



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 11 September 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Building

Present:

- Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson) MLA
- Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
- Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA
- Ms Nicola Brogan (Deputy Chairperson) MLA
- Mr Mark Durkan MLA
- Mr Brian Kingston MLA
- Mr Maolfiosa McHugh MLA
- Ms Sian Mulholland MLA

Apologies:

- Mr Maurice Bradley MLA

In Attendance:

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



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

1. Declarations of interest

The following interests were declared:

Andy Allen – Charity trustee, trade union member, private sector landlord

Brian Kingston – Charity director

Colm Gildernew - Secretary, Brantry Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

Maolíosa McHugh – Chairperson of pre-school Naíscoil na Deirge

Kellie Armstrong – Member of deaf community

2. Apologies

Maurice Bradley MLA

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson welcomed Mark Durkan to the Committee and wished him well in his new role. The Chairperson also placed on record the Committee's thanks to Daniel Mc Crossan for his hard work on the Committee and sought Committee agreement to write to him accordingly.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to Daniel McCrossan thanking him for his work on the Committee.

The Chairperson informed Members that, during the summer, he had attended the Cricket Connects Camp at Stormont and spoke about the power of sport to



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bring people together, and about the importance of supporting opportunities for young people from all traditions and backgrounds. The Chairperson congratulated Cricket NI for hosting such a great event and for their promotion of the game as a good pastime. It was a well-attended, positive event. The Chairperson further informed Members that he has been invited to a further event in Malahide which he will attend.

The Chairperson congratulated the organisers of the Open Golf tournament in Portrush on what was a tremendous event.

The Chairperson informed Members that he understood that the Minister would be making a major announcement today at 11am, during the Committee meeting, in relation to the NI Football Fund.

The Chairperson voiced his displeasure at this as, stating that not only did the Minister not have the courtesy to formally inform the Committee, but scheduling the event to take place during the Committee meeting meant that Members can neither attend the announcement or follow it as it was being streamed live on Facebook.

The Chairperson further informed Members that he had raised a point of order in the House on Tuesday past in relation to major announcements being made to the media rather than on the floor of the House and the Speaker agreed that this should not be happening. The Chairperson proposed that the Committee formally writes to the Speaker to voice its disappointment and concern that Members are being bypassed when it comes to major announcements and to ask him to take action to address this.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Speaker to voice the Committee's disappointment and concern that Members are being bypassed when it comes to major announcements and to ask him to take action to address this.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister to voice the Committee's displeasure at the Minister bypassing the Committee when it comes to making major announcements and to ask that he takes action to address this. Brian Kingston wished it to be noted that he did not agree with this action.



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The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee had agreed to revisit its strategic planning priorities at a suitable meeting when each parliamentary session resumes. The Chairperson stated that he hoped this could take place before Halloween recess and proposed that the Committee formally requests a definitive list of primary and delegated legislation from the Department acknowledging that a volume of legislation for scrutiny may well curtail what the Committee can do in the remainder of this mandate.

Agreed: That the Department is asked to provide the Committee with a definitive list of primary and delegated legislation in order to inform the Committee's planning session.

4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the draft minutes from the meeting on 3 July 2025.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. Matters Arising

Department for Communities - Approval Request for The Transfer of Functions Order

Agreed: That the Committee is content to agree the transfer of functions.

NICVA - Offer to brief on the Partnership Agreement between Government and the Community and Voluntary Sector

Agreed: That a briefing session is arranged for a future meeting and that NICVA is asked, in advance of the session, to outline how all departments should be complying with the Partnership Agreement.

Solace NI - Reply to request for briefing on Anti-Poverty Strategy

Agreed: That a briefing session is arranged for a meeting in October, after the consultation deadline has passed.



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Agreed: That a Committee response to the strategy is drafted for consideration at a future meeting.

Department for Communities – Response to Assembly And Executive Review Committee (AERC) re Community Voluntary And Charity Stakeholder List

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask how it determined which organisations were included in the stakeholder list it provided to AERC and to ask how the Department ensures that all organisations are adequately represented.

Minister of Finance - Further detail regarding the Invest to Save Initiative

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister for Finance to express Committee views that any funding returned by Treasury should not focus solely on identifying fraud and error.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to express Committee views that any funding returned by Treasury should not focus solely on identifying fraud and error. The Committee would like to know if there any plans for funding to be allocated to all organisations, for further information on the business case and to ask for more information on the bidding process.

Department for Communities - Engagement with Social Inclusion Co-Design Groups

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department requesting further information on a definitive timetable for publication of all of the social inclusion strategies and to ask how the Department will ensure meaningful consultation in this mandate. The Committee would also like to know what steps are being taken now to ensure that action relating to the implementation of these strategies can be factored-into ongoing planning for forthcoming multi-year budgets.

Department for Communities - NICIF - Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund – response agreeing to brief the Committee after the launch of the call for applications

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask who the fund will be available to and requesting a specific date when the application process will open.



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Department for Communities - Fuel Poverty Strategy

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask what work is going on at present, between now and the mapping exercise taking place in the future, in relation to identifying and alleviating fuel poverty in Northern Ireland.

Department for Communities - Budget 2024-25 – Child Risk Assessment

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask if it is committed to publishing a full Child Risk Impact Assessment before forthcoming budgets are announced and to ask how the decision was made not to proceed with a Child Risk Impact Assessment given that the remit of the Department extends to so many areas where children could be affected. The Committee is concerned that the Age category in Section 75 has not been adequately considered.

Minister for Communities - Reply to Committee Chair - Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 Implementation

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask which aspects of these regulations will require legislation and to ask for a specific timetable as to when those regulations will be brought forward.

Department for Work and Pensions - Universal Credit Bill

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the UK government to ask how it will take into account the views of disabled people in Northern Ireland regarding this Bill.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister to ask that he updates the Committee in relation to ongoing discussions with the UK Government to ensure that the Northern Ireland reality and experience informs the Bill.

Department for Communities - Disability Payment Reform

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department emphasising Committee concerns about the lack of progress with delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Funding and to ask what it intends to do to ensure progress given the passage of time and recognising that organisations are now facing a cliff edge in terms of their funding.



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Response following Ministerial Briefing Session

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

- what steps it is taking to ensure fairness and transparency in the provision of financial support to music and arts organisations, ensuring that all musical traditions and none are included;
- how the Department is monitoring the funding allocated to ensure that it is distributed fairly.

The Committee feels that funding schemes and allocations for musical instruments and associated travel needs to be processed in a fair, equal and transparent manner and should not be allocated to any group or organisation which has an association with any activity which could cause offence or harm.

The Committee further requested information on how the availability of funding schemes for musical instruments and associated travel is disseminated to all groups and organisations.

Department for Communities – UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister for Finance to express Committee concern about the lack of progress on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the lack of local input, encouraging more engagement in order to ensure that it is progressed as quickly as possible.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Northern Ireland Office to request a briefing session on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Department for Communities - Departmental Briefing on June Monitoring Round - Asset Transfers Between Departments

Agreed: That the Department is asked to confirm whether this is NICS-wide land or if it is just the Department for Communities land.



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The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Belfast City Council	Planning Application Processing times
Department for Communities	NICIF - Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund – confirmation that eligibility criteria will be made available to Committee ahead of the Fund's launch
Department for Communities	Shaping Sustainable Places Consultation
The Executive Office	Delay in Publication of the Irish Language Strategy
Minister for Communities	North Down Cricket Club - Summer Camp Cancellation
Department for Communities	Reinstatement of Winter Fuel Payments
Department for Communities	Casement Park Funding
Department for Communities	SL1 - Social security - Claims and payments and electronic communications



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Department for Communities	SL1 - The Social Security (Habitual Residence + Past + Presence + temp absence amendment regs 2025)
Solace NI	Planning Application Targets The Environmental Protection – Single Use Vapes
Department for Communities	Memo To Members re Local Councils on Anti-Poverty Strategies

6. Correspondence

Individual - Sign language interpreting provision information

Agreed: That the individual is asked if they are content for this correspondence to be included as written evidence in the Committee report on the Sign Language Bill.

All Party Group on Reducing Harm Related to Gambling - Request to share scoping paper on gambling reform provided by the Department for Communities

Agreed: That the Department is contacted to ask if it is content that the paper is shared with the All Party Group on reducing Gambling-related Harm.

Individual - Letter of Complaint addressed to Minister re reduced REA benefit claim

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department seeking assurance that it is following the proper procedures in relation to this case and that the



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correspondent is advised that the Committee is not enabled to become involved in individual cases.

Dr Pádraig Ó Tiarnaigh Co-Chair of the Irish Language Strategy Co-Design Group - Delay in Irish Language Strategy - Co-design groups' request to brief the Committee regarding the Irish language Strategy

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

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask that officials also brief on the Irish Language Strategy at the same meeting as the briefing by the Irish Language Strategy Co-Design Group.

Individual - Lack of Accountability Regarding MA Interpreting at QUB

Agreed: That permission is sought from the individual to include the correspondence as written evidence in the Committee's Sign Language Bill report, to ask if they would like to provide oral evidence to the Committee and to forward a copy of the correspondence to the Committee for the Economy.

Department for Communities - Public Authorities (Fraud Error and Recovery) Bill

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask what the consequences would be if parity is broken with GB should the situation arise that the Northern Ireland Bill on this issue is slower to progress than the GB Bill and to ask how the Department is preparing for this possibility.

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs - Dilapidation Bill - call for views

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask how it considers it may be affected by the Bill given its remit in housing, homelessness and built heritage.

Department for Communities - Permanent Secretary retirement



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Permanent Secretary to thank him for his work with the Committee during his time in post and to wish him well in his retirement.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Business Office	Department of Justice Retention and Disposal Schedule
Diane Forsythe MLA	Private Member's Bill Consultation - Women and Girls in Sport in Northern Ireland
Department for Communities	Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme – Update
Arts Council for Northern Ireland	National Youth Choir of NI (Removal of Funding) - reply to Steve Aiken MLA
Cricket Ireland	Invitation for Chair to Ireland v England T20 International – Malahide, September 2025
Department for Communities	Child Maintenance: Accelerating Enforcement (Administrative Liability Orders) - Public consultation
Department for Communities	Code Of Practice for Licensed Premises and Registered Clubs
Strategic Investment Board	Investing Activity Report - August 2025
Business Office	Department for Infrastructure - Retention and Disposal Schedule
Department for Communities	Invite to NIMC AGM and Forum



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Source	Summary of content
Imtac	Imtac published Work Programme for 2025/2026
Ulster University - Future Island	Invitation: Launch of The Imaginarium Exhibition – Youth Visions for a Sustainable Future
Ulster Rugby	Ulster Rugby Foundation - Impact Report
Individual	Copy of correspondence to Minister for Communities regarding installation of individual metered gas boiler/heaters
Department for Communities	Draft Disability and Work Strategy
Pivotal	18 months of the Northern Ireland Executive report
Department for Communities	Charities Bill to amend the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008



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The Committee noted the following items of tabled correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Department for Communities	Press Release: 100k funding for the Travel Awards for Bands Programme
Department for Communities	Press Release: Completion of the Portrush Urban Development Grant Scheme
Department for Communities	Press Release: Historic Environment Division celebrate the success of their Family Fun Day at Dundrum Castle
Department for Communities	Press Release: Minister Lyons announces £3.3m for Housing Rights
Department for Communities	Press Release: Ministers announce public consultation launch on £150m proposals for new approach to regeneration delivery
Department for Communities	Press Release: Publication of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme Purpose and Framework
Department for Communities	Press Release: Register of Parks, Gardens and Demesnes of Special Historic Interest
Daniel McCrossan MLA	Letter of thanks to Chair and Members of the Communities Committee

7. SL1 - The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 2) Regulations (NI) 2025

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed rule will allow changes to provide a legal basis for the continued payment of benefits (disability and



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carer benefits) for a small cohort of claimants not explicitly covered by the EU Withdrawal Agreement.

Agreed: That the Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

8. **SL1 - The Housing Benefit (Habitual Residence) (Amendment) Regulations 2025**

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed rule would allow individuals claiming Housing Benefit to be treated as satisfying the Habitual Residence Test where they are already receiving Universal Credit.

Agreed: That the Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

9. **SL1 - The Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Regulations (NI) 2025**

The Chairperson informed Members that on 9 June 2025, Treasury announced that the Winter Fuel Payment was being reinstated for all pensioners from Winter 2025/26. The funding accompanying this policy change extends to Northern Ireland.

A statutory rule has been made to implement these Winter Fuel Payment changes which Committee will consider at next week's meeting. The legislation implements the policy decision to change the entitlement conditions for payment of a Winter Fuel Payment. The Department has decided, in line with the Department for Work and Pensions, to remake the regulations rather than amend them as that is the clearest way to make the necessary changes to the legislation.

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Hayley Ward – Policy Lead on Winter Fuel Payment

Nicola Boyle – Deputy Principal on Winter Fuel Payment

Agreed: That the Departmental officials will provide the Committee with information on the number of people this proposal might affect in border areas.



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Agreed: That the Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

10. SR 2025/122 - The Social Security (Income and Capital Disregards) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (NI) 2025

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/122 - The Social Security (Income and Capital Disregards) (Amendment No. 2) 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 request a full list of existing capital disregards.

11. SR 2025/127 - The Social Security (Claims And Payments) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2025

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/127 - The Social Security (Claims And Payments) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2025 and has no objection to the Rule subject to the report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

12. SR 2025/129 - The Social Security (Electronic Communications) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2025

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/129 - The Social Security (Electronic Communications) (Amendment) Order (NI) 2025 and has no objection to the Rule subject to the report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

13. SR 2025/136 - The Social Security (Habitual Residence, Past Presence and Temporary Absence) (Amendment) Regulations (NI)

That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/136 - The Social Security (Habitual Residence, Past Presence and Temporary Absence) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2025 and has no objection to the Rule subject to the report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

15. Local Government Staff Commission - Retention and Disposal Schedule



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

16. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson informed Members that there will be an informal information session with Departmental officials on the Pensions Schemes Bill at 12.30 p.m. on Tuesday 16 September.

The Chairperson informed Members that the committee team is organising two events in relation to the Sign Language Bill. The events will mark the end of evidence gathering before the Committee goes into deliberations after the October recess.

The Chairperson proposed that, with the outstanding briefing requests on the forward work programme and with any new requests that are received, individual members could consider identifying any particular areas of interest and holding a Zoom meeting with the group, inviting other Members to attend, and that a report of the meeting could subsequently be brought back for Committee consideration and action.

Agreed: That the Committee is content with this approach.

17. Any other business

There was no other business.

18. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 18 September 2025, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11.18 a.m.



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Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities