



Northern Ireland Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday 12 March 2020
Room 29 Parliament Buildings**

Present: Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)
Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Andy Allen MBE MLA
Mark Durkan MLA
Sinead Ennis MLA
Robin Newton MBE MLA
Fra McCann MLA
Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

In Attendance: Kevin Pelan (Assembly Clerk)
Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Claire Milliken (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Supervisor)
Oliver Bellew (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Jonathan Buckley MLA

The meeting commenced in open session at 10:01 a.m.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Committee Chairperson welcomed Fra McCann MLA to the Committee.

Members noted a memo outlining plans for the Committee's strategic planning day.

Sinead Ennis joined the meeting at 10:03 a.m.

The Committee considered a NIAO report on governance issues in Sport NI.

The following interest was declared:

Carál Ni Chuilín declared an interest as a former Minister of DCAL.

Agreed: Members agreed to schedule a future Departmental briefing on this issue.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 5 March 2020.

4. Matters Arising

Members noted further information, including speaking notes from Cliff Edge Coalition, following their briefing session on 20 February.

Members noted a Departmental response to Committee queries on the Social Security (Fines) (Deductions from Benefits) Regulations and The Social Fund Funeral Expenses (Amendment) Regulations.

Members noted a Departmental response to Committee queries on PIP, Universal Credit and the Bereavement Support Payment Regulations.

Members noted a Departmental response to Committee queries regarding a consultation on PIP.

Mark Durkan MLA joined the meeting at 10:06 a.m.

Members considered a Departmental response to Committee queries on the following:

- Ongoing development projects
- Public realm schemes
- City Deals
- Community planning
- Causeway Coast and Glens Council
- Code of Conduct for councillors; and
- Woodvale and Shankill Community Housing Association

Agreed: Members agreed to note and to revisit a number of these issues at a later date.

Members noted a Departmental response to Committee queries on the Sub Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer.

Members noted a copy of an Advice NI press release on failures affecting vulnerable and disabled people claiming Universal Credit.

5. Correspondence

The Chairperson drew members' attention to correspondence from the Alzheimer's Society regarding Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) 'Dementia Friendly Large Organisation of the Year 2019 award, including the opportunity for members to visit a scheme that supports people living with dementia.

Agreed: Members agreed to organise a meeting/visit to a scheme that supports people living with dementia or the NIHE after Easter recess.

Agreed: Members agreed to write a letter of congratulations to the NIHE on their award.

The Committee considered an Action for Children request to brief the Committee on the challenges for children, young people and families.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Action for Children requesting a briefing paper.

The Committee considered an Irish Congress of Trade Unions request to brief the Committee in relation to gender and sexual orientation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions requesting a briefing paper.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Armoy Community Association regarding North Antrim.

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

The Committee noted the following:

- I. A copy of a NIPSA report entitled '21st Century Housing for Northern Ireland'
- II. A copy of the Sports Council for NI Annual Report and Accounts year ended 23 March 2018.
- III. A memo from the Clerk to the Committee for Finance regarding the analysis of the impact on Local Government Pension Scheme of the McCloud Ruling.

6. Briefing by Deputy Secretary for Strategic Policy and Professional Services

The following departmental officials joined the meeting at 10:12 a.m.

Beverley Wall, Deputy Secretary for Strategic Policy and Professional Services

Gavin Patrick, Director of Financial Management
Paul McKillen, Director of Central Policy
Allison Cosgrove, Director of Transformation, Communication and Engagement
Karen Ward, Director of Governance and Commercial Services

The officials provided the Committee with an overview of the work of Strategic Policy and Professional Services

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek the following:

- A geographical breakdown of calls made to the Make The Call helpline
- A reply to Committee queries on whether the operation of post offices is a reserved matter

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

7. Departmental briefing on Legislative Consent Motion – Westminster Pension Schemes Bill

The following departmental officials joined the meeting at 11:25 a.m.

Anne McCleary, Director of Social Security, Policy and Legislation
Gerry McCann, State and Private Pensions & EU
Doreen Roy, State and Private Pensions

The officials provided the Committee with an overview of the Legislative Consent Motion – Westminster Pension Schemes Bill.

The oral evidence was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

8. Consideration of Statutory Rule

SR 2020/26 – The Pneumoconiosis, Etc., (Workers’ Compensation) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland)

The Committee considered The Pneumoconiosis, Etc., (Workers’ Compensation) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) which would provide lump sum compensation to sufferers of certain dust-related diseases and makes provision for payments to dependants, as defined by the order, where sufferers did not receive a compensation payment under the order before their death.

The Rule will maintain parity with GB when it comes to social security payments and will increase payments in line with the Consumer Price Index.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/26 – The Pneumoconiosis, Etc., (Workers’ Compensation) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland), and recommended that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

9. Any Other Business

A member raised concerns that legislation for Welfare Reform mitigations had not yet been introduced and that this had serious implications for continuation of payments after 31 March.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Department requesting an urgent update on this issue.

Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The Committee’s strategic planning day will be on Thursday 19 March at 10.00 a.m. in the Skainos Centre, Newtownards Road.

The meeting adjourned at 11.51 p.m.

Ms Paula Bradley MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities