



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 4 December 2025

Meeting Location: The Skainos Centre

Present:

Mr Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Cathy Mason MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mrs Pam Cameron MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mrs Sian Mulholland MLA

In Attendance:

Mrs Emer Boyle (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Victoria Bourquin (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Chris McAfee (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Katie Egan (Clerical Officer)
Ms Patrice Morris (Senior Assistant Clerk)
Ms Kathryn Black (Senior Assistant Clerk)



Northern Ireland Assembly

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

1. Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared:

Colm Gildernew - Charity trustee, private sector landlord, Member's Bill on mitigating the threat of homelessness, Member of Public Accounts Committee.

Andy Allen – Charity trustee

Maurice Bradley - Member of Harry Gregg Foundation, Member of Coleraine and District League Management, Member of North West Football Association, Member of Irish Football Association Council.

Pam Cameron – former Junior Minister with sight of Executive and Cross Departmental policy, strategy and legislation.

2. Apologies

Mark Durkan MLA.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson reminded Members that this week is Homelessness Awareness Week, and thanked The Skainos Centre and Committee team for hosting and organising the Committee meeting and facilitating a tour of Hosford Community Homes.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a draft press release for their review – the purpose of which is to highlight the Committee taking its meeting outside of Parliament Buildings and into the heart of the Skainos Centre, to hear directly from people and organisations working with people experiencing homelessness locally.

Agreed: That the Press Release of the Committee meeting is published as drafted.



Northern Ireland Assembly

4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the meeting on 27 November 2025.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. Matters Arising

Department of Finance - Reform of Building Regulations

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department of Finance to seek clarity on the specific EPC rating currently required under existing Building Regulations in relation to new builds properties (and which would apply to social homes).

Minister for Communities - Department for Work and Pensions - Universal Credit Bill

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for more data in relation to the Northern Ireland impact of the Green Paper and whether the Department will publish the related impact assessments for Northern Ireland, to include EQIA, Regulatory, Rural Needs and Child Rights Impact (assessments).

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Department for Communities	December Monitoring Round
Minister for Infrastructure	Pictorial Signage at Transport Stations
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council	Local Councils Plans for Future-Proof House Building and Retrofitting
RaISe	Briefing paper on the Housing Rights 2025 Private Rented Sector conference
RNID	Language Deprivation – with reference to the Sign Language Bill



Northern Ireland Assembly

6. Correspondence

Clerk to Committee for Finance - Review of Arm's Length Bodies

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to request clarification in relation to which of its Arm's Length Bodies have been reviewed, which are currently under review and whether the Committee will be consulted or involved prior to the implementation of any reviews' changes and recommendations.

Assembly Communications - Good Morning Ulster transcript - Benefit Fraud and Error

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to request further clarity in relation to the difference in figures set out in the radio transcript from those previously stated in evidence to the Committee, with particular focus on any clarity in terms of likely penalty figures and what quantum of monies will be returned to Northern Ireland as a result of FER investigations.

Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Association - Delivering Accessible Homes for People with Motor Neurone Disease

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive requesting an update in writing in relation to its delivery plan for social housing and the future proofing of new build homes to include how it is planning ahead to deliver on accessibility needs or building to the "lifetime home" standards. Committee expressed concerns that a failure to build to these standards now could require further, more significant investment of public money at a later date, when improvements or changes are required.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Summary of content
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission	Windsor Framework Article 2: Enforcement and Remedies Launch
Clerk to Committee for Education	Response from the Dept of Education regarding its interaction with Linking Generations Northern Ireland (LGNI)
Department for Communities	Impact of local government reform on service delivery and cost effectiveness



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Source	Summary of content
Chairpersons' Liaison Group	Guidance for Departments on Delegated Legislation
Clerk to Committee for Finance	2025-26 Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn October
Executive Information Service	News release - 'Women's World Cup would have lasting legacy' – Archibald
Minister for Communities	Written Ministerial Statement - New Foundations Programme
Individual	Housing Issue / Removal from Northern Ireland
Department for Communities	Joint Briefing re Sustainable Places Programme

The Committee further noted the following items of tabled correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Executive Information Service	New Children's book to tell story of US Declaration of Independence signatory Charles Thomson
Executive Information Service	Housing and Health Ministers launch New Foundations initiative to support care leavers
Executive Information Service	Department submits Proposal for Application Notice for Outline Planning Application at Fort George
Executive Information Service	Communities Minister announces £150,000 seasonal funding for homeless services



Northern Ireland
Assembly

7. SR 2025/185 - The Occupational Pensions (Revaluation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/185 - The Occupational Pensions (Revaluation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 and has no objection to the Rule, subject to the report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

8. SR 2025/187 - The State Pension Revaluation for Transitional Pensions Order (Northern Ireland) 2025

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/187 - The State Pension Revaluation for Transitional Pensions Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 and has no objection to the Rule, subject to the report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

9. SR 2025/188 - The State Pension Debits and Credits (Revaluation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/188 - The State Pension Debits and Credits (Revaluation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 and has no objection to the Rule, subject to the report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

10. Oral evidence on Community Led Housing – East Belfast Mission

The Chairperson welcomed the following Officials to the meeting:

Andrew Irvine, Chief Executive Officer

Aidan Byrne, Head of Homelessness Services at East Belfast Mission

Tom Dinnen, Chief Operating Officer and co-founder of Hosford Community Homes Ltd

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

- Community Led Housing Support
- Intervention Timelines
- Funding and Financial Model



Northern Ireland Assembly

- Mentoring other Community organisation and Department for Communities Contribution
- Referral process
- Financial and Structural Barriers
- Role of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Housing Benefit, Grant Funding and Supporting People Grant
- Vacant Housing
- Expansion of Community Led Housing across Northern Ireland
- Supporting Community Integration, Community Relationships and Community Leadership

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to commend the Community Housing Model to the Minister. In addition the Committee requested that the letter:

- Ask the Department examine whether the Model could be supported as an approach to be further rolled out across Northern Ireland
- Ask the Minister to raise with The Executive the potential of the application of this model in relation to the use of derelict public buildings which could be transferred to community organisations
- Include the Committee's support to the Minister in relation to FTC Funding requests made at the Executive
- Set out the Committee's request for an uplift to Supporting People funding in line with inflation
- Make the case for funding for FTC and access to it by charities and community organisations
- Ask for the Minister's thoughts on the use of FTC for buy-back of homes for social housing

11. Oral evidence on Future of the Supporting People Programme – Committee Representing Independent Supporting People Providers (CRISPP)

The Chairperson welcomed the following Officials to the meeting:

Kate Martin, CEO of MACS



Northern Ireland Assembly

Jackie McCaughey, Area Manager for Housing Support at Mindwise

Deirdre Walker, Executive Director of Supported Living at Apex Housing Association

Kevin Wright, CEO of First Housing Aid and Support Services (FHASS)

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

- Prevention of Homelessness
- Budget, Funding Issues and Inflation
- Staff Employment and Volunteers
- Adverse Incidents and Reporting Incidents
- Financial Impact and Staff Wages
- Role of cross-Executive Departments in Supporting People

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister for Communities to express the Committee's support for a consistent funding uplift to Supporting People across the incoming 3 year budget to address the absence of an uplift in previous years and the operational challenges that minimum wage payment for skilled workers is creating.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister of Finance to highlight the existing pressures and likely future impact on Supporting People providers as a consequence of failing to invest adequately in Supporting People in the 3 year budget.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to The Executive Office expressing the need for a prioritised Cross-Departmental approach between Education, Justice, Health and Communities in relation to upcoming budget discussions relating to Supporting People.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to each of the four CRISSP groups requesting a written update from each – to outline the impact that the funding situation is having on their ability to sustain the support services and what they are not / no longer able to provide as a consequence of the real-time cuts they set out.



Northern Ireland Assembly

12. Oral evidence on Childhood Adversity and Homelessness Report – The Simon Community

The Chairperson welcomed the following Officials to the meeting:

Jim Dennison, CEO, Simon Community

Karen McAlister, Head of Impact and Innovation, Simon Community

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

- Importance of Early Intervention and Prevention of Homelessness
- Childhood Adversities and Vulnerable Individuals
- Generational Homelessness
- Education and its link to Homelessness
- Support Avenues and Integration of Services
- Funding and Cost of Statutory Services
- Family Homelessness
- Lack of Housing
- Decline of Social Housing and the Right to Buy Scheme
- The impact of Community and Paramilitary Violence on Homelessness

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to ask whether there are plans to review and update the Strategic Needs Assessment, previously undertaken in 2020.

Agreed: That the Committee Team draft a mini report based on the evidence sessions received at Agenda Items 10,11 and 12 and revert to the Committee for consideration at a future meeting.

13. Sign Language Bill – Committee deliberations on the clauses of the Bill

The Chairperson informed Members that all items relating to this Agenda item had been considered at the Committee meeting on 2 December, and that the Committee team has sent correspondence to the Department detailing the agreed amendments.

14. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the forward work programme.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

15. Any other business

There was no other business.

16. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 11 December 2025, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.09 p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities