



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 2 May 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

- Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson) MLA
- Ms Ciara Ferguson (Deputy Chairperson) MLA
- Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA
- Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
- Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
- Ms Sian Mulholland MLA
- Mr Brian Kingston MLA

Apologies:

- Mr Maurice Bradley MLA

In Attendance:

- Ms Emer Boyle (Assembly Clerk)
- Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Clerk)
- Mrs Katie Egan (Clerical Supervisor)
- Mrs Tracey McCaughey (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in open session at 10.00am



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1. Apologies

Apologies are listed above.

2. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business to report.

3. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the draft minutes from the meeting on 25 April 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes as drafted.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a reply from the Minister in relation to Housing as a stand-alone outcome in the Programme for Government.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Executive seeking an update on whether or not Housing will be identified as a stand-alone outcome in the Programme for Government as committed to in New Decade New Approach.



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The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a reply from Co-Ownership on completions by Council Area and Assembly Area during 2023-24.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to Co-ownership to ask what work is being undertaken to address the disparity in the figures for completions.

Members noted a reply from Carers NI in relation to Carers Allowance in the Republic of Ireland.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply in relation to Neighbourhood Renewal.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department seeking further information in relation to:

- The test and learn initiative, to include when it began and what it involves, and
- The Place Based approach, to include what plans are in place and whether there is potential for plans to be in place for the summer months

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply in relation to gambling legislation. Members expressed disappointment that work on bringing forward a comprehensive gambling Bill, to include online gambling, will not progress in the current mandate.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask that Committee is provided with:

- Copies of the Draft codes of practice, including details on the manner in which land-based facilities for gambling are provided for
- A copy of the survey questions / questionnaire being used in the prevalence study, and
- A timeline for completion of the survey with an indication of when Committee will be able to receive a briefing on its findings.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to OFCOM to ask for briefing at a future Committee meeting on its role in Northern Ireland in relation to gambling regulation.



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The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Ministerial reply in relation to the Scottish model for a mortgage rescue scheme.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre to ask whether it has updated the research study data (between 2021 and current day) or has more real time information or longitudinal data, emphasising that Members feel that as the report was published in 2021, it may not reflect accurately what is happening now in terms of the levels of house repossessions in the current cost of living crisis.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for a copy of the research used to inform the housing stress report and whether the Department uses its own information, such as numbers of applications for rates relief, as indicators of financial stress.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental letter in relation to a recent announcement by the Prime Minister on welfare reform.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for a briefing on this issue at a future Committee meeting when more information is available and to voice Members' concerns about the proposals outlined in the letter, particularly in relation to the qualifications of the proposed specialist work and health professionals and work coaches.

5. Briefing by Sport NI

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Richard Archibald, Interim CEO

Brian McKimm, Interim COO

Simon Burrows, Accountant



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A question and answer session with Members followed and the main topics of the discussion were funding for grassroots sports, governance issues, public health outcomes, engagement on women and disability sport, capital funding and transport in sport

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for briefing the Committee.

Agreed: That Sport NI provides figures in relation to the amount of money that Sport NI investment can leverage in return from clubs and organisations and an explanation and further detail on Sport NI's capital funding allocations to clubs.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department asking for a copy of the Deloitte report in relation to Sport NI when it is finalised.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11.10a.m.

The meeting resumed at 11.23a.m. with all Members present.

6. Briefing by Disabled People's Organisation on the Disability Strategy

Kellie Armstrong declared an interest as a previous member of IMTAC.

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Tony O'Reilly North West Forum of People with Disabilities – via Zoom

June Best – Imtac, with support from Michael Lorimer

Amanda Paul - Centre for Independent Living

David McDonald - The Omnibus Partnership

Dermot Devlin – My Way Access

A question and answer session followed and the main areas of discussion were delays in the formulation of a disability strategy, the co-design process,



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resource allocation and working relationships with the Department for Communities.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for briefing the Committee.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister expressing the Committee's disappointment at the lack of progress on a disability strategy and raising concerns about the reported treatment of the disabled people's organisations representatives who were part of the co-design process and who had expressed that they felt they felt "dumped" following the completion of the co-design process.

Agreed: The Committee requested sight of the draft disability strategy and expressed a strong wish for the draft strategy to be shared with those involved in the development of it. Members also requested an update on the research that the Department had commissioned as part of the co-design work and agreed to ask the Department about its plan to evaluate the co-design process.

7. SL1 - The Universal Credit (Administrative Earnings Threshold) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024

The Chairperson informed Members that the purpose of the proposed Rule is to raise the Universal Credit Administrative Earnings Threshold to 18 hours per week at the National Living Wage for single claimants, or for couples a total of 29 hours between them at the National Living Wage, from 13 May 2024.

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



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8. SR 2024/99 - The Registered Rents (Increase) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered S.R. 2024/99 - The Registered Rents (Increase) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024 and has no objection to the rule.

9. Correspondence

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with two correspondence memos with proposed actions set out on each.

Agreed: That the requests in correspondence to brief the Committee are considered at the Committee's planning session on 9 May.

10. Forward work programme

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee's strategic planning session will take place on 9 May when the focus will be on agreeing and prioritising a work programme beyond the meeting on 16 May when the Committee will have several briefings in relation to the forthcoming Defective Premises Bill.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a draft agenda and details for the session next week, for their review and comment.

Members were asked to identify their top 5 priorities for the Committee Planning session, to the Clerk, by noon next Tuesday 9th May by email.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for a timeline on all the primary legislation it proposes to bring forward in this mandate.



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for an updated position on the budgetary pressure it is facing in 2024-25.

11. Any other business

Kellie Armstrong informed the Committee that she had received correspondence from an individual on the proposed Defective Premises Bill and agreed to forward a copy to the Clerk for inclusion in papers for the meeting on 16 May which will focus on this Bill.

12. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10am on Thursday 09 May, in First Steps Women's Centre, Dungannon.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.40p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities