



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Communities

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 4 March 2021

**Meeting Location:** Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

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

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

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

**Apologies:** Mr Fra McCann MLA

**In Attendance:** Dr Janice Thompson (Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Ms Kristina Laverty (External BSL Interpreter)



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:**

Ms Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Oliver Bellew (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 9.18 am in open session.

**1. Apologies**

As above.

**2. Briefing by Deaf Campaign Group on the Video Relay Service**

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Mr Jeff McWhinney, Managing Director  
Vortex Consultants

Mr Raymond Abernethy, Deaf Campaign Group

Mrs Rita Abernethy, Deaf Campaign Group

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

*The meeting was suspended due to a technical issue at 9.52 am and restarted at 9.54 am*

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister asking that she work with the Minister for Health to introduce a Video Relay Service as soon as possible.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office to ask what steps, if any, are being taken by the NI Executive to progress the introduction of VRS across all Departments.

Members were encouraged to learn that the system in Scotland (Contact Scotland) works particularly well.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister asking that she liaise with her Scottish counterpart to ascertain the costs and requirements for introducing a similar system in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ask for the total amount of funding allocated to VRS services in the current Departmental budget.

**Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to write to SOLACE to ask for information on those councils that provide VRS services, and the cost for each council to provide these services.

Members were alarmed to hear that members of the deaf community are struggling to access advice services.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ask that additional funding is made available to ensure that the deaf community can avail of full access to all advice services.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Chief Constable to ask what steps, if any, the PSNI is taking to introduce VRS services to communicate with the deaf community.

The Deaf Campaign Group advised Members that its funding is due to end on 31 March 2021.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ask if there was a possibility of further funding being awarded to the group to ensure it can carry on its valuable work.

The Deaf Campaign Group highlighted that the concerns of the deaf community, as highlighted by the NI Regional branches of UK-wide charities representing them, are often overlooked by the mainland UK head offices. This has particularly been the case around VRS as it is no longer an issue in England, Scotland and Wales.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and to the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) to highlight the group's concerns that national charities are not always considering regional issues and that Northern Ireland is lagging behind as a result when it comes to providing essential services to the deaf community.

The Deaf Campaign Group recommended the employment of members of the deaf community to help with advice queries from other members of the deaf community.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to recommend that members of the deaf community are employed to provide advice services to other members of the deaf community.

*The meeting was suspended at 10.40 am and restarted at 10.47 am*

Before the first briefing session on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill, Members agreed a memo outlining how the Committee would proceed with deliberations on the Bill which would commence at the meeting on 11 March 2021.

The Committee also noted a Departmental reply to Committee queries on its evaluation plan for the Bill

### **3. Institute of Public Health Ireland briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill**

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Ms Helen McAvoy, Director of Policy

Ms Joanna Purdy, Public Health Interventions Officer

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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

#### **4. GAA briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill**

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Mr Brian McAvoy, Provincial Secretary and CEO

Mr Diarmaid Marsden, Head of Community Development Department

Mr Stephen McGeehan, Project Sponsor, Casement Park Stadium  
Redevelopment

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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

#### **5. Drinkaware briefing on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill**

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Ms Elaine Hindal, Chief Executive

Mr Adams Jones, Director of Partnerships, Business Development and Public  
Affairs

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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

#### **6. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson advised Members that it had been brought to her attention that some Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) home repairs are being held up as



## Northern Ireland Assembly

delivery of materials for repair are being delayed due to the outworkings of the Northern Ireland Protocol

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the NIHE to seek further information on how widespread this issue is.

### 7. Draft Minutes

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

### 8. Matters Arising

#### **Proposed primary legislation timetable from the Department**

The Committee felt that the proposed timetable might be overly ambitious with so little time remaining in the current mandate. Members raised concerns regarding the impact on the Committee's ability to carry out its full scrutiny role.

Members were also disappointed to note that a Sign Language Bill was not included in the proposed timetable.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister asking that she impress upon Executive colleagues the need to progress the proposed Bills as soon as possible so that they reach the Committee in good time for it to carry out its scrutiny function.

#### **Response from SOLACE with details on funding support schemes for the remaining councils**

The Committee noted the response.

#### **Departmental response on the special recognition payment to health workers.**

The Committee noted the response.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

### **Response from the Minister for Finance on financial support for the clinically extremely vulnerable**

A Member expressed concern that employers of clinically extremely vulnerable people continue to place them on Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) rather than furlough them under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS).

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Finance to ask if the working from home guidance has been updated and to ask that this guidance is extended in line with the extension of furlough.

### **Departmental response on Jobstart**

A Member raised concerns that the Executive's Draft Budget didn't include any Covid-19 allocation to address the need for labour market interventions to support people into employment in 2021-22.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office to ask what actions it will take to provide employment opportunities for young people as the Department for Communities does not have the budget to commence its labour market interventions such as Jobstart.

### **Departmental response on the definition of a terminal illness**

A Member acknowledged that all Executive parties are united on this issue but raised concerns that, as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has yet to report the findings of its evaluation, people remain adversely impacted by the current definition of terminal illness.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ask if she would consider including this issue in the welfare reform mitigations measures until such time as the DWP is able to report on the findings of its review of terminal illness provision.

### **Research papers from NIADA**

The Committee noted the response.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**9. SR 2021/41: The Private Tenancies (Coronavirus Modifications) Regulations (NI) 2021**

*Andy Allen declared an interest as a private sector landlord.*

The Committee considered SR 2021/41: The Private Tenancies (Coronavirus Modifications) Regulations (NI) 2021 which responds to the present outbreak of coronavirus in Northern Ireland and protects tenants from eviction during the present emergency period. The Department now wishes to further extend “the emergency period” by 6 months to 30 September 2021.

**Agreed:** The Committee considered SR 2021/41: The Private Tenancies (Coronavirus Modifications) Regulations (NI) 2021 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the Rule.

Members discussed the issue of tenants still being evicted from their homes as neither they nor their landlords know about the rights provided by this rule.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to issue a press release welcoming the 6-month extension and to make tenants and landlords equally aware of the legislation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking that they publicise the rights provided by this rule more widely via media and social media.

**10. SR 2021/45: The Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021**

*Andy Allen declared an interest as a war veteran.*

The Committee considered SR 2021/45: The Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme Regulations (NI) 2021 which provides eligibility for the Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 (S.R. 2021 No. 1) is extended to include persons in receipt of benefits which are deemed to overlap with the social security benefits already included in the eligibility criteria for the Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme.





Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**Agreed:** The Committee considered SR 2021/45: The Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme Regulations (NI) 2021 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the Rule.

### 11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a memo in relation to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Primacy over Northern Ireland Audit Office Reports.

A Member raised concerns regarding the number of Department for Communities reports that are still under consideration by the PAC and the direct impact this has on the Committee for Communities.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the PAC asking that these reports are released as soon as possible.

- ii. The Committee considered a request to brief from the School of Law, Ulster University, on the Discretionary Support Isolation Grant

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request a written briefing.

- iii. The Committee considered a request to brief from the National Insulation Association of Ireland on the insulation of housing stock.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request a written briefing.

- iv. The Committee considered a request to brief from the Council for the Homeless NI on the Housing Outcome in the Programme for Government.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request a written briefing.

The Committee noted the following:



## Northern Ireland Assembly

- i. Copy of memo from the Committee for the Economy to the Department seeking an update on what plans it has to assist 16-24-year-olds seeking employment.
- ii. Note of Policy Forum for Northern Ireland keynote seminar - key priorities for housing policy in Northern Ireland.
- iii. Imtac update on post Brexit travel with assistance dogs.
- iv. Investing Activity Report for Department for Communities 28 February 2021.

### **12. Forward Work Programme**

Members noted that, at its meeting on 11 March 2021, the Committee will begin its deliberations on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill.

### **13. Any Other Business**

#### **UK and Ireland Bid to Host Football World Cup 2030**

A Member raised the issue of the recent announcement by the Westminster Government that it will provide £2.8m to pursue the World Cup bid by England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland to host the 2030 tournament.

The Committee then discussed the economic and sporting benefits to be gained from offering stadia in Northern Ireland as training venues for international teams.

Members felt that the bid could act as a catalyst to progress the Sub Regional and Regional Stadia programmes quickly and to avail of the potential benefits that could follow from being able to offer teams good training venues as well as upgrading the facilities for local clubs and fans.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Communities to ask if she has given consideration to the use of stadia in Northern Ireland as part of this bid.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

### **Model Engineers' Society**

A Member raised the issue of the relocation of the Model Engineers' Society following the National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) decision to evict the group from its Cultra site.

The Member advised the Committee that a new site had been sourced, that NMNI had extended its notice to leave by 3 months and had committed to assisting the Model Engineers' Society with its relocation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ask if there would be funding available to assist with the move as it will be a huge expense to the Model Engineers' Society as it is a voluntary group.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write NMNI to ask what support it had offered the Model Engineers' Society to relocate.

### **14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 11 March 2021 at 9.15 a.m. in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting moved into closed session at 12.50pm to take a briefing from the Bill Office of the NI Assembly.

The meeting was adjourned at 13.02 pm.

**Paula Bradley MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Communities**