



Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 30 September 2021

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

- Ms Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
- Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Mr Andy Allen MLA
- Mr Stephen Dunne MLA
- Ms Ciara Ferguson MLA
- Mr Paul Frew MLA
- Ms Aíne Murphy MLA
- Mr Fra McCann MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Mr Mark Durkan MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance:

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



The meeting commenced at 09.03 am in closed session with the Deputy Chairperson, Kellie Armstrong, in the Chair.

The Committee received advice from the Bill Office on its role in the scrutiny of the three Bills currently at Committee Stage.

Paula Bradley assumed the Chair at 9.29am.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with an options paper on the PIP assessment services contract with Capita.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to await oral briefings from the Department and Capita before deciding on its course of action on this issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request an Assembly Research paper on actions taken to date in relation to PIP and the way forward on this issue.

The meeting went into open session at 9.40am.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee was due to receive a Departmental briefing on October Monitoring Round at today's meeting. However,



this was postponed by the Department at late notice and will now take place at the meeting on 7 October 2021. The Chairperson expressed the Committee's disappointment at the late cancellation.

The Chairperson informed Members that an additional meeting had been provisionally scheduled, post Halloween recess, on a Tuesday morning from 9 – 10.30am. This meeting would be specifically to hear oral evidence on the Private Tenancies Bill.

The Committee agreed to this additional meeting and requested that the Tuesday morning was also now booked for after the Christmas recess going forward.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 23 September 2021.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental response in relation to the increase in domestic energy costs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if it had considered an increase in support payments such as the Cold Weather Payment Scheme, the Affordable Warmth Scheme and the Boiler Replacement Scheme.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a response from the Department for the Economy on rising energy costs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for the Economy to ask if, as part of its energy strategy, it is considering a ban on gas boilers as has recently been introduced in the energy strategy for England and what this might mean for social housing stock in Northern Ireland.



The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental response in relation to the timeline for the Sub Regional Stadia Programme.

Members expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of detail in the response.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if the amount available for this programme will increase as there had been a substantial delay in the programme which had resulted in higher costs to local football clubs. Members would also like to know, if there is an increase in funds, where will this additional budget be found.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the Department to ask how the additional £33m needed to fund the development of Casement Park will be met.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental letter in relation to a Supporting People Feasibility Study.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask what options are being considered in relation to funding e.g. will the funding now move from grants to contracts. Members would also like to know the timeline for this to happen.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental response to queries on SL1 - The Universal Credit (Childcare Costs) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if this will apply to all children or only children with special needs.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental written briefing on its Annual Report and Accounts for 2020/2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if the underpayments of £23.8m outlined in the report have been rectified.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a draft Committee response to the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs' (AERA) call for evidence on the Climate Change (No 2) Bill.

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



5. Private Tenancies Bill

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a draft motion to extend the Committee stage until 14 January 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the motion is laid in the Business Office.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a draft signposting ad for the Committee's call for evidence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the signposting ad is published.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a request from Renter's Voice to brief on the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Renter's Voice to brief at a future meeting.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a tabled press release on the Committee's call for evidence on the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the press release is issued.

6. Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Amendment) Bill

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a draft motion to extend the Committee stage until 28 January 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the motion is laid in the Business Office.

7. Briefing by Charity Law Association on the Charities Bill

The following representative joined the meeting:

Professor Gareth Morgan



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

The Chairperson thanked the representative for his attendance.

8. Departmental briefing on the Women in Community Transformation (WICT) Scheme

The following Officials joined the meeting:

Sharon McCullagh

David Sales

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 Departmental Officials agreed to provide the Committee with the following information:

- Delivery review reports;
- PSNI statistics on areas under paramilitary control;
- Central Procurement Directorate advice on each extension to the WICT Scheme;
- Evaluation work on the scheme;
- A copy of the dashboard for the scheme;
- Details of the previous and new advisory panels when the details are known;
- A copy of the lessons learned from the scheme;
- An outline of the 2 programmes and an annotation of the changes in the programmes;
- A copy of the original tender document; and
- A copy of the feedback received from the WICT participants.



The meeting was suspended at 11.23am.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 11.31am

The meeting restarted at 11.32am with the following Members present: Paula Bradley, Fra McCann, Stephen Dunne, Kellie Armstrong, Ciara Ferguson, Paul Frew and Mark Durkan.

9. Charities Bill

Members noted a Departmental response to queries from the Assembly Research paper on the Bill.

Members noted information from the Community Foundation NI Survey from June 2020.

Members noted a paper from Nfp Synergy.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a tabled Departmental response to queries on Clause 2 of the Bill.

Agreed:

Aine Murphy rejoined the meeting at 11.35am.

10. Briefing by the Ulster Society of Chartered Accountants Charity and Not for Profit Group on the Charities Bill

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Rosemary Peters Gallagher_[thompsonj1]

Sam Snodden

Dee Moran



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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

11. Departmental briefing on SL1 – The Social Security (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The following Officials joined the meeting:

Anne McCleary

Michelle Grills

Karen Kempton

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 Departmental Officials agreed to provide further information on the EEA Member States which are not a signatory to Europe's European Convention on Social and Medical Assistance (ECSMA) and the 1961 European Social Charter (ESC).

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

12. SR 2021/261 - The Pensions Regulator (Employer Resources Test) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/261: The Pensions Regulator (Employer Resources Test) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, had no objection to the Rule.



13. SR 2021/267 - The Social Security Benefits (Claims and Payments) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/267: The Social Security Benefits (Claims and Payments) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, had no objection to the Rule.

14. SR 2021/269 - The Social Security (Habitual Residence and Past Presence) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/269: The Social Security (Habitual Residence and Past Presence (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, had no objection to the Rule.

15. Correspondence

Briefing paper from Save the Children, Action on Children and the National Children's Bureau on child poverty and request to brief the Committee at a future meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the group to a future stakeholder meeting.

Correspondence from the Finance Committee regarding 3 Year Budget-Setting Process.

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

Correspondence from the Finance Committee regarding Unique Circumstances Funding.



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

Departmental response regarding query on Finlock Guttering.

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

Departmental response regarding Foras Na Gaeilge.

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

Departmental response regarding Afghan refugees arriving in Northern Ireland.

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

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- i. Copy of NI Food Strategy Framework Consultation.
- ii. Correspondence from the Finance Committee regarding Monthly Spending - forecast and outturn for August.
- iii. Investing Activity Report for Department for Communities.
- iv. Correspondence from the Committee for Education regarding physical literacy and physical education in Schools.

16. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson informed Members that, at the meeting on 7 October 2021, the Committee will be briefed by Departmental Officials on October Monitoring Round and by 2 individuals on the Charities Bill.



17. Any Other Business

A Member raised the issues of people struggling to sell homes due to the short number of years left on a lease and the status of the Shared Prosperity Fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for an update of discussions on the leasehold issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for an update on the Shared Prosperity Fund.

18. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 7 October 2021 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings, at 9.00 am.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.34 pm.

Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities