



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 22 May 2025

Meeting Location: Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI)

Present: Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson) MLA
Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
Ms Sian Mulholland MLA
Mr Brian Kingston MLA
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA

In Attendance: Mr James Gilsenan (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Chris McAfee (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Katie Egan (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in public session at 10.06a.m.

1. Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.



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2. Apologies

Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA

Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA

Ms Nicola Brogan (Deputy Chairperson) MLA

Mr Maurice Bradley MLA

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson welcomed three new members of Commission staff who will be working to develop and evolve the Assembly's legislative scrutiny work.

The Chairperson noted that the Anti-Poverty Strategy was approved by the Executive on 15 May but the committee has no date for a briefing from the Department. Committee staff are aware of a further departmental response on committee queries on social inclusion strategies. The Chairperson informed members that the committee would return to the issue at the next meeting.

The Chairperson also noted the Prime Ministers indication at Question Time on 21 May that more pensioners would qualify for winter fuel payments going forward. He further welcomed the Ministers call for 'the return of universal winter fuel payments. The committee has been concerned about benefit reductions and this is an issue that members will keep a watching brief on.

The Chairperson informed members that today's meeting was very much focused on the work of PRONI and that following the briefing from RaISe there would be a tour of the building and members would have the opportunity to learn more about PRONI's statutory role in quality assuring the contents of Retention and Disposal Schedules and laying them before the Assembly.

Due to a lack of quorum, the Committee agreed to change the running order of the meeting.



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7. Assembly Research and Information Service (RalSe) Briefing on parliamentary oversight of retention and disposal schedules

The Chairperson welcomed the following Assembly official to the meeting:

Karen McCallion – Assembly Researcher

Daniel McCrossan joined the meeting at 10.23a.m.

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

- The benefits of a parliamentary oversight process
- The recent changes in the process
- The committee process in considering retention and disposal schedules
- Whether the public has a role in decisions around retention and disposal schedules
- GDPR changes and the impact on retention and disposal schedules
- Digitisation of documents
- The release of public documents

4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the meeting on 15 May 2025.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. Matters Arising

DfC - Budget 2024-25 and Budget 2025-8 Process

Agreed: That the Clerk write to the Clerk for the Committee for Finance seeking information regarding information pertaining to regional balance in recruitment and steps being to increase NICS recruitment as the rate of vacancies in DfC is still very high.



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The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Belfast City Council	Student Housing
Charity Commission	Use of reserves
Department for Communities (DfC)	Briefing by Co-Ownership
DfC	Community Asset Transfer
DfC	Impact of Housing Association grant levels on delivery of housing targets
DfC	Independent review of the Liquor Licensing System
DfC	Pivotal proposals on housing
DfC	Voluntary and Community Support Payment
DfC	Funding for America 250 Celebrations
Arts Council of Northern Ireland	2025/26 Annual Funding Programme – Budget Confirmation

Belfast City Council - Anti-Poverty Strategy

Agreed: That a follow up email is sent to the councils that have yet to respond on this issue.



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The Committee noted the following tabled items:

Source	Subject Matter
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council	Anti-Poverty Strategy
Armagh Banbridge Craigavon Council	Anti-Poverty Strategy
Department for Communities	Northern Ireland Football Fund
Department for Communities	The Executive Office query regarding the Budget for 25-26 with reference to Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
Department for Communities	Disability Action Plan 2025-2030
Department for Communities	Recent media report on the UK Government's plans regarding disability benefits
Department for Communities	Fees generated by Department for Communities
Department for Communities	Revised Legislative Consent Motion – Employment Rights Bill
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	Response to Planning Applications Timeframe
Department for Communities	Irish Language Strategy and the Ulster Scots Language and Culture Strategy
Department for Communities	Briefing by National Lottery
Department for Communities	Climate Change Action Plan
Department for Communities	Universal Credit Contingency Fund



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Source	Subject Matter
Arts Council of Northern Ireland	2025/26 Annual Funding Programme – Budget Confirmation

6. Correspondence

Department for Communities - Budget 2024-25 Equality Impact Assessment – final decisions report.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the department to ask that it considers carrying out impact assessments on the risk to children in relation to budget decisions.

Chartered Institute of Housing - request for roundtable discussion and enquiry regarding off-site Committee events

Agreed: That committee staff will email members to ask for potential topics for a roundtable discussion.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Pivotal	New Pivotal report - Achieving greater integration in Northern Ireland: young people's voices.
Examiner of Statutory Rules	Thirty-ninth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.



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The Committee noted the following items of tabled correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Committee for Assembly and Executive Review (AERC)	Scrutiny of Cross-cutting Executive Strategies
Arts and Humanities Research Council - Creative Communities	Press release: Progress update from Arts and Humanities Research Council - Creative Communities who briefed the Committee for Communities on 20 Feb 2025

7. Forward Work Programme

Andy Allen noted an omission on the forward work programme.

8. Any other business

There was no other business.

9. Date, time and location of the next meeting

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

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 10.54a.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities