



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday 14 January 2021
Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
Andy Allen MBE MLA
Alex Easton MLA
Robin Newton MBE MLA

Present: Starleaf Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mark Durkan MLA
Sinéad Ennis MLA

In Attendance: Janice Thompson (Assembly Clerk)
Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced in open session at 9.16a.m.

1. Apologies

Fra McCann MLA
Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised Members that it had come to her attention that the Irish Football Association (IFA) are asking for certain fines to be paid by football clubs, despite the clubs having little to no income due to football being suspended at the moment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the IFA on this issue.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister had raised her concerns about only having a short period of time to brief the Committee on a Thursday due to the Executive meeting. The Chairperson advised that the Minister has offered to brief the Committee on a Wednesday for an hour and a half.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Secretariat would investigate the availability of any meeting room availability on Wednesdays.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to also request a formal briefing from the Minister as soon as possible but request a start time of 8.30a.m.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 17 December 2020.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a reply from the Minister for Infrastructure to Committee queries on community transport.

Kellie Armstrong declared an interest as the former NI Director of the Community Transport Association.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask what level of engagement officials have with other relevant departmental officials to ensure that a form of funding is secured for community transport that will ensure its long term viability.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write the Minister to encourage joined up working between herself, the Minister for Health and the Minister for Infrastructure to explore how they can work collaboratively to secure the future of community transport.

Members noted a reply from the Minister for Health to Committee queries on HSC Service Related Contracts and Full Cost Recovery.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with Departmental replies to Committee queries on welfare reform mitigations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a briefing at a future meeting to discuss the progress of work on this issue.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Ministerial reply to Committee queries on the Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme SL1.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to express their dissatisfaction with the lack of detail in the response and to request further information.

Members noted a Departmental reply to Committee queries on PIP award extension letter.

Members noted a Departmental reply to Committee queries on the timescales for Charities Funding spend.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply to Committee queries on the Covid-19 Discretionary Support Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request more information on how well the fund is being utilised, particularly how many individuals are requesting the advance payment rather than the Contingency Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request further details of the rationale behind the refusal of the payment loan to individuals and to request a copy of the published criteria for the fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to express their disappointment that money from the fund is being surrendered and requests that the Department aims in future to profile its budget to ensure this doesn't occur, particularly in the current health emergency, as the Committee is aware that there are many people who could benefit from further funding.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply to Committee queries on the Charities Fund.

Andy Allen declared an interest as a Charity Trustee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department welcoming the news that under Phase 2 all Northern Ireland charities will be able to apply, and to ask if the Department will be in contact with charities that were unsuccessful in their applications to Phase 1 of funding to advise of this.

Members noted a Departmental reply to Committee queries on its 5-year strategy.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental letter in relation to the review of Charity Regulations 2008.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to again request a written briefing on why Section 167 of the Charities Act (NI) 2008 has not yet been enacted, as requested following the meeting on 3 December.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a briefing from Officials to ensure the Committee has input to the planned review process.

The Committee agreed to suspend Matters Arising and move to agenda item 5 at 09.56a.m.

5. Hospitality Ulster briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

Mark Durkan declared a family interest in licensed premises.

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Colin Neill, Chief Executive Officer

Stephen Magorrian, Managing Director, Horatio Group

Phil Patterson, Managing Director, The Approachable Group

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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

The meeting was suspended at 11.07a.m. and restarted at 11.15a.m.

6. Public Health Agency briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

The Chairperson informed Members that the briefing from the Public Health Agency has been rescheduled to a later date due to a bereavement.

7. Belfast Chamber of Commerce briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Simon Hamilton, Chief Executive

Michael Stewart, President

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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

8. Northern Ireland Hotels Federation briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

The following representative joined the meeting:

Janet Gault, Chief Executive

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

The Chairperson thanked the representative for their attendance.

9. SL1 – The Local Government (Capital and Accounting) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a briefing from the Department.

10. SR 2020/347 – The Social Security (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) (Citizens Rights Agreement) (Revocation) Order (NI) 2020

The Chairperson advised Members that the rule was not subject to any resolution procedures.

The Committee agreed to note SR 2020/347 - The Social Security (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) (Citizens Rights Agreement) (Revocation) Order (NI) 2020.

11. SR 2020/348 - The Social Security (Switzerland) (Citizens Rights Agreement) (Revocation) Order (NI) 2020

The Chairperson advised Members that the rule was not subject to any resolution procedures.

The Committee agreed to note SR 2020/348 – The Social Security (Switzerland) (Citizens Rights Agreement) Order (NI) 2020.

12. SR 2020/351 – The Statutory Sick Pay (General) (Coronavirus Amendment) (No.7) Regulations (NI) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/351, which ensures that individuals will be eligible for Statutory Sick Pay for the full period for which they are required to self-isolate, including where they have tested positive for coronavirus, or where they are in a household with someone who has tested positive. This Statutory Rule reflects the changes to public health advice on self-isolation in Northern Ireland, which came into effect on 14 December 2020.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/351 - The Statutory Sick Pay (General) (Coronavirus Amendment) (No.7) Regulations (NI) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the rule.

13. SR 2020/357 – The Social Security (Norway) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Chairperson advised Members that the rule was not subject to any resolution procedures.

The Committee agreed to note SR 2020/357 - The Social Security (Norway) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020.

14. SR 2021/1 – The Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/1 which provides for a one-off payment to be made to qualifying persons under the Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme to assist with household energy costs during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the SR until the Department provided further information for consideration at its meeting on 21 January.

15. SR 2021/2 – The Universal Credit (Transitional Provisions) (Claimants previously entitled to a severe disability premium) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/2 which provides help with the financial transition to UC, previous SDP claimants will be eligible to be considered for a transitional SDP element. This Statutory Rule provides the criteria for these payments.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/2 - The Universal Credit (Transitional Provisions) (Claimants previously entitled to a severe disability premium) Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the rule.

The Committee agreed to return to Matters Arising at 12:28p.m

16. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply to Committee queries on the 2nd Independent Review of PIP Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write the Department asking if they will take into account recommendations from the 2nd Independent Review of PIP report when reviewing and further developing the welfare reform mitigation measures.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply to Committee queries on liquor licensing and Covid-19 funding for sports clubs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write the Department seeking clarification on the Sports Sustainability Fund, as the Committee is aware of confusion over the correct funding stream that sports clubs should be accessing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write the Department recommending that they consider establishing a central database for all licence holders that are currently held by local District Courts.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply to Committee queries on labour market recovery interventions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to express their dissatisfaction with the lack of explanation for the delays to the JobStart Scheme and to other labour market recovery interventions and to request detailed information on the reasons why this scheme has been delayed when similar schemes have already launched in other parts of the UK.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if the money earmarked for the JobStart Scheme will have to be returned as a result of delays in the launch of the scheme, whether the Department will now have to delay the launch of the scheme until the new financial year and whether staffing was an issue behind the delay of the scheme.

Members noted a reply from Ciste Infhéistíochta Gaeilge to Committee queries on the Covid-19 Culture, Languages, Arts and Heritage Programme.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a paper from Advice NI on Safeguarding Vulnerable Social Security Benefits Claimants.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the paper to the Department and request that the paper is taken into account when developing proposals for welfare reform mitigations.

17. Correspondence

The Committee considered a letter of concern regarding issues faced by caravan owners and the Caravan Act 2011.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send a copy of the correspondence to the Department for Communities for comment on the queries that fall under its remit of the Caravan Act.

The Committee considered responses from Belfast Harbour and Belfast City Council regarding Drive-in Performances.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the responses to the original correspondent.

The Committee considered a response to queries raised by St Vincent de Paul.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the responses to St Vincent de Paul.

The Committee considered a response to queries raised regarding youth sport and current Covid-19 restrictions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the responses to the original correspondent.

The Committee considered a response to queries raised regarding Covid-19 restrictions and outdoor fitness classes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the responses to the original correspondent.

The Committee considered a response to queries raised in relation to an unsuccessful application to the Heritage Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the responses to the original correspondent.

The Committee noted the following:

- i. Department letter regarding published guidance on restrictions on Grassroots Sports.
- ii. Conradh na Gaeilge response re Languages funding for Covid-19.
- iii. Link to guidance re Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Act of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of an Armed Conflict.
- iv. Copy of National Museums NI Annual Report & Accounts year ended 31 March 2020.
- v. Copy of letter from the Committee for the Executive to the First and deputy First Minister re Scrutiny of Common Frameworks.
- vi. Copy of the consultation on Social Housing Allocations.
- vii. Copy of the Review of Parts 3 and 8 of the NI local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors.
- viii. Copy of letter from the Committee for the Economy to the First and deputy First Minister re Contingencies for the ending of Covid support schemes.
- ix. Housing Rights policy briefing papers regarding Intimidation Points, Letting Fees and the proposal to use the private rented sector to discharge the statutory duty to homeless households.
- x. Response from the Gillen Education and Awareness Group.
- xi. Investing Activity Report 27 Dec 2020.
- xii. Letter from NICCY re Statement on Children's Rights in Northern Ireland II (SOCRNI 2) 2020
- xiii. UK Sports Council Grant Aid National Lottery Distribution Report & Accounts year end 31 March 2020.
- xiv. Children's Law Centre report to inform the 'List of Issues' that will be sent to the UK Government by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.
- xv. Copy of letter from the Minister for Finance to Chair of Finance Committee re update on the Executive's Budget Process.
- xvi. Letter from Pivotal regarding their report New Decade, New Approach – one year on.

18. Forward Work Programme

Members noted that, at the meeting on 21 January 2021, the Committee will be briefed by Lucida Brewery Co-operative, The Society of Independent Brewers, Campaign for Real Ale Northern Ireland and Unite the Union on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill.

19. Any Other Business

A Member raised concerns regarding how other MLAs on the Committee are being responded to on what the Department deems ‘operational matters’.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to raise concerns regarding the timings and content of responses to MLA questions.

20. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on Thursday 21 January 2021 at 9:15 a.m. in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting adjourned at 12.59p.m.

Ms Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities