Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 12 November 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:
Mr Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Nicola Brogan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA (via Zoom)
Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA
Mr Paul Boggs MLA
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mrs Pam Cameron MLA
Mrs Sian Mulholland MLA

In Attendance:
Mrs Emer Boyle (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Victoria Bourquin (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Chris McAfee (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Patrice Morris (Senior Assistant Clerk)

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

Northern Ireland Assembly

1. Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared:

Colm Gildernew - Private Sector Landlord, Member's Bill on mitigating the threat of homelessness, Charity Trustee, Attended local RAIN events.

Andy Allen – Charity Trustee, Private Sector Landlord, Trade Union Member, former Member of the Armed Forces.

Kellie Armstrong – Associate of Chartered Institute of Housing.

Pam Cameron – Former Junior Minister with sight of Executive and cross-departmental policy, strategy and legislation, family member is a member of the Arts Council, director of a production company.

2. Apologies

Mr Mark Durkan MLA

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson thanked Members for attending an additional formal Committee meeting on Wednesday 11 November to facilitate the continuation of Committee deliberations and the informal Clause by Clause on the Charities (Amendment) Bill, and Committee Deliberations on the Housing (Amendment) Bill.

The Chairperson then advised Members that the following was agreed in relation to the Charities (Amendment) Bill:

- That the Bill clerk is asked to finalise an amendment to Clause 13 in relation to a timeframe for commencement and biennial reporting on Bill implementation.

The Chairperson then advised Members that the following was agreed in relation to the Housing (Amendment) Bill:

- that the Bill Clerk would ***not be*** asked to draft any amendments for Committee consideration; and

- that the Committee team should expedite responses from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Supporting People and the Simon Community in relation to a range of additional considerations which were raised during Bill scrutiny and in relation to which Committee should make comment, in the Committee's report on the Bill.

4. Draft Minutes

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

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

The Chairperson brought forward Agenda Item 8 - SR 2026/177 The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

5. SR 2026/177 The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Chairperson reminded Members that following consideration of the SL1 at the Committee Meeting on 8 October 2026, when the Committee had agreed that it was content for the Department to proceed to make the rule, in line with new scrutiny process for delegated legislation.

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has SR 2026/177 The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and has no objection to the rule subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

The Chairperson brought forward Agenda Item 9 - SR 2026/181 The Social Security (Income and Capital Disregards) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

6. SR 2026/181 The Social Security (Income and Capital Disregards) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Chairperson reminded Members that following consideration of the SL1 at the Committee Meetings on 24 September and 8 October 2026, when the Committee had agreed that it was content for the Department to proceed to make the rule, in line with new scrutiny process for delegated legislation.

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2026/181 The Social Security (Income and Capital Disregards) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and has no objection to the rule subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

The Chairperson brought forward Agenda Item 10 - SR 2026/182 The Social Fund (Child Funeral Fund) (No. 2) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026.

7. SR 2026/182 The Social Fund (Child Funeral Fund) (No. 2) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Chairperson reminded Members that following consideration of the SL1 at the Committee Meetings on 17 September and 8 October 2026, when the Committee had agreed that it was content for the Department to proceed to make the rule, in line with new scrutiny process for delegated legislation.

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2026/182 The Social Fund (Child Funeral Fund) (No. 2) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and has no objection to the rule subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

The Chairperson brought forward Agenda Item 11 – Matters Arising.

8. Matters Arising

The Committee noted the following Matters:

Source	Subject Matter
Department for Communities	Home Heating Oil Scheme – Issues with claims
Newry Mourne and Down Council	Local Development Plans

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	Local Development Plans
AERA Committee	Reply to Committee for Communities RAIN correspondence
Department for Communities	Briefing to Committee for Communities - Every House Matters: a new approach to tackling social housing tenancy fraud and misuse – Consultation
Committee for Infrastructure	Reply to Committee for Communities re RAIN correspondence

The Chairperson brought forward Agenda Item 12 – Correspondence.

9. Correspondence

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

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to request a briefing on the Timms review once it has been published and that the Department is asked to set out the specific Northern Ireland issues which have been raised with DWP and how those issues have contributed to the review. Further, to ask the Department what engagement and opportunities for contribution disabled groups in Northern Ireland have had in relation to the Timms Review.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Steering Group overseeing the Disability Strategy seeking an update on how the group has ensured that the views of disabled people here have been fed into the Timms Review.

Department for Communities - Grosvenor Road and Sandy Row Public Realm Scheme – Public Consultation

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to request specific Departmental expenditure to date and any future work planned in relation to the Public Realm Schemes.

Executive Information Service - Press Release - Lyons launches new policy framework to strengthen voluntary and community sector

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to request more detailed information and updates on the recently launched policy framework to strengthen the voluntary and community sector.

Committee for the Executive Office - Age Discrimination (Goods, Facilities and Services) Bill – Call for Evidence

Agreed: That the Committee is content for the secretariat to review the Bill for intersection with Department for Communities' area of responsibility and draft a Committee response for consideration, if appropriate.

Department for Communities - Local Government Legislative Framework – Call for Evidence

Agreed: That a timely follow-up in relation to this issue is included in the Committee's Legacy Report.

Homeless Connect - Urgent investment in homelessness services: correspondence to Executive Ministers

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister for Communities to ask what engagement he has had with Homeless Connect in relation to the issues raised within the correspondence.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Assembly Business Office	Addendum to the Probation Board for Northern Ireland Retention and Disposal Schedule
AHRC Creative Communities	Invite to online event - Co-Lab Policy Networks Summit
Department for Communities	DWP Call for Evidence on State Pension Deferral – Call for Evidence open until 1 December 2026

Source	Summary of content
NI Fiscal Council	Notification of publication of report - Retention and use of Income
Executive Information Service	Press Release - Lyons launches first international exhibition in PRONI: Voices Across the Atlantic
Committee for Finance	Visual Arts Ireland report - The Arts our role in the future
Homeless Connect	Homelessness Awareness Week 2026
Department for Communities	Active Ageing Strategy Action Plan
Executive Information Service	Press Release - Lyons launches new campaign to encourage people to Make the Call
Assembly Business Office	Truth Recovery Independent Panel Retention and Disposal Schedule
Executive Information Service	Lyons opens public consultation on Active Ageing Strategy Action Plan
Department for Communities	Arts Consultation to open 12 Nov 2026

The Chairperson reverted to Agenda Item 5 – Minister for Communities: Quarterly Update.

10. Minister for Communities: Quarterly update

The Chairperson welcomed Minister Gordon Lyons to the meeting along with the following officials:

Grainia Long, Permanent Secretary

Paul Price, Deputy Secretary, Housing Sustainability Group

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 10.18 a.m.

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

- Pensions Schemes Bill – Accelerated Passage
- Timeline for purchase of 600 social homes
- Musical Instruments Funding
- The Housing (Anti-Social Behaviour) Bill
- Proposals awaiting Executive Office Approval
- Conversion Practices
- Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy timeline
- Irish Language Strategy
- Department Budget
- Libraries Consultation
- Removal of Books from Libraries
- Draft Disability Strategy timeline
- Social Housing need and lack of Infrastructure
- Support for Armed Forces and Armed Forces Bill
- Housing Association Grant
- SHDP Timeline and Target
- SWEP Protocol Engagement
- Revitalisation of social homes
- Future of Arts Policy

Sian Mulholland left the meeting at 11.28 a.m.

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

- Further detail on the rationale for Accelerated Passage for the Pensions (Schemes) Bill including the commencement period and whether timing could negatively impact pension holders in Northern Ireland
- LCM – Armed Forces Bill
- Whether Accelerated Passage is being considered for the Housing (ASB) Bill
- Social Housing and a long-term strategy for investment by geographic location

- Impact of reduced staffing on benefits including average time for UC and PIP

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Executive Office to request information on the number of papers and subject matter of the papers currently awaiting agreement in order to be placed on an agenda for an Executive meeting.

The Chairperson proposed a short suspension.

The meeting suspended at 11.31 a.m.

The meeting resumed in public session at 11.36 a.m. with the following Members present: Colm Gildernew, Nicola Brogan, Andy Allen, Kellie Armstrong, Paul Boggs, Pam Cameron and Sian Mulholland.

The Chairperson reverted to Agenda Item 6 – Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill: Oral evidence from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

11. Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill: Oral evidence from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Alyson Kilpatrick, Chief Commissioner, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

David Russell, Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Dr Colin Caughey, Director of Policy (Advice to Government, Research, Investigations and International Treaties), Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Maurice Bradley rejoined the meeting at 11.44 a.m.

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

- Changes to definitions
- Clause 7 Safeguards and Protections
- Parental responsibilities
- Consent
- Scientific evidence and legal opinion
- Criminal conduct
- Psychological harm threshold
- Right to fair trial
- State duties to protect individuals from harm
- Individual responsibility regarding knowledge of criminal law
- Clause 4 definition of measures
- Scope of legal ban

Andy Allen left the meeting at 12.21 p.m.

The Chairperson advised that any further actions would be considered alongside the following Agenda Item.

The Chairperson reverted to Agenda Item 7 – Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill: Oral evidence from PSNI and Public Prosecution Service.

12. Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill: Oral evidence from PSNI and Public Prosecution Service

The Chairperson advised Members that the relevant PSNI officials due to attend contacted the Committee team on 10 November 2026 that they would require further time in order to provide Committee with a *"full and considered view"* on the Bill. The Chairperson further advised Members that that a further slot will be identified and offered to PSNI and that timings for Agenda Item 7 had been adjusted.

The Chairperson then welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Michael Agnew, Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions, Public Prosecution Service

Cathy McGalie, Principal Public Prosecutor, Policy and Information Unit, Public Prosecution Service

Andy Allen rejoined the meeting at 12.45 p.m.

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

- Evidential burden versus legal burden approach
- Clause 6 wording and definition
- Clause 4 interpretation
- Gap in current Law regarding Conversion Therapy
- Evidence of psychological harm and abuse

Maurice Bradley left the meeting at 12.57 p.m.

Agreed: That legal advice is sought in relation to the specific legal implications associated with the Bill, as raised by Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and Public Prosecution Service.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Bill Sponsor seeking a response to the Bill Matters as raised by Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and Public Prosecution Service.

Agreed: That further Members' questions to Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and Public Prosecution Service are forwarded to the Committee (via the Clerk) for Committee consideration and review, before submission to the relevant organisations on behalf of the Committee.

13. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a Clerk's Memo in relation to future planning of oral evidence sessions on the Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill for Committee scrutiny at Committee Stage, following previous Committee agreement to consider requests received to provide evidence on the Bill.

Agreed: That an additional meeting is scheduled for 25 November 2026 to facilitate oral briefings from Presbyterian Church in Ireland and Six:Eight Church and that the Faith/Humanist Panel is split into two sessions.

Agreed: That Liberty NI is added to a Panel to provide oral evidence to the Committee in relation to the Bill.

Agreed: That any further evidence provided to the Committee should be in writing only, with the Committee reserving the right to request an oral briefing should it consider that the witness has any new or important information relevant to Committee scrutiny of the Bill.

The Chairperson then advised Members that "*Trauma Informed Practice Training*" to assist Members and staff when hearing oral evidence had been scheduled for Wednesday 18 November.

Kellie Armstrong advised that she would be an apology for scheduled meetings on 18 and 19 November 2026.

The Committee then 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 19 October 2026, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.28 p.m.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities