



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 11 April 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

- Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson) MLA
- Ms Ciara Ferguson (Deputy Chairperson) MLA
- Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA
- Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
- Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
- Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
- Ms Sian Mulholland MLA
- Mr Brian Kingston MLA
- Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance:

- Ms Emer Boyle (Assembly Clerk)
- Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Clerk)
- Mr Chris McAfee (Clerical Supervisor)
- Mrs Tracey McCaughey (Clerical Officer)



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

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

Daniel McCrossan joined the meeting at 10.02a.m.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a letter from Housing Rights in relation to a forthcoming visit in May to N.I by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing.

Agreed: That the Committee holds a short meeting with the Special Rapporteur on Tuesday 14 May followed by an informal lunch.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a letter from the Minister outlining his intention to introduce a Bill on Pensions – Extension of Automatic Enrolment.

Agreed: That a Departmental briefing on the Bill is requested for a future meeting.

3. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the draft minutes from the meeting on 21 March 2024.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes as drafted.

4. Matters Arising

Members noted a Ministerial response to Committee queries on the LCM on Pensions – Special Rules for End of Life Bill 2024.

Members noted a reply from the Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL) to Committee queries on social return on investment.

Members noted a Departmental reply to Committee queries arising from the briefing by the Deputy Secretary of Engaged Communities Group.

Members noted a Departmental reply to Committee queries on correcting errors to Assembly Written Questions.

Members noted a Departmental reply to Committee queries on reform of gambling legislation.

5. Correspondence

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a correspondence memo with proposed actions detailed.

Agreed: That representatives from the Postcode Lottery are invited to brief the Committee at a future meeting.



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Agreed: That representatives from NICVA are invited to brief the Committee at a future meeting.

Agreed: That representatives from NICMA are invited to brief the Committee at a future meeting.

Agreed: That a copy of the Equality Commission's paper on the Implications of Article 2(1) of the Windsor Framework is forwarded to the Department to seek an update on any work that is being undertaken in relation to plans for transposition into NI law in line with June 2026 timeline outlined in the correspondence.

Agreed: That Sport NI representatives are invited to brief the Committee at a future meeting.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister for Infrastructure seeking an update on what is being done to address the wastewater challenges in N.I. and a view on the call from the Construction Employers Federation made in the press release.

The Chairperson asked Members if they were content to move consideration of correspondence to after briefings and further towards the end of Committee meetings starting from the meeting on 18 April. Members indicated they were content with this suggestion.

6. Briefing by Neighbourhood Renewal Forum

Ciara Ferguson declared an interest as a previous Neighbourhood Renewal Chairperson.

Brian Kingston declared an interest as a Director of Greater Shankill Partnership.

The following representatives joined the meeting:



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Charles Lamberton, Strategy Manager, Triax

Seana Boyle NR Co-ordinator Crumlin Ardoyne

Stevie Johnson, Neighbourhood Renewal Co-ordinator, Inner East Belfast

Raymond Jackson, CEO - Confederation of Community Groups Newry

Alison Wallace, Waterside Neighbourhood Partnership

A question and answer session with Members followed and the main topics of the discussion were the sustainability of the sector, retention and recruitment of staff, funding cuts, the real living wage and relationships with the Department for Communities.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for briefing the Committee.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department asking for a written update on the policy and legislative framework for neighbourhood renewal and whether any consideration has been given to placing this on a statutory footing.

7. Briefing by NI Federation of Housing Associations

The following representative joined the meeting:

Seamus Leheny, Chief Executive

A question and answer session with Members followed and the main topics of the discussion were the Supporting People programme, recruitment and retention of staff, multi-year budgets, issues with infrastructure in building new homes, retrofitting houses, the allocation of points for social housing and the need for housing to be a stand-alone outcome in the Programme for Government.

The Chairperson thanked the representative for briefing the Committee.



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Agreed: That the NI Federation of Housing Associations provides the Committee with figures on the numbers of voluntary house sales by housing associations in 2023 and the number of housing association planning applications rejected to objections by NI Water.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Executive Office and the Minister for Communities to ask if consideration is being given to making housing a stand-alone outcome in the Programme for Government.

The Chairperson suspended the meeting at 11.33a.m.

The meeting restarted at 11.38a.m. with all Members present.

8. Briefing by Homeless Connect

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Nicola McCrudden, Chief Executive Officer

Mark Baillie, Policy and Public Affairs Manager

A question and answer session followed and the main areas of discussion were staff retention and recruitment, cuts to services, the need for multi-year budgets, the need for legislative reform, the Supporting People programme and Housing First.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for briefing the Committee.

Agreed: That Homeless Connect provides the Committee with its survey report in relation to Supporting People.

Agreed: That a letter is also sent to the NI Housing Executive seeking an update on any work it is carrying out in relation to Housing First and what its views and position is in relation to it.



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Agreed: That a research paper is requested from RaISe in relation to approaches taken to homelessness prevention in other jurisdictions and any recent policy or legislative changes.

9. Briefing by Housing Rights

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Kate McCauley, Chief Executive

Natalie Whelehan, Head of Policy and Development

Stephen Morrison, Policy Co-ordinator

A question and answer session followed and the main areas of discussion were homelessness prevention, issues with the private rented sector and a mortgage rescue scheme.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for briefing the Committee.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister to ask for his views on the Scottish model for a mortgage rescue scheme.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Housing Executive to ask if it is carrying out any work with the housing sector in relation to the establishment of a working group on homeless prevention in Northern Ireland or if there are plans to establish a working group.

10. Briefing by Chartered Institute of Housing NI

The following representative joined the meeting:



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Justin Cartwright, National Director

Carol McTaggart, Chairperson

A question and answer session followed and the main areas of discussion were the need for revitalisation of the NI Housing Executive stock, the need for housing to be a stand-alone outcome in the Programme for Government, the potential for collaboration between housing associations and the NI Housing Executive and the need for a review of the planning system.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for briefing the Committee.

Daniel McCrossan left the meeting at 12.55p.m.

Agreed: That the Chartered Institute of Housing NI provides the Committee with a report on alternative approaches to public debt, details on empty homes and a report on the social impacts of more dense housing developments in Europe.

Agreed: That Committee Secretariat bring back a summary report on all briefings from today's meeting to a future Committee meeting.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 1.05p.m.

11. SR 2024/58 – The Benefit Cap (Annual Limit) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2024/58 – The Benefit Cap (Annual Limit) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024 and recommends that it is approved by the Assembly.



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12. S.R. 2024/69 - The Social Security (2023 Benefits Up-rating) Order (NI) 2024

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered S.R. 2024/69 - The Social Security (2023 Benefits Up-rating) Order (NI) 2024 and recommends that it is approved by the Assembly.

13. S.R. 2024/70 - The Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (2023 Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered S.R. 2024/70 - The Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (2023 Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024 and recommends that it is approved by the Assembly.

14. S.R. 2024/71 - The Social Security (2023 Benefits Up-rating) Regulations (NI) 2024

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered S.R. 2024/71 - The Social Security (2023 Benefits Up-rating) Regulations (NI) 2024 and recommends that it is approved by the Assembly.”

15. S.R. 2024/73 - The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (NI) 2024

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered S.R. 2024/73 - The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (NI) 2024 and recommends that it is approved by the Assembly.



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16. S.R. 2024/74 - Occupational Pension Schemes (Governance and Registration) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered S.R. 2024/74 - Occupational Pension Schemes (Governance and Registration) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024 and recommends that it is approved by the Assembly.

17. S.R. 2024/75 - The Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered S.R. 2024/75 - The Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024 and recommends that it is approved by the Assembly.

18. S.R. 2024/76 - The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Regulations (NI) 2024

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered S.R. 2024/76 - The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Regulations (NI) 2024 and recommends that it is approved by the Assembly.



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19.S.R. 2024/78 - The Occupational Pension Schemes (Master Trusts) Regulations (NI) 2024

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered S.R. 2024/78 - The Occupational Pension Schemes (Master Trusts) Regulations (NI) 2024 and recommends that it is approved by the Assembly.”

20.S.R. 2024/79 - The Occupational Pension Schemes (Administration, Investment, Charges and Governance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered S.R. 2024/79 - The Occupational Pension Schemes (Administration, Investment, Charges and Governance) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024 and recommends that it is approved by the Assembly.

21.S.R. 2024/90 - The Occupational Pension Schemes (Funding and Investment Strategy and Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered S.R. 2024/90 - The Occupational Pension Schemes (Funding and Investment Strategy and Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024 and recommends that it is approved by the Assembly.



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22. Forward work programme

The Chairperson informed Members that, at the meeting on 18 April, the Committee will receive briefings from the Minister for Communities, the Construction Employers Federation and RaISe PFS Unit.

23. Any other business

Brian Kingston re-raised the question of whether consideration of correspondence being moved towards the end of future meetings would be constructive, given pressures on members time, expressing a preference that it was kept at the start of the meeting.

The Chairperson advised that as Members had indicated they were content with the proposed change, it would be scheduled for later in the next meeting but that the discussion could be revisited at that time, as needed.

24. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10am on Thursday 18 April 2024, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.12 p.m.



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Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities