



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 25 November 2021

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Ms Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Andy Allen MLA
Mr Stephen Dunne MLA
Mr Paul Frew MLA
Ms Áine Murphy MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Ciara Ferguson MLA
Mr Mark Durkan MLA
Ms Aisling Reilly MLA

In Attendance: Dr Janice Thompson (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 meeting began in open session at 9.05 am. The Chairperson, Paula Bradley, assumed the Chair. The following Members were present at the start of the open session: Paula Bradley, Kellie Armstrong, Andy Allen, Stephen Dunne, Ciara Ferguson, Aisling Reilly.

Andy Allen declared an interest as a private landlord.

Stephen Dunne declared an interest as a private landlord.

Paul Frew declared an interest as a private landlord.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 18 November 2021.

Paul Frew joined the meeting at 9.09 am.

Mark Durkan joined the meeting at 9.09 am.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that the Executive had reinforced the work from home message. As such, Members were encouraged to attend future Committee meetings via Starleaf, where possible.



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The Chairperson informed Members that, in response to the recent Executive decisions on holding events, Minister Hargey had cancelled the reception planned for 8 December in recognition of the success of the Antrim Senior and Minor Camogie Teams.

4. Matters Arising

Aine Murphy joined the meeting at 09.14 am.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental response in relation to the Housing Executive Revitalisation Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting that the Department keeps the Committee informed of progress on this issue, particularly if there is slippage regarding timescales.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental response in relation to the Supporting People Feasibility Study.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting an update on the proposed budget.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental response in relation to Welfare Mitigations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing with the Review Panel and add the issue to the Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental response in relation to the WICT Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department, welcoming the response and requesting to be kept informed of the programme's progression.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a response from Derry and Strabane District Council in relation to its access inclusion model.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the access inclusion model to the Department as a proposed model of good practice in determining if appeal venues are accessible.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a response from Capita in relation to the Committees queries on PIP. The Committee was content to note.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental response in relation to Committee queries on the Rates Support Grant.

The Committee also agreed to write to the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) regarding the current financial circumstances for Councils.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental response in relation to the Disability Strategy Working Group.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the expert panel enquiring; whether the BS8300 as a minimum standard was the standard that the panel were prepared to accept; and to enquire how the BS8300 standard would be applied to an old building that did not meet the requisite standard?

5. Clause by Clause consideration of the Charities Bill

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee was now commencing the formal clause by clause considerations of the Charities Bill with Departmental Officials.

The Chairperson welcomed the following Officials to the meeting:

Martin Ireland

Colleen Bell

The Officials took part in a question and answer session with Members, and provided final clarifications in response to Members' queries in advance of the formal clause by clause stage.

Clause 1: Actions of Commission staff treated as Commission actions?



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The Chairperson put the question to Members: if the Committee was content with Clause 1 subject to the proposed Departmental amendments?

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 1 subject to the proposed Departmental amendments.

Clause 2: Power of the Commission to delegate to Staff.

The Chairperson put the question to Members: if the Committee was content with Clause 2 subject to the proposed Departmental amendments?

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 2 subject to the proposed Departmental amendments.

Clause 3: Regulations exempting Charities from registering by reference to thresholds.

The Chairperson put the question to Members: if the Committee was content with Clause 3 as drafted by the Department?

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 3 as drafted by the Department.

Clause 4: Short title and Commencement.

The Chairperson put the question to Members: if the Committee was content with Clause 4 as drafted by the Department?

Agreed: The Committee was content with Clause 4 as drafted by the Department.

The Chairperson put the question to Members: if the Committee agreed the long title of the Bill?

Agreed: The Committee was content with the long title of the Bill.

The Chairperson thanked the Officials for their attendance.

The Meeting went into closed session at 9.33 am to allow Members to prepare for the Deliberations on the Private Tenancies Bill and to take advice from Claire McCanny, Bill Office Clerk.

The Meeting went into open session at 10.03 am.



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6. Committee Deliberations on the Private Tenancies Bill

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental Officials to the meeting:

David Polley

Eilish O'Neill

Karen Barr

The Chairperson reminded Members that this was not the formal Clause by Clause stage, but rather an opportunity for Members to discuss Clauses comprehensively with Officials.

Clause 1. Tenant to be given notice regarding certain matters

Members emphasised the need for easy-read guides to be made available; that internet links to webpages of available financial or legal support for Tenants be readily accessible; and that all information and webpage links be accessible centrally on NI Direct.

Agreed: The Officials agreed that the measures as outlined by the Committee would be adopted, in addition to which, a template for Landlords would also be available for ease of use and uniformity of documentation.

Clause 2. Tenant to be given notice regarding certain past matters

The Committee was content at this stage with Clause 2 as drafted.

Clause 3. Tenant to be provided with a rent receipt for payment in cash

Members raised concerns regarding; the concept of a receipt, enquiring whether a mobile text message or email were acceptable; whether the Department knew of any instances where, having paid rent in cash and not received a receipt, a tenant was subsequently accused of a missed rental payment by a landlord; whether the Department would consider adding a timeframe to the Bill's definition of 'as soon as is reasonably possible'; if a tenant lodges a complaint in relation to a landlord's failure to issue a receipt following a cash payment of rent, where is this complaint upheld?; Members queried whether payments other than rent within friendship



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groups, where one is the tenant and the other the landlord, could be affected by the Bill.

Agreed: The Officials agreed to confirm the definition of a receipt with Consumer Law, what was an acceptable format, and whether both parties would be required to keep a copy, and report their findings to the Committee.

The Officials agreed to contact Housing Rights and report back to the Committee regarding instances where, having paid rent in cash and not received a receipt, a tenant was subsequently accused of a missed rental payment by a landlord.

The Officials agreed to write back to the Committee after receiving legal advice regarding the legality of adding a timeframe to 'reasonably possible'. The Officials agreed to consider drafting a new Clause detailing that only payments in relation to the rented property would fall under the remit of the Bill.

Clause 4. Limit on Tenancy Deposit Amount

Members raised the issue whether the legal responsibility to ensure a tenant's deposit is lodged with the Tenancy Deposit Scheme rests with the landlord, the agent, or both.

Agreed: The Officials agreed to check on this and write to the Committee with the response.

Clause 5. Increase in time limits for requirements relating to tenancy deposits

The Committee did not raise any issues with the Clause.

Due to time constraints, the Committee agreed to move to Agenda Item 7, a Departmental briefing on Increased Housing Options, at 11.04am. The Committee agreed to continue deliberations on the remaining clauses of the Private Tenancies Bill at its meeting on Tuesday 30 November 2021, recommencing at Clause 6.

7. Departmental briefing on Increased Housing Options

The following Departmental Officials joined the meeting:

Mr David Polley



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Mr Paul Price

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 Officials agreed to the following actions;

- To forward the webpage link to access the Public Land Registry;
- To send a copy of the Empty Homes Report;
- To send figures illustrating the amount of money lent under the Affordable Homes Loans Fund which was subsequently returned to the Fund as proposed building projects were not realised;
- To send the overall budget amount made available under the Affordable Homes Loans Fund;
- To send figures detailing the number of Housing Association houses sold in the previous year;
- To send figures demonstrating the number of those officially classed as homeless;
- To send the respective webpage links to access the Homeless Bulletin and the Housing Bulletin.

8. Northern Ireland Turf Association briefing on the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Amendments) Bill

Andy Allen left the meeting at 12.09 pm.

Stephen Dunne left the meeting at 12.42 pm.

Áine Murphy left the meeting at 12.58 pm.

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Mr Paul McLean

Mr Gary Toal



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Mr Michael Fee

The representatives from the Northern Ireland Turf Association briefed the Committee and took part in a question and answer session with Members.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

9. Correspondence

The Chairperson informed Members they had received a request from the Northern Ireland Sports Forum to brief the Committee on the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Amendments) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the NI Sports Forum to brief on 2 December 2021.

The Chairperson informed Members they had received a request from Oasis Gaming to brief the Committee on the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Amendments) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to confirm with Oasis Gaming that they were scheduled to brief on 9 December 2021.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson informed Members that, at the meeting on 2 December, the Committee will continue its deliberations of the Private Tenancies Bill; receive a briefing by RaISe on the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Amendment Bill); and receive Departmental briefings on the Fuel Poverty payments and the Sub Regional Stadia Programme.



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11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 30 November 2021 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, at 9.00 am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.11 pm.

Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities