



Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 27 May 2021

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Ms Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Andy Allen MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Mark Durkan MLA
Ms Karen Mullan MLA
Mr Fra McCann MLA
Ms Sinéad Ennis MLA
Mr Alex Easton MLA
Mr Robin Newton MLA

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



In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Oliver Bellew (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 9.19 am in open session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 20 May 2021.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee is holding its next informal stakeholder event on Tuesday 1 June 2021 and that the theme of the event is Covid Recovery.

The Chairperson informed Members that Co-Ownership is holding an event on Friday 4 June at 10.30am and that all MLA's had been emailed an invitation.

The Chairperson informed Members that she had been made aware that Advice NI have received no confirmation in relation to their staff contracts and that they had been given a temporary funding extension until the end of June.

Members discussed their concerns regarding the temporary extension to contracts, including the uncertain future of staff and service provision.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for clarification on its future funding contracts with Advice NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Advice NI to ask for details on the impact of the delayed contracts, particularly in relation to potential staff redundancies.

4. Matters Arising

Mark Durkan joined the meeting at 9.24 am.

Response from the Department for Infrastructure in Relation to Funding for the Voluntary and Community Sector

Kellie Armstrong declared an interest as a former director of the Community Transport Association (CTA).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask how it intends to engage with other Departments that have will be impacted by the Disability Strategy and to ask how actions leading to outcomes will be provided for on a long term basis when one year budgets are in operation.

Ministerial Response in Relation to the Flexibility of Council Meetings

The Committee noted that the Minister would be shortly bringing forward legislation to introduce the legislative changes needed to ensure that powers to operate remotely are extended. However, the Committee expressed concerns regarding potential delays to its introduction.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if there is a timetable for the introduction of the necessary legislation.

Response from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in Relation to Special Rules for Terminal Illness

The Committee noted the response which informed that DWP remains committed to implementing the key areas identified in the evaluation; a consensus to change the six-month rule; improving consistency with other services used by people nearing the end of their lives; and raising awareness of the support that is available.



Departmental Response in Relation to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The Committee noted the response which stated that the Community Renewal Fund is a one-year pilot scheme in preparation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and that an initial allocation of £11m has been earmarked for NI.

Departmental Response in Relation to the Historic Status of the Boyne Bridge

The Committee noted the response which stated that the present Boyne Bridge is not afforded statutory designation by listing as it does not meet the statutory tests.

The Committee also noted that, at this time, there is insufficient information on the condition and extent of the buried remains of the 17th century bridge to consider designation as a scheduled historic monument.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek clarification on its remit in relation to this issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to representatives from all interested parties including the Sandy Row Community Forum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Infrastructure to ask if it has conducted any work in relation to this issue.

Departmental Response in Relation to the JobStart Scheme

The Committee welcomed confirmation that work coaches are an integral part of the JobStart Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss this issue in further detail during the Departmental briefing scheduled for 24th June 2021.

Departmental Response in Relation to Gender Budgeting in Sport

The Committee expressed disappointment with the response, which stated that the Department had no plans to adopt gender budgeting and will continue with its current approach through the use of the equality screening process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response to the Women's Caucus Group and to the All Party Group on Women, Peace and Security.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask what plans it has for capacity building for voluntary groups in relation to future gender budgeting.

Departmental Response in Relation to the Court of Appeal Judgement on Charities Judgements

Andy Allen declared an interest as a Charity Trustee.

A Member raised the issue of the express powers of delegation, which was first highlighted by Charity Commission staff in June 2011.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask for a copy of the correspondence from 2011, which raised concerns about the delegations of functions to staff and to request a copy of the legal advice on this issue.

Departmental Response in Relation to the Closure of Post Office Card Accounts

The Committee expressed disappointment with the response and discussed a range of outstanding concerns including the requirements for older people and people with disabilities to open a bank account and concerns regarding access to nominated bank accounts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a briefing at a future meeting.

Draft Response on Budget 2021-22

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the Budget 2021-22 response to the Committee for Finance.

4. Departmental Briefing on the Reform of Gambling Law

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Liam Quinn



Ms Martina Campbell

Mr Ciarán Mee

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

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

The meeting was suspended at 10.35 am and restarted at 11.43 am.

5. Briefing by the Independent Review Panel of Charity Regulation

Kellie Armstrong declared an interest as she was previously employed in the Community and Voluntary Sector.

Karen Mullen left the meeting at 11.00 am.

Mark Durkan left the meeting at 11.00 am.

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Ms Oonagh Breen

Mr Noel Lavery

Rev Dr Lesley Carroll

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 moved into closed session at 11.18 am to allow the Committee to be briefed by Departmental Officials on the Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) - Westminster Compensation (London Capital & Finance plc and Fraud Compensation Fund) Bill.



6. Departmental Briefing on LCM - Westminster Compensation (London Capital & Finance plc and Fraud Compensation Fund) Bill – Closed Session

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Gerry McCann, State and Private Pensions & EU

Ms Doreen Roy, State and Private Pensions

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

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Pensions Regulator to request a written paper on the LCM and its impact.

The meeting moved into open session at 11.40 am.

7. RaISe Briefing on Sport Research Papers

Karen Mullen re-joined the meeting at 11.40 am.

Mark Durkan re-joined the meeting at 12.10 pm.

The following RaISe staff member joined the meeting:

Ms Karen McCallion

The Assembly Research Officer briefed the Committee and took part in a question and answer session with Members.

The Chairperson thanked the researcher for her attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the research papers to the Department for comment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Education to ask if it had completed any work in the areas of physical literacy and young women's participation in sport.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Health to ask if it had completed any work in relation to children’s participation in sport and physical activity in school as a way to tackle childhood obesity and other conditions.

8. SR 2021/118 - The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit (Care Leavers & Homeless) (Amendment) Regulations 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/118: The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit (Care Leavers & Homeless) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021, which extends the age bands within which two existing exemptions from the Local Housing Allowance – Shared Accommodation Rate, can be applied. The care leavers exemption is being extended so that it applies up to the age of 25 instead of age 22, while the existing lower age limit of 25 has effectively been removed from the homeless hostel exemption.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/118: The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit (Care Leavers & Homeless) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021 and had no objection to the Rule.

9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered correspondence from Belfast City Council regarding Social Value in Council Procurement Frameworks.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister in support of Belfast City Council.

- ii. The Committee considered a Departmental response to queries forwarded regarding the reopening of outdoor football.

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



- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding a Fiscal Council for Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this further at its meeting on 3 June.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- i. Departmental letter regarding Public Consultation on the Housing Supply Strategy.
- ii. Letter from the Committee for Finance regarding the Building Fire Safety Programme.
- iii. Copy of the Cliff Edge Coalition letter to Executive Ministers regarding Welfare Reform Mitigations Legislation.
- iv. Correspondence regarding the Review of the Charity Commission.
- v. Departmental letter re Second Independent Review of Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

10. Forward Work Programme

Members noted that, at its meeting on 3 June 2021, the Committee will be briefed by Departmental Officials on the Video Relay Service (VRS) and by RaISe on its paper on the High Street Taskforce.

Members noted that the June Monitoring briefing, which was scheduled for next week, has now been moved to the 10th June.



11. Any Other Business

A Member raised an issue in relation to a response he had received from the Minister of Finance regarding the provision of Changing Places public toilets, for those who cannot use standard accessible toilets.

The Member informed the Committee that progress on this issue would require changes to building regulations but that the Minister of Finance would consider the issue as a priority if the Minister for Communities brought a proposal to the Executive for consideration.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ask if she has any plans to bring this forward as a proposal and to express the Committee's support for such a proposal.

A Member raised concerns regarding the delay in the introduction of legislation in relation to Welfare Reform mitigation measures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a briefing on the issue at a future meeting.

12. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 3 June 2021 at 10.00 am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.30 pm.

Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities