



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 1 October 2026

Meeting Location: Ulster Rugby, Affidea Stadium

Present: Mr Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)
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 Katie Egan (Clerical Officer)
Ms Patrice Morris (Senior Assistant Clerk)
Ms Kathryn Black (Senior Assistant Clerk)

The meeting commenced in public session at 10.01 a.m.



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1. Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared:

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

Kellie Armstrong – Associate of Chartered Institute of Housing, Chair of All Party Group on Homelessness.

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.

Sian Mulholland – Son is a Member of an affiliated Club, Family Member coming up through Ulster and Irish Rugby U19's.

2. Apologies

Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA

Ms Nicola Brogan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Mark Durkan MLA

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson thanked Members for making the journey to the Ulster Rugby, Affidee Stadium, and further thanked Ulster Rugby for the invitation. The Chairperson further informed Members that there would be a stadium tour provided following the Committee meeting.



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Finally, the Chairperson highlighted to Members that following the Anti-Poverty Briefing which took place in closed session at the Committee meeting on 24 September 2026, that he remained concerned in relation to timescales and next steps. The Chairperson then made reference to other Members' concerns regarding the same and reminded Members that the Committee agreed to seek a briefing in public session as soon as possible.

The Chairperson then proposed that the oral session is scheduled as soon as possible and that the Department is requested to communicate clearly the revised anticipated timeframes to wider stakeholders.

Agreed: That an oral briefing in public session from the Department is scheduled as soon as possible.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to request that it communicate clearly the revised anticipated timeframes to wider stakeholders, in relation to the updated Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy.

4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the Committee meeting on 17 September 2026.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. Oral briefing from Ulster Rugby

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Hugh McCaughey, CEO, Ulster Rugby

David King, Head of Marketing & Communications, Ulster Rugby

Chris Webster, Head of Rugby Development, Ulster Rugby

Aine Doran, Chair of Our Women & Girls Committee, Ulster Rugby



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Matthew Holmes, Funding & Projects Manager, Ulster Rugby

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

- Measurement of outcomes from investment
- Support from Irish Government
- Women's Rugby participation and Women's World Cup
- Capital Investment
- Outreach for wider schemes
- Multi-Year funding and roll-forward funding
- Evidence based reporting and development of bespoke strategies
- Breakdown of investment per group
- Use of facilities for other sports
- Collaboration for multi-sports infrastructure
- Identification of facilities in need in rural areas
- One to One funding for clubs
- Inclusion of disabilities and appointment of Disability Officer

6. Charities (Amendment) Bill: Oral evidence from Charity Law Association

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Sarah Burrows, Executive Committee Member (Director) of the Charity Law Association (CLA) and a Partner at Edwards Solicitors

Hannah Sloane, Member of the Charity Law Association (CLA) and an Associate at Edwards Solicitors

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

- Definitions and Risks



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- “Relevant Public Body” definition
- Disclosure “to” and “by” the Commission
- Designated religious charities
- “Official Warning” protection and appeal
- Resources and staff availability for introduction of the Bill
- Dates of commencement for Clauses 7, 8 & 9
- All-island charities
- Employment law and unintended consequences

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Labour Relations Agency to seek it’s view in relation to Clause 4 and charities which operate across two jurisdictions (NI & ROI).

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland to seek it’s opinion on whether, in advance of a warning being issued, a procedure should be included “on the face” of the Bill itself.

7. Charities (Amendment) Bill: Oral evidence from Ulster Society of Chartered Accountants Not for Profit Subgroup

The Chairperson welcomed the following Officials to the meeting:

Gareth McGleenon, Chair, Ulster Society of Chartered Accountants Not for Profit Subgroup

Angela Craigan, Chair, Ulster Society of Chartered Accountants

Dr Rosemary Peters-Gallagher, Vice Chair, Ulster Society of Chartered Accountants Not for Profit Subgroup

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

- Restrictions and safeguards to be added to Bill
- Commencement dates for Clauses 7, 8 & 9



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- Rollover of annual funds
- Registration requirements for all Charities
- Additional Assembly scrutiny for Delegated Legislation

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

- For clarification on what requirements are placed on smaller Charities and the detail; and
- What consideration has been given to the need for *all* Charities to be registered

The Chairperson requested a Member to assume Chairperson for agenda Item 8, as the Deputy Chairperson was not in attendance.

Agreed: That Kellie Armstrong MLA would assume Chairperson for Agenda Item 8.

The Chairperson suspended that meeting at 11.54 am.

The meeting commenced at 12.02pm with all Members present.

8. Housing (Amendment) Bill: Oral evidence from RalSe

As the Chairperson is the sponsor of this Bill, the nominated Chairperson, Kellie Armstrong MLA, assumed the Chair for this item.

The nominated Chairperson welcomed the following Officials to the meeting:

Dr Eleanor Thomson, Research Officer, Assembly Research and Information Services (RalSe)

Ross Connolly, Research Officer, Assembly Research and Information Services (RalSe)



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

- Temporary accommodation costs and types
- Process and duties of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Availability of figures for completeness
- Regional balance and difference in types of homelessness
- Comparisons with other jurisdictions
- Notice to quit procedure
- NIHE staff resources and potential associated implications
- Cost of homelessness for the public purse

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to request:

- The modelling and data evidence supporting the £2.5million figure that the Minister referred to during the second stage debate; and
- an update on the Interdepartmental Working Group and any planned budgetary bids for the year ahead relating to homelessness.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to all Departments to request their budgetary allocation in relation to homelessness services and the impact of homelessness for each.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to request:

- The profiles of groups threatened with homelessness;
- The capacity within NIHE to cope with the 28 day duty, and
- What the impact to caseload management and resource requirements would be should the Bill come into effect and have a 60 day duty

The Chairperson resumed the Chair at 12.40 p.m.



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9. Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill: Agreement of Committee stage arrangements

The Chairperson informed Members that the Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill passed second stage and has now been referred to the Committee for Scrutiny.

The Chairperson reminded Members that a forecast timetable had been considered on 2 July 2026 to facilitate an early Call for views, which had closed on 1 October 2026 and that a revised and updated timeline was included for Members consideration.

Pam Cameron and Maurice Bradley recorded their disagreement with the timeline and reflected that they did not believe there was adequate time remaining in the mandate for effective Committee scrutiny of this Bill.

Agreed: That the Committee is content to agree the revised Committee Stage plan and timeframe, including extra meetings, if required.

Agreed: That the Draft Motion to extend Committee Stage is approved.

Agreed: That the relevant Stakeholders identified, are scheduled to brief the Committee, at a future meeting on aspects of the Bill.

Agreed: That two Members would forward additional potential stakeholders to the Clerk for inclusion at scheduled oral evidence sessions for the Bill.

10. SL1 The Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Chairperson reminded Members that the SL1 was received on 23 September 2026 and provided Members with an overview of the SL1.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the Minister for Communities had requested that the Committee consider the proposed statutory rule within a *shortened timeframe*.



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The Chairperson further advised that a draft SR and Explanatory Memorandum had not yet been received.

Agreed: That the Committee consider the proposed statutory rule within the shortened timeframe, and that:

- The Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 would be considered at the Committee Meeting on 22 October 2026.

The Chairperson reminded Members that a shortened timeframe does not preclude the committee from issuing a call for views.

The Chairperson then informed Members that:

- The Committee team will issue a call for views on the SL1 using the standard survey on Citizen Space from 1 October 2026;
- The SL1, and any relevant papers from the Department will be published on the Committee website and notified to relevant stakeholders, where appropriate; and
- The Committee will next consider this SL1 on 22 October 2026 alongside a summary of any comments and feedback received via Citizen Space.

Finally, the Chairperson informed Members that:

- The Department intends to lay the rule as soon as possible, after Westminster lay the corresponding Statutory Instrument.

Agreed: That the Committee is content to publish the Citizen Space call for views, publish the Departmental documents in relation to this SL1, and notify relevant stakeholders as appropriate.

Agreed: That the Committee will next consider this SL1 on 22 October 2026 alongside a summary of any comments and feedback received via Citizen Space.



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Agreed: That a briefing from the Department in relation to this SL1 is scheduled for 22 October 2026.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to request a copy of the Westminster Statutory Instrument.

11. SL1 - The Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Chairperson reminded Members that the SL1 was received on 23 September 2026 and provided Members with an overview of the SL1.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the Minister for Communities had requested that the Committee consider the proposed statutory rule within a *shortened timeframe*.

The Chairperson further advised that a draft SR and Explanatory Memorandum had not yet been received.

Agreed: That the Committee consider the proposed statutory rule within the shortened timeframe, and that:

- The Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 would be considered at the Committee Meeting on 22 October 2026.

The Chairperson reminded Members that a shortened timeframe does not preclude the committee from issuing a call for views.

The Chairperson then informed Members that:

- The Committee team will issue a call for views on the SL1 using the standard survey on Citizen Space from 1 October 2026;
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- The Committee will next consider this SL1 on 22 October 2026 alongside a summary of any comments and feedback received via Citizen Space.

Finally, the Chairperson informed Members that:

- The Department intends to lay the rule as soon as possible, after Westminster lay the corresponding Statutory Instrument.

Agreed: That the Committee is content to publish the Citizen Space call for views, publish the Departmental documents in relation to this SL1, and notify relevant stakeholders as appropriate.

Agreed: That the Committee will next consider this SL1 on 22 October 2026 alongside a summary of any comments and feedback received via Citizen Space.

Agreed: That a briefing from the Department in relation to this SL1 is scheduled for 22 October 2026.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to request a copy of the Westminster Statutory Instrument.

12. SR 2026/157 The Housing Benefit (Earned Income Disregards) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Chairperson reminded Members that following consideration of the SL1 at the Committee Meetings on 2 July and 10 September 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 2026/157 The Housing Benefit (Earned Income Disregards) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and has no objection to the rule.



13. Matters Arising

Department for Communities - Bereavement Services and Tell Us Once

Agreed: That the response is shared with LastSay Organisation.

Department for Communities - Home Heating Oil Scheme

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to request monthly updates on the number of individuals' approved for the Home Heating Oil voucher against the number of vouchers activated

Minister for Communities - Map of Social Housing Need

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Permanent Secretary working group to highlight the history of the Committee's request and the absence of cross-departmental working, and to further highlight that the Committee would be keen to see evidence of Cross-Departmental working.

The Committee noted the following Matters Arising:

Source	Subject Matter
Department for Communities	SL1 Scrutiny Process and Resources
Department for Communities	Hearing Tests and High Street Providers
Department for Communities	Cremation Regulations
Charity Commission NI	Charities (Amendment) Bill
Fundraising Regulator	Charities (Amendment) Bill

14. Correspondence

Department for Communities – Musical Instruments Programme 2026-27 Announcement



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Arts Council NI to highlight an issue with the online application and request that the application deadline is extended to allow adequate time for applications, once the issue is fixed.

Sian Mulholland MLA – Minister for Communities - clarification on the recent PIP award extension exercise

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to seek clarity on why the PIP extension exercise is being conducted in this manner and request the written criteria used.

Law Centre NI - On behalf of NI Somali Association -- Community Voices, Community Solutions Report

Agreed: That the Chairperson attend the event on behalf of the Committee.

Public Prosecution Service - Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Public Prosecution Service, authorising the extension request.

Individual - Response re Conversion Practices (criminalisation) Bill;

Individual - Response re Conversion Practices (criminalisation) Bill;

Lesbian and Gay Alliance in Iceland - Response re Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill;

NI Commissioner for Children and Young People - Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill - September 2026;

Evangelical Alliance - Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill; and



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Rev Dr Brian D. Ammons - Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill

Agreed: That each response is added to its relevant bill folder, collated with other responses to the relevant bill and returned to the Committee for consideration during committee stage scrutiny of each Bill.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Individual	Letter to Minister for Communities NIHE policy barriers to lawful home working and self-employment
Executive Information Service	Press Release - Major step forward for the Deaf community in Northern Ireland as Sign Language Act comes into effect
Executive Information Service	Press Release - Lyons announces £2m investment in sports clubs
Department for Communities	Minister announces intention to continue supporting the Olympic Legacy Fund in 2026/27 with a funding allocation of £2 million
Assembly Business Office	Annual Report on Decision Making and Financial Accuracy
Committee for Finance	Baby Loss Ribbon Ceremony
Committee for Finance	Memo to all Stat Comm re Outturn and Forecast Outturn Aug 26
Committee for Finance	Department of Finance - Supply of Agency Workers



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Source	Summary of content
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission	Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's Annual Human Rights Statement 2026
Committee for Health	B Positive - charity which supports children diagnosed with cancer
Committee for Economy	Gas Safety Regulations
Department for Communities	Equality Impact Assessment Consultation Document
Committee for Economy	Regional Balance Bill
Strategic Investment Board	Assembly Committee Report
Assembly Business Office	The Sports Council for Northern Ireland (Sport NI) - Annual report & Accounts 2024-25
Executive Information Service	Press Release - Minister meets veterans taking part in Help for Heroes sports Event

The Committee noted the following items of tabled correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
NICVA	eNews - Charities (Amendment) Bill
Department for Communities	Public Libraries Consultation

15. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a Clerk's Memo in relation to future planning of oral evidence sessions with particular focus on time constraints for Committee scrutiny with three Bills at Committee Stage.



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The Chairperson then proposed that written briefings are requested for non-legislative agenda items up to and inclusive of 12 November 2026.

Agreed: That the Committee receive written briefings instead of oral briefings for non-legislative agenda items, for the interim period.

The Committee then noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

16. Any other business

There was no other business.

17. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 08 October 2026, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.15 p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities