Creativity Lead

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

- The budget for the programme
- The policies that will be reviewed
- Regional balance
- Historic building being brought back into use
- The Dilapidation Bill
- Feedback from the sector
- Timeline for policy publication
- The arts sector and creativity



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- Support for individual artists

Agreed: That a letter is sent to DAERA to ask if the Dilapidation Bill deals with listed buildings that are non-dwellings.

12. Departmental briefing on the Charity Commission scheme of delegation

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Colleen Bell, Head of Charities Policy and Legislation Team

Martin Ireland, Deputy Principal, Charities Policy and Legislation Team

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

- The upcoming Charities Bill
- Registration process

13. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the forward work programme.

The Chairperson informed Members that, on Tuesday, the Committee had been advised by the Department about an LCM which may be tabled in the coming weeks.

Agreed: That the Committee is content that the Committee team proceeds to schedule-in work which will help the Committee to scrutinise the LCM in line with the 15 days provided for in Standing Order 42A (7).

14. Any other business

Kellie Armstrong raised the possibility of receiving legal advice in relation to the Departmental presentation on the Northern Ireland Football Fund and the claim by officials that a Committee could ask an FOI in order to get information.



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Agreed: That legal advice is sought on the powers of Committee to request papers.

15. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 25 September 2025, in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.59 p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities