



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 17 February 2022

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Ms Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
Mr Mark Durkan MLA
Mr Paul Frew MLA
Ms Áine Murphy MLA
Ms Ciara Ferguson MLA

Apologies: Mr Stephen Dunne MLA

In Attendance: Dr Michael Potter (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Clerk)
Ms Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Officer)

In Attendance by Video or Teleconference: Ms Rachel Ashe (Clerical Supervisor)



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The Chairperson, Paula Bradley, assumed the Chair. The meeting began at 10.03 am in open session. The following Members were present at the start of the public session: Paula Bradley, Kellie Armstrong, Ciara Ferguson, Andy Allen, Paul Frew, Mark Durkan and Áine Murphy.

Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

1. Apologies

Stephen Dunne.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that she had met with The Women's Network (TWN) earlier in the week and they had informed her that they believed that the Department had misled the Committee over the Women in the Community (WICT) Programme as regards certain dates and facts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request an oral briefing regarding the WICT Programme, including what plans are in place for after the current scheme closes at end of March.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meetings held on Tuesday 8 February 2022 and Thursday 10 February 2022.



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4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed that Committee that they had received a Departmental response regarding the Access and Inclusion Programme Guidance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to enquire why only Disability Sport was included in discussions as Disability Sport only addresses one area of access and inclusion.

The Chairperson informed that Committee that they had received a Departmental response regarding the Energy Payment Support Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request:

- Further details on awards made to date, including a province-wide breakdown, and to enquire whether the scheme is on target to meet its goals;
- To enquire what other schemes the Department is considering going forward; and;
- To request an update on the 5000 households assessed as eligible for the scheme, including an indication of how soon will they receive the fuel or energy payment

The Chairperson informed the Committee that they had received a Departmental response regarding the Anti-Social Behaviour and Social Housing Allocation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to:

- Request a breakdown of what the Department deems unacceptable behaviours; and
- To seek clarification regarding the 130 people in Northern Ireland who are not entitled to social housing, where these people are in Northern Ireland, and the support being offered to these individuals for any specific issues they may face.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that they had received a Departmental response regarding Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) funding for adaptations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write the Department to:



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- Request a breakdown detailing the number of times the £50,000 grants maximum was exceeded and to ask where the additional funds come from; and
- To request an updated list of contractors that tenants can choose from to complete works and to ask if there is any prospect of these services being brought in-house.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that they had received a copy of the Department's Historic Environment Division Listing Process. The Committee was content to note.

The Chairperson informed that Committee that they had received a Departmental response regarding the Funding Announcement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to:

- Write to The Executive Office (TEO) to extend the support of the Committee and request that the TEO considers ring-fencing the £150m funding from the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the new Mandate;
- Write to the Minister for Communities to encourage Minister Hargey to submit a bid for funding; and
- To write the Minister of Finance to request whether the Minister is considering a rates holiday or rebate in Northern Ireland similar to the GB Council Tax rebate announcement.

5. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive briefing on Budget and Mixed Tenure Properties

The Chairperson welcomed the following representatives to the meeting:

Grainia Long

Catherine McFarland

The representatives briefed the Committee and participated in a question and answer session with Members.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.



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Agreed: The representatives agreed to send on the following documents:

- Information related to the Disability Facilities Grant and Quantity Surveyors; and
- Information on Placements in Private Sector Accommodation.

6. Department Briefing on the Draft Housing Supply Strategy

The Chairperson welcomed the following Officials to the meeting:

David Polley

Julie Lavery

The Officials briefed the Committee and participated in a question and answer session with Members.

The Officials thanked the representatives for their attendance.

7. Save the Children Briefing on Child Poverty

The Chairperson welcomed the following representative to the meeting:

Jerome Finnegan

The representative briefed the Committee and participated in a question and answer session with Members.

The Chairperson thanked the representative for his attendance.

The meeting was adjourned at 12pm.

The meeting resumed at 12.11 pm in public session with all Members present.



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8. SL1 - The Gaming (Bingo (Amendment)) and Gaming Machine (Registered Clubs) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

Agreed: The Committee was content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

9. SL1 - Gaming and Lotteries (Variation of Monetary Limits) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022

During the adjournment, the Committee requested an urgent briefing from Officials for clarification before the Committee made its decision on this SL1.

The Chairperson welcomed the following Official to the meeting:

Martina Campbell

The Official briefed the Committee and participated in a question and answer session with Members.

The Chairperson thanked the Official for her attendance.

Agreed: The Committee was content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

10. Correspondence

The Chairperson informed the Committee that they had received a memo from the Committee for the Economy regarding energy price rises.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Committee for the Economy any relevant responses received from the Department for Communities regarding the mitigation of the impact of energy prices rises.



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The Chairperson informed Members that they had received correspondence from Billy Dickson BEM, the Co-ordinator of the Transport Hub Alternatives Group (THAG) requesting to brief the Committee on the Boyne Bridge and Transport Hub development.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence from THAG to the Department requesting a further update on the status of the Boyne Bridge and to forward a copy of the Historic Environment listing process from the Department to THAG and advise it of the actions taken by the Committee.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a copy of the response to the Consultation on Notice-To-Quit periods from the Department for Communities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Department to brief the Committee at the meeting on 24 February 2022.

Letter from The Executive Office seeking the views of the Committee for Communities regarding its consultation on a draft Investment Strategy for NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reconsider this letter at its meeting on 24 February to formulate a response.

The Committee agreed to note the following items of correspondence;

- i. A joint-letter from the Departments for Justice, Health, and The Executive Office regarding the extension to the Call for Evidence on the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy, and the Equally Safe Strategy respectively.
- ii. A copy of the Annual Report from the Press Recognition Panel on the State of the Recognition System in February 2022.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee was content to note the Forward Work Programme until the conclusion of the mandate,

The Committee discussed the issue of the funding for the Sub-Regional Stadia Development Programme.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to request a Ministerial briefing on 24 February 2022.

11. Any Other Business

On the back of the briefing by Save the Children on child poverty, Committee discussed the Anti-Poverty Strategy and its current status.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to enquire how the lack of an Executive will affect the Anti-Poverty Strategy and the Welfare Mitigations Review.

12. Date, Time and Location of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 24 February 2022 at 09.30 am in room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.58 pm.

Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities