



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 12 February 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Cathy Mason MLA (Deputy Chairperson) (via Zoom)
Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mrs Pam Cameron MLA
Mr Mark Durkan MLA (via Zoom)
Mr Maolfosa McHugh MLA
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)



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

1. Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared:

Colm Gildernew – Cricket Summer Camp Attendee.

Andy Allen – Recently met with Cricket Ireland.

Kellie Armstrong – Recently met with Cricket Ireland.

Pam Cameron – former Junior Minister with sight of Executive and Cross Departmental policy, strategy and legislation, Cricket Summer Camp Attendee & recently met with Cricket Ireland..

2. Apologies

There were no apologies.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Minister delivered a statement in Plenary on Monday 9 February in relation to the review carried out by the Benefit Fraud and Error Task and Finish Group.

The Chairperson also informed Members about an addition to the meeting agenda, due to a new SL1 received from the Department after the issue of Member's Meeting Packs.

Kellie Armstrong joined the meeting at 10.03 a.m.

4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the meeting on 5 February 2026.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.



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5. Rescission of Committee Decision: Proposed Correspondence

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 10.06 a.m.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee agreed, at its meeting on 29 January 2026, to write to the Secretary of State under Section 30(6) of the Northern Ireland Act to seek an opinion on whether the NI Assembly ought to consider a resolution, following the report of the previous Commissioner for Standards. Subsequently, the Committee sought Legal Advice on the processes underpinning this which was provided at the Committee Meeting on 5 February 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to rescind its decision of 29 January 2026 to write to the Secretary of State.

Pam Cameron proposed that, correspondence is sent to the Minister for Communities apologising for attempting to use the Northern Ireland Act inappropriately against him.

The Committee failed to reach consensus in relation to the proposal.

The question was put that the Committee “write to the Minister to apologise for attempting to use the NI Act inappropriately against him”.

The Committee divided: Ayes 3; Noes 6; Abstain 0

AYES

Mr Andy Allen
Mr Maurice Bradley
Mrs Pam Cameron

NOES

Mr Colm Gildernew
Mrs Cathy Mason
Mrs Kellie Armstrong
Mr Mark Durkan
Mr Maolíosa McHugh
Mrs Sian Mulholland

The proposal was not agreed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would not write to the Minister with an apology.



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6. Matters Arising

Committee for Infrastructure - Construction Employers Federation Draft Budget

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister for Communities to seek comment on the Construction Employers Federation Report and requesting that the Minister identify opportunities to work with other Ministers to resolve issues.

Agreed: That the above letter is copied to the First Minister and deputy First Minister and identifies clearly the need for a significantly increased budget for social and affordable housing to ensure that the Programme for Government commitment is met.

Department for Communities - Rates Support Grant and RPA

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department requesting a copy of the report following the Review of Public Administration (RPA) and to request monitoring and review reports from Councils on any identified savings following the implementation of the RPA.

Department for Communities - Departmental Logo

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department with thanks for the information received and seeking clarity on what options were provided to the Minister and further requesting sight of the criteria applied in respect of decisions in relation to when the use of the trilingual logo is appropriate.

Minister of Finance - Local Growth Fund

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the First Minister and deputy First Minister asking whether a “Plan B” or alternative approach is being considered should there be inadequate funds forthcoming for the Local Growth Fund.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister of Finance to ask whether a “Plan B” or alternative approach is being considered should there be inadequate funds forthcoming for the Local Growth Fund.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for Communities to ask what Impact assessments are being undertaken in relation to the wider impact (on the absence of funding from the Local Growth Fund) on the Department, and specifically asking what impact the lack of funding will have on Access to



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Employment Schemes - highlighting that Committee Members are hearing a great deal of fear from the Community and Voluntary Sector in relation to the loss of these funds.

Department for Communities - Discretionary Housing Payments

Agreed: That an informal briefing is scheduled for a future date.

Department for Communities - Ministerial Briefing Session - definition of Priority Need

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask whether there is any plan to review and update the Housing Act (NI) 1988 to reflect current NI societal demographics.

Department for Communities - Universal Credit – Help With Health Costs

Agreed: That an informal briefing on the UC system portal is scheduled for the Committee.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask if the Communications plan for Help with Health Costs could include advertising on TV, radio or in newspaper campaigns.

Department for Communities - Changes to Funding for New Social Homes

Agreed: That points for consideration are sent to NIFHA in advance of their briefing with the Committee on 19 March 2026.

Department for Communities - Conversion to new style ESA

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department welcoming the information and asking if there is a particular reason why “easy-read” / accessible documents are not used by default, particularly in relation to ESA communications, and to further ask whether the Department intends to review this policy.

Department for Communities - Severe Weather Emergency Protocol

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask if there is any plan to place the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol on a statutory footing.

Agreed: That a briefing is requested from Paul McCusker – The People’s Kitchen.

Agreed: That an update on the work of the Task and Finish Group is sought.



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Agreed: That a dedicated Committee meeting is arranged for a future date with relevant stakeholders to brief.

Department for Communities - Supporting People Modernisation Project

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to ask if they are considering the retention of skilled employees level as part of the strategic needs assessment for Supporting People.

Department for Communities - The Northern Ireland Football Fund response - funding allocations

Agreed: That a briefing in closed session is scheduled for a future meeting.

Department for Communities - Social Housing Development Programme - Ringfenced Funding

Pam Cameron proposed that, the Committee endorse the request for ringfencing of budget to (at least) enable the delivery of the Programme for Government commitment to building Social Housing.

Committee failed to reach consensus on the way forward and the Chairperson subsequently counter-proposed that the Committee defer the decision for one week, to allow for more information to be sought.

The question was put that the Committee “defer the decision for one week, to allow for more information to be sought”.

The Committee failed to reach consensus in relation to the proposal.

The Committee divided: Ayes 7; Noes 2; Abstain 0

AYES

Mr Colm Gildernew
Mrs Cathy Mason
Mr Andy Allen
Mrs Kellie Armstrong
Mr Mark Durkan
Mr Maolíosa McHugh
Mrs Sian Mulholland

NOES

Mr Maurice Bradley
Mrs Pam Cameron



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The Proposal was carried.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would defer the decision for one week and reconsider at its meeting on 19 February 2026.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Department for Communities	Community-Led Housing Models
Department for Communities	Community Infrastructure Fund
Department for Communities	Retrofitting and Future Proofing Cross Departmental Strategy
Department for Infrastructure	Dropped Curbs
Department for Communities	Housing Fund and Housing Association Grant
Department for Communities	Child Maintenance Services – Complaints Management
Department for Communities	Benefit Fraud – Stephen Nolan Show Interview with Minister for Communities
Department for Communities	Fraud, Error and Recovery Bill – Cost of Engaging PSNI
Department for Communities	Festive Lighting Funding
Department of Communities	UK Town of Culture 2028 and UK City of Culture 2029 – timeliness of correspondence from the Department for Communities
Department of Communities	Freedom of Information Statistics
Department for Communities	Social Inclusion Strategies
Department for Communities	ROI Mother and Baby Institutions Payment
Department for Communities	Review of Arm’s Length Bodies



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7. Correspondence

Journal of Neighbourhood Renewal - Urban Regeneration and Neighbourhood Renewal Training Programme IJNR 2026 – Series of seminars

Agreed: That the Clerk seek clarity on whether colleagues from the Assembly’s Research and Information Service (RaISe) can be in attendance and provide a follow-up brief to Committee.

Advice NI - Updated information - Removal of the Two-Child Limit

Agreed: That this correspondence is added as an additional appendix to the Committee’s Report on the Legislative Consent Memorandum for the Universal Credit (Removal of Two Child Limit) Bill.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Summary of content
IMTAC	IMTAC launches recruitment process for new members 2026
Department for Communities	Child Maintenance Service Annual Report 2024-25 – Request for further information
Youth Assembly	Youth Assembly - Monthly Update
Minister for Communities	Written Statement - Warm Healthy Homes Strategy
Executive Information Service	Press Release - Minister for Communities Statement - Warm Healthy Homes Strategy
Minister for Communities	Logo for Commonwealth Games
Executive Information Service	Press Release - First offers of financial support issued to local clubs through Northern Ireland Football Fund
Chair of 2026 Angel Eyes	Charity Audit Thresholds - email to Minister for Communities



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Source	Summary of content
Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Individual	Final Notice of Continuing Breach of Statutory Duty and Denial of Remedy NI Housing Executive NIHE
Department of Finance	Written Ministerial Statement - Further Allocations 2025-26
Minister for Communities	Oral Statement - Benefit Fraud and Error Task and Finish Group Report

8. SL1: The Universal Credit and Employment Support Allowance (Rates of Allowances) (Amendments and Modifications) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Chairperson informed Members that this was the first SL1 proposal received since the new process was implemented to support improved Committee scrutiny of Delegated Legislation.

Pam Cameron left the meeting at 11.42 a.m.

The Chairperson then welcomed the following Departmental officials to the meeting:

Ms Helen Vaughan, Principal for Work and Health, Social Security Policy, Legislation and Decision Making, Department for Communities.

Ms Maureen Scullion, Deputy Principal for Work and Health, Social Security Policy, Legislation and Decision Making, Department for Communities.

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

- LCRWA reduction rate
- Uplifting Rates

The Chairperson then informed Members that:

- The Committee will next consider this Delegated Legislation on 12 March 2026;



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- The Committee team will issue a call for views on the proposal using the standard survey on Citizen Space following the meeting and the call for views will close at midnight on 25 February 2026, and;
- The SL1, the proposed draft statutory rule, and any relevant papers from the Department will be published on the Committee website and notified to relevant stakeholders, alongside the relevant deadline.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Citizen Space calls for views on the SL1 Proposal is published and a notification sent to relevant stakeholders.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content to reconsider the SL1 proposal on 12 March 2026 alongside a summary of Citizen Space survey responses.

Pam Cameron rejoined the meeting at 11.49 a.m.

9. Further Education Sector Retention and Disposal Schedule

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

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

10. Oral evidence from Cricket Ireland – The Work of Cricket Ireland

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance and their rescheduling of dates to accommodate the Committee. The Chairperson then welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Ms Elaine Nolan, Director of Strategy and Growth, Cricket Ireland

Mr Callum Atkinson, CEO, Northern Cricket Union

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

- Growth in Women and Young People participating in Cricket
- Redevelopment Funding Streams and Economic Benefits
- Infrastructure upgrades required to meet Cricket World Cup Standards
- Multi-sport facilities within Councils



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- Grant Funding for Summer Sports
- Commercial Sponsorship for the Cricket World Cup
- Support for new Cricket clubs
- Cost of facilities and astro turf mats
- Social impact and inclusion of sports
- SEN schools participation and Inclusive Sport Award
- Grassroots strategy and structure

The Chairperson proposed that any follow up actions be considered in relation to agenda items 10 and 11 together following the final briefing at agenda item 11.

11. Oral evidence from Ulster Hockey – Ulster Hockey Facilities Review

Maolíosa McHugh left the meeting at 12.26 p.m.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance and their rescheduling of dates to accommodate the Committee. The Chairperson then welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Mr Marc Scott, Chief Executive, Ulster Hockey

Dr Shirley McCay MBE OLY, Head of Talent and Pathways

Maolíosa McHugh rejoined the meeting at 12.28 p.m.

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

- Limited access to facilities, particularly school facilities
- Engagement with Education Authority, Local Councils and Schools
- Impact of lack of facilities on the growth of clubs
- Pitch Strategies and engagement in relation to these
- Multi sports pitches
- Potential for synergies with other clubs

Pam Cameron left the meeting at 12.50 p.m.

Cathy Mason left the meeting at 12.51 p.m.



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Cathy Mason rejoined the meeting at 12.54 p.m.

Following briefings at Agenda Items 10 and 11, the Chairperson requested the Committee consider any follow up actions as requested by Members.

The Chairperson proposed that, following the briefings from Cricket Ireland and Ulster Hockey, that the Committee follow-up on these and a number of recent queries in relation to funding for disabled sport, Deaflympics and the closure of the outdoor centre at Tollymore, by seeking an updated briefing from Sport NI.

Agreed: That an updated briefing from Sport NI is scheduled for a future meeting and specific topics for consideration are sent to Sport NI in advance of the briefing.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister for Communities requesting that he do whatever he can to help secure the All Island Funding portion required for NI to host the Cricket World Cup.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

13. Any other business

There was no other business.

14. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 19 February 2026, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.56 p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities