



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 14 May 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Cathy Mason MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA (via Zoom)
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)
Mr Neal Flanagan (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:

Maolíosa McHugh – Charity Trustee of Naíscoil na Deirge. Member of Conradh na Gaeilge, Member of the GAA

Cathy Mason – Member of the GAA

Maurice Bradley – Member of Harry Gregg Foundation

2. Apologies

There were no apologies.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that he had met with the Minister, the Permanent Secretary and Department officials on Monday 11 May regarding the Committee's response to the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Minister advised that the next version of the strategy would be updated to include consultation response feedback. Members had been provided with a summary of the meeting.

The Chairperson further informed Members that he had spoken, as Chairperson, in relation to the Draft Budget at the plenary debate on Monday afternoon.

Finally, the Chairperson informed Members that he had been invited, as Chairperson, to deliver the opening remarks at the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS) event scheduled for Wednesday 17 June in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings. The seminar addresses themes relevant to the Committee's remit.



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Agreed: That Members are content that the Chairperson attends the KESS event and provides the opening remarks.

4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the meeting on 7 May 2026.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. SL1 The Registered Rents (Increase) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Chairperson reminded Members that the initial correspondence in relation to this SL1 was received on 2 April, during the Easter recess and the accompanying Statutory Rule and Explanatory Memorandum were received on 8 April; the Rule was therefore for consideration via the new process for delegated legislation.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee had considered this proposal at the meeting on 23 April when Members agreed to:

- extend the four week consideration period (due to recess being discounted from the 4 week period)
- publish the Department's papers
- issue a call for evidence - with a closing date of 7 May
- reconsider the SL1 together with any responses from the call for evidence

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

6. Retention and Disposal Schedule – The Executive Office

The Chairperson informed Members that this schedule was considered by the Committee for The Executive Office at its meeting on 13 May when Members indicated that they would defer their decision with regard to it for a further week, pending a response from PRONI to a query.



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Agreed: That the Committee is content to defer a decision in relation to the schedule for a week.

The Chairperson informed Members that, as the Minister and officials were not yet in place, it was his intention to move to agenda item 10, Matters Arising.

Agreed: That the Committee bring forward agenda item 10, Matters Arising.

7. Matters Arising

Head of the Civil Service - Equality Impact Assessments

Agreed: That the response is forwarded to Law Centre NI, Equality Commission and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People for their written views on the substance of the response.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to The Executive Office to ask what consideration is being given to ensuring that Equality Impact Assessment reporting includes detail on the positive actions taken to address identified inequalities.

Minister for Health - Help with Health Costs Scheme – Information provided to Service Providers

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for Communities to ask how many times those in receipt of benefits have been notified of the Help With Health Costs application process.

Department for Communities - Update on the Timms Review of Personal Independence Payment

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for Communities to raise Committee concerns that the voice of disabled people locally is not being heard in this review, to ask how the Department is reaching out to PIP recipients to ensure workshops are accessible and to ask how the Department is removing barriers to participation in the consultation process.

As the Minister and Officials were now in place, the Chairperson informed Members that the meeting would now move to the Ministerial briefing session.



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8. Northern Ireland Place-Name Project and Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy: Oral briefing from the Minister for Communities

The Chairperson welcomed Gordon Lyons MLA, Minister for Communities, to the meeting along with the following Departmental officials:

Grainia Long, Permanent Secretary

Iain Greenway, Deputy Secretary, Engaged Communities Group

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

- The Irish Language Strategy, delay and ongoing legal proceedings
- Funding arrangements for the NI Place-Name Project and responsibility for baseline funding
- The role of the Department of Finance in the project
- Staffing and personnel continuity within the project team at Queen's University Belfast
- The Department for the Economy's intervention and engagement between Departments
- Accessibility of the Place-Name Project database and interim arrangements for translation services
- Gaps in the Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy identified through consultation
- Timeline for finalisation of the Anti-Poverty Strategy and delivery of a revised draft
- Action plans, targets and indicators for the Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Collaboration with local government on the Anti-Poverty Strategy
- The Childcare Strategy, Sure Start provision and impact on families in poverty
- Fuel poverty and the Warm Healthy Homes Fund
- In-work poverty and the Rates Support Grant



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9. Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy consultation report: Oral briefing from Equality Coalition, Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network and the Anti-Poverty Strategy Group

The Chairperson welcomed the following representatives to the meeting:

Daniel Holder, Director, Committee on the Administration of Justice and, Co-convenor, Equality Coalition

Kellie Turtle, Member, Anti-Poverty Strategy Group

Rebecca Bor, Development Coordinator, Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network

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

- The role and function of a proposed independent anti-poverty commission
- Engagement between civil society organisations and the Department on the strategy to date
- Methodology changes to poverty measurement and comparability of statistics
- The impact of delays in publishing the strategy on people experiencing poverty
- Measurable targets, including proposals for a 50% reduction in child poverty
- The need for costed policy interventions, including a child payment and universal free school meals
- An anti-poverty lens on Executive policy and budgetary decisions

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister for Communities urging that a significantly revised Anti-Poverty Strategy is brought forward as quickly as possible, preferably before the summer recess, and requesting that the Department engages with the Anti-Poverty Coalition and relevant civil society organisations in the development of targets. The Committee further indicated its



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willingness to meet during the summer recess, if necessary, to consider a revised strategy and avoid further delay.

Agreed: That the letter also ask what steps the Minister is taking to ensure that all Executive Departments factor-in funding for Anti-Poverty Strategy measures as a priority within multi-year budgets.

Sian Mulholland left the meeting at 12.02 p.m.

Pam Cameron raised the issue of the earlier Ministerial briefing session on the Place-Name Project and proposed that the Committee write to the Minister for Communities to apologise for the misrepresentation of his position by some Members of the Committee in relation to the Place-Name Project, in light of the information which had been presented to the Committee.

The Chairperson put the question on the proposal.

The Committee divided: Ayes 2; Noes 3; Abstain 3.

AYES

Pam Cameron
Maurice Bradley

NOES

Colm Gildernew
Cathy Mason
Maolíosá McHugh

ABSTAIN

Andy Allen
Mark Durkan
Kellie Armstrong

The proposal was not carried.

The meeting was suspended at 12.07 pm.

Colm Gildernew left the meeting at 12.07 p.m.



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The meeting restarted at 12.14 p.m. with Cathy Mason, Deputy Chairperson, in the Chair and the following Members present:

Kellie Armstrong, Andy Allen, Maolíosa McHugh, Mark Durkan, Sian Mulholland

Maurice Bradley rejoined the meeting at 12.16 p.m.

10. Oral briefing from Sport NI

The Deputy Chairperson welcomed the following representatives to the meeting:

Richard Archibald, Interim CEO, Sport NI

Gavin Boyd, Chair, Sport NI

Brian McKimm, Interim COO, Sport NI

Rebecca Hope, Interim Director of Sport, Sport NI

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

- Deaflympics provision and engagement with deaf sports organisations
- Regional balance across sports funding and investment
- Grassroots sport participation and support for underrepresented groups
- The future of Tollymore National Outdoor Centre and the Fathom review
- The financial sustainability of the operating model at Tollymore National Outdoor Centre
- Governance and performance issues
- Disability sport, inclusive participation and mainstreaming within governing bodies

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



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- a closed session briefing at a future meeting on Sport NI governance and performance issues
- a breakdown of the running costs of the Tollymore National Outdoor Centre, including the revenue position
- an extension of the consultation to 12 weeks to end in autumn, rather than summer
- information on the range of existing activities at, and diversification plans and potential options for, the Tollymore National Outdoor Centre
- a copy of risk management reports provided to the Sport NI Board in relation to the Tollymore National Outdoor Centre

Andy Allen left the meeting at 12.54 p.m.

11. Matters Arising

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that the Committee now needed to consider the remainder of Matters Arising.

Department for Communities - Active Ageing Strategy

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask that the Committee is provided with a copy of the other departments' response on actions they could take forward in support of the Strategy and its new Action Plan.

Department for Communities - Financial Issues faced by Supporting People

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for an update on its People and Place Review.

NIHE - Social Housing Development Programme

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for Communities and the Department for Infrastructure to ask why, given the constraints on the development of new social housing arising from closed water catchment areas, a single map correlating housing need with water connectivity constraints has not been produced.

Inspire Wellbeing - Young People and Supported Housing



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Agreed: That Inspire Wellbeing are invited to brief the Committee informally, at a future date.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister for Health to ask what evidence or incidents prompted the Department's consideration of the introduction of new regulatory arrangements for supported accommodation for young people.

Committee for Communities - Draft reply to Committee for Education - Holiday Hunger Bill

Agreed: That the reply is issued to the Committee for Education.

Committee for Communities - Draft response to Committee for Education - Irish Medium Education Bill

Agreed: That the response is not issued and that a letter is sent to the Education Authority to ask about ongoing work it is undertaking on its Irish language Strategy.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
USEL - Ulster Supported Employment Limited	Employment Support Scheme
Department for Communities	2028 Welfare Mitigations Cliff Edge
Department for Communities	SWEP - Severe Weather Emergency Protocol

12. Correspondence

Committee for Economy Call for Evidence - Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill and Committee for Economy Call for Evidence - Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that the Committee for the Economy has commenced Committee Stage of both Bills and requested views from statutory committees in relation to both Bills.

Agreed: That the Committee is content for the Committee team to review the Bills for intersection with DfC areas of responsibility and to draft a Committee response for consideration, if appropriate.



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Mark Durkan left the meeting at 1.04 p.m.

Action for Children - Request to host Committee for Communities during Homelessness Week 2026

Agreed: That a reply is sent to inform Action for Children that the Committee agreed to this request.

Committee for The Executive Office - Proposals to disregard compensation payments - Mother and Baby

Agreed: That a reply is sent to inform the Committee for The Executive Office that it will be kept up to date on progress on this issue.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Summary of content
Department for Communities PRONI	USA NI 250 Invitation – Ulster American Treasures - The Migration Story
Assembly Executive and Review Committee	Crosscutting invite to Department for Communities
Department for Communities	House Sales Scheme - Public Consultation
Committee for Finance	Management of the Vote on Account as agreed in the Budget Act NI

The Committee noted the following items of tabled correspondence:



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Source	Summary of content
Assembly Business Office	Department for Communities Annual Report on Social Fund 2023-24
Department for Communities	Launch of the Successful Legacy Appeals Compensation Scheme
Executive Information Service	Press Release Lyons visits Donaghadee sports clubs to celebrate participation, inclusion and investment
Live Music Now	Invitation - Expanding Access to Music for Autistic Learners in Northern Ireland
Executive Information Service	Press Release Lyons confirms Latharna House demolition

13. Forward Work Programme

The Deputy Chairperson drew Members' attention to next week's concurrent meeting and the logistics of the meeting. She advised that both Committees will require a quorum and it will be co-Chaired with alternating Committee Members asking questions. The Committee will then continue its own meeting in The Senate, immediately following the concurrent meeting.

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

14. Any other business

There was no other business.

15. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 21 May 2026, in The Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Deputy Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.07 p.m.



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Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities