



# Northern Ireland Assembly

## COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES

### MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Wednesday 29 April 2020**  
**Room 29, Parliament Buildings**

Present, Senate: Paula Bradley MLA (Chairperson)  
Andy Allen MBE MLA

Present, Teleconferencing: Kellie Armstrong MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mark Durkan MLA  
Sinéad Ennis MLA  
Fra McCann MLA  
Carál Ní Chuilín MLA  
Jonathan Buckley MLA  
Robin Newton MBE MLA

In Attendance: Kevin Pelan (Assembly Clerk)  
Sean McCann (Assistant Assembly Clerk)  
Antoinette Bowen (Clerical Supervisor)

*The meeting commenced in open session at 13:02 p.m.*

#### **1. Apologies**

There were no apologies to record.

#### **2. Chairperson's Business**

The Committee noted updated guidance from the Chairpersons' Liaison Group that stated that Committees should only meet to consider Covid-19 related issues and that, if Committees decided to meet, the meetings should last no longer than 75 minutes.

## **SL1 – The Draft Local Government (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Council Meetings) Regulations (NI) 2020**

The Chairperson advised members that the Department had asked the Committee to urgently consider the proposed Statutory Rule.

The following departmental official joined the meeting via teleconference at 13.04 p.m.:

Julie Broadway, Governance and Administration

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

*Agreed:* The Committee considered the Draft Local Government (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Council Meetings) Regulations (NI) 2020 and was content that the Rule is made.

The Chairperson thanked the official for her attendance.

## **SR 2018/98 - The Social Security (Fines) (Deductions from Benefits) Regulations (NI) 2018**

The Chairperson advised members that the Committee considered these regulations at its meeting on 30 January 2020 as part of the backlog of legacy regulations and had requested additional information. The Chairperson reminded the Committee that it was content when it considered the departmental response to its queries at the meeting on 12 March 2020 but that the Committee hadn't proceeded to approve the regulations.

The Rule will provide for deductions to be made from certain social security benefits where a fine or compensation order has been imposed upon a person by a court to meet the sums due in respect of such fines and compensation orders.

*Agreed:* The Committee considered SR 2018/98 - The Social Security (Fines) (Deductions from Benefits) Regulations (NI) 2018 and had no objection to the Rule.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 22 April 2020.

### **4. Matters Arising**

Members considered a draft letter to the Minister of Infrastructure in relation to capital projects post Covid-19.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to issue the letter as drafted.

Members considered a Departmental response to queries on Sport NI Funding to local councils.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking for the following further information:

- A breakdown by council area of the specific projects funded
- Further details on which councils have availed previously of the Capital Investment Fund and what plans Sport NI has for a post Covid-19 stimulus package for sports clubs, particularly those in rural areas.
- Whether councils had not drawn down funding they were entitled from the Everybody Active Funding scheme due to a lack of partnership funding, particularly in areas of multiple deprivation.

Members noted a draft Committee response on the budget.

## **5. Correspondence**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) on the Health and Social Care remote language interpreting service.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on whether there are any plans to extend this support to members of the Deaf community who are applying for benefits and if there has been any consideration, in discussion with the Department for Health, to integrating this approach with the function of job and benefit offices.

The Committee noted the following:

- I. Copy of New Decade New Approach topics document.
- II. Copy of North South Language Body 2017 Annual Report and Accounts.
- III. Copy of correspondence from the Committee for Health to the Department regarding Hourglass, the elder abuse support charity.

## **6. Legislative Consent Motion - Westminster Pension Schemes Bill– Consideration and Approval of Committee Report**

The Committee considered the draft report on the Legislative Consent Motion – Westminster Pension Schemes Bill.

### **Powers and Membership**

The Committee considered the Powers and Membership section of the report (paragraphs 1-3) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Powers and Membership section of the report.

## **Background**

The Committee considered the Background section of the report (paragraphs 4-9) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Background section of the report.

## **Collective Defined Contribution Pensions**

The Committee considered the Collective Defined Contribution Pensions section of the report (paragraph 10-21) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Collective Defined Contribution Pensions section of the report.

## **Communication Workers Union**

The Committee considered evidence from the Communication Workers Union section of the report (paragraphs 22-30) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Communication Workers Union section of the report.

## **Royal Mail**

The Committee considered evidence from the Royal Mail section of the report (paragraphs 31-36) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Royal Mail section of the report.

## **Trades Union Congress**

The Committee considered evidence from the Trades Union Congress section of the report (paragraphs 37-44) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Trades Union Congress Section of the report.

## **Unite the Union**

The Committee considered evidence from the Unite the Union section of the report (paragraphs 45-54) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Unite the Union section of the report.

## **Pension Regulator**

The Committee considered the Pension Regulator section of the report (paragraphs 55-73) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Pension Regulator section of the report.

## **Pensions Dashboards**

The Committee considered the Pension Dashboards section of the report (paragraphs 74-75) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Pension Dashboards section of the report.

## **Further Provisions**

The Committee considered the Further Provisions relating to pension schemes section of the report (paragraph 76-80) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Further Provisions section of the report.

## **Committee consideration of the Bill and LCM**

The Committee considered the Committee consideration of the bill and LCM section of the report (paragraph 81-93) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Committee consideration and LCM section of the report.

## **Glossary**

The Committee considered the Glossary section of the report as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Glossary section of the report.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content for the Report on the Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Westminster Pensions Scheme Bill (NIA/19/17-22) to be printed.

## **7. Consideration of Secondary Legislation**

**SL1 – The Draft Local Government Pension Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2020**

The following interests were declared:

Andy Allen MLA declared an interest as a member of LGPS (NI)  
Robin Newton MLA declared an interest as a member of LGPS (NI)  
Sinead Ennis MLA declared an interest as a member of LGPS (NI)  
Jonathan Buckley MLA declared an interest as a member of LGPS (NI)  
Paula Bradley MLA declared an interest as a member of LGPS (NI)  
Mark Durkan MLA declared an interest as his wife is a member of LGPS (NI)  
Kellie Armstrong MLA declared an interest as a member of LGPS (NI)

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content for the Rule to be made.

#### **8. SR 2020/69 – The Maternity Allowance and Statutory Maternity Pay (Normal Weekly Earnings etc.) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/66 - The Maternity Allowance and Statutory Maternity Pay (Normal Weekly Earnings etc.) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2020. The purpose of the Rule is to prevent an employee from experiencing disadvantage in relation to Statutory Maternity Pay and Maternity Allowance as a result of their being ‘furloughed’ under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. It modifies the way in which Normal Weekly Earnings are calculated in cases where an employee has been on furlough for all or part of the relevant assessment period.

*Agreed:* The Committee considered SR 2020/69 - The Maternity Allowance and Statutory Maternity Pay (Normal Weekly Earnings etc.) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, had no objection to the rule.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking if individuals on maternity leave were to receive 90% of their salary/wage based on their full salary/wage or if it is based on the recently introduced furlough arrangements i.e. 80% of their salary/wage.

#### **9. SR 2020/67 – The Discretionary Support (Amendment No. 2) (Covid-19) Regulations (NI) 2020**

The Committee noted that these regulations were debated and approved in the House on Tuesday 21 April.

#### **10. Any Other Business**

The Chairperson advised members that, given the significant impact of Covid-19 on local councils, the Committee may wish to request a briefing from SOLACE NI.

*Agreed:* The Committee will request a briefing from SOLACE at the meeting on 13 May 2020.

A member of the Committee raised an issue in relation to the Departmental budget paper considered by the Committee on 22 April in which coronavirus funding to councils had been listed.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department asking how departmental coronavirus funding to councils has been communicated.

A member of the Committee raised issues regarding the Supporting People Fund and how it is currently being managed.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the department requesting a breakdown of the Covid-19 funding allocated to NIHE, and its subsequent allocation to service providers; specifically, to those housing associations providing care and accommodation for older people.

A member of the Committee raised concerns in relation to Northern Ireland being the only part of the UK where supermarkets have not been able to access the database for priority online delivery slots for elderly and vulnerable people.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department and to the Department for Health asking what they are doing to accelerate the process to allow supermarkets to access the information.

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

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 13 May at 11.30 a.m. Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting adjourned at 13.50p.m.*

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