



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Communities

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 11 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 Paul Frew MLA  
Ms Áine Murphy MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**  
Mr Stephen Dunne MLA  
Mr Mark Durkan MLA  
Ms Ciara Ferguson MLA  
Ms Aisling Reilly MLA

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



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The meeting began in open session at 9.04 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, Mark Durkan, Ciara Ferguson, Paul Frew, Aisling Reilly.

### **1. Ministerial briefing on the Social Security (Terminal Illness) Bill**

*Áine Murphy joined the meeting at 9.07am*

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister had requested to brief the Committee on the Social Security (Terminal Illness) Bill at today's meeting.

The Chairperson welcomed the Minister, Deirdre Hargey and Officials, Anne McCleary and Mark McCartney. The Minister briefed the Committee and took part in a question and answer session with Members.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and the Officials for their attendance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to support the Minister's request for accelerated passage for the Social Security (Terminal Illness) Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department enquiring whether sufficient resources were in place to ensure effective implementation of the legislation, once it has been passed.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Speaker would conduct a short Act of Remembrance in the Senate Chamber at 10.55am as a focus for those who wished to mark the 2-minute silence at 11am for Remembrance Day.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to suspend the meeting from 10.50am until 11.10am to allow Members who wished to attend the Act of Remembrance an opportunity to do so.

*The meeting went into closed session at 09:30am to allow the Committee to receive training on Effective Questioning from Kate Faragher of Bespoke Skills.*



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### 2. Effective Questioning Training

The Chairperson welcomed Kate Faragher of Bespoke Skills. The Committee received training on Effective Questioning as a refresher to last year's training session and in response to the number of new Members recently joining the Committee.

The Chairperson thanked Kate Faragher for her attendance.

*The meeting went into open session at 10:35am with all Members present*

*Andy Allen declared an interest as a charity trustee.*

### 3. Apologies

There were no apologies.

### 4. Draft Minutes

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 4 November 2021.

### 5. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that she had recently met with National Energy NI to discuss fuel poverty.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister requesting a timeline and specific figures for winter fuel payments in NI, as current figures represent the UK as a whole. The Committee also requested figures indicating what the financial implications would be to the Executive of an increase of £20 to £50 per household.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Child Poverty Action Group regarding the financial implications of removing the two child limit from the social security system and introducing a £20 child payment for children in families eligible for means-tested benefits.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for the Economy to ask if there have been negotiations with energy providers in relation to rising energy prices and whether any solutions were being brought forward.

### 6. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental response in relation to SL1 – The Jobseeker’s Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance. The Committee was content to note the response.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental update in relation to the Changing Places Toilet Fund.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department enquiring as to the accessibility of these toilet facilities for the public and for assurance that funds were being effectively invested to accommodate all day access to these facilities.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental response in relation to the Covid-19 Heating Payment Scheme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting figures on the number of applicants that had received a payment following a successful appeal.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental response in relation to The Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021. The Committee was content to note the response.



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The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental response in relation to Legislative Consent Motions. The Committee was content to note the response.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental response in relation to the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF).

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department enquiring as to the potential social impacts if the SPF is not forthcoming.

*The meeting was adjourned at 10.48am*

*The meeting restarted in open session at 11.25am and the Committee moved to its deliberations on the Charities Bill*

*Stephen Dunne left the meeting at 11.25am.*

### **7. Committee deliberations on the Charities Bill**

The Chairperson welcomed Departmental Officials Sharron Russell and Martin Ireland to the meeting.

The Officials took the Committee through the Department's response to its queries on the Clauses of the Bill from the meeting of the 21<sup>st</sup> October and also took part in a question and answer session with Members.

The Chairperson thanked Sharron and Martin for their attendance.

*The meeting went into closed session at 11.51am to allow Members to take advice from Claire McCanny, Bill Office Clerk*

*The meeting went into open session 12.12pm*

*The meeting returned to the remaining Matters Arising at 12.12pm.*



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## 8. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental response in relation to the further information requested on the audit system and specifically on the £23.8m underpayments. The Committee was content to note the response.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental response in relation to queries raised by Members regarding the transfer of Functions Order and the use of courts as venues for appeals.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting the mandatory access requirement standards that disability access officers need to meet.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Derry City and Strabane District Council requesting a copy of their assessment template.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental response in relation to Welfare Reform Mitigations. The Committee was content to note the response.

*Kellie Armstrong left the meeting at 12.17pm*

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting a list of applicants that were successful in receiving funding.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a Departmental response in relation to the development of Social Inclusion Strategies. The Committee was content to note the response.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received a response from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in relation to the winter fuel payment.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Communities enquiring when winter fuel payments had most recently been reviewed and assessed for Northern Ireland.



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**9. SR 2021/285 – The Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021**

**Agreed:** The Committee considered SR 2021/285 – The Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report, had no objection to the rule.

**10. SR 2021/288 – The Jobseeker’s Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021**

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/288 – The Jobseeker’s Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report, had no objection to the rule.

**11. SR 2021/289 – The Social Security (Information sharing in relation to Welfare Services etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021**

**Agreed:** The Committee considered SR 2021-289 – The Social Security (Information sharing in relation to Welfare Services etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2021 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report, had no objection to the rule.

**12. Correspondence**

The Chairperson informed Members that they had received correspondence from the Training for Women Network regarding the recent Departmental briefing on the WICT Programme.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward it to the Department for further comment.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- i. Copy of correspondence from the Justice Committee to the Department for Communities regarding Court Licensing Fees.
- ii. Copy of All-Party Group on Reducing Harm Related to Gambling Inquiry Report on the Future Regulation of Gambling.
- iii. Copy of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Annual Report 2020 to 2021.

### **13. Forward Work Programme**

The Chairperson informed Members that there will be a meeting on 16 November 2021 at 9.00am to take evidence on the Private Tenancies Bill.

### **14. Any Other Business**

A Member raised an issue in relation to cuts in the Rates Support Grant to local councils.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting a written briefing on the Rates Support Grant.

### **15. Date, Time and Place of the Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 16 November 2021 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, at 9.00 am.

*The meeting was adjourned at 12:30pm.*





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