



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 20 June 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present: Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson) MLA
Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA (via Zoom)
Ms Ciara Ferguson (Deputy Chairperson) MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mr Brian Kingston MLA

Apologies: Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA
Ms Sian Mulholland MLA

In Attendance: Ms Emer Boyle (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Chris McAfee (Clerical Supervisor)
Mrs Tracey McCaughey (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in open session at 10.01a.m.



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Colm Gildernew declared an interest as a private landlord.

Andy Allen declared an interest as a private landlord and as Chairperson of the All-Party Group on Fuel Poverty.

1. Apologies

Apologies are listed above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a memo from the Clerk in relation to the event for the NI Deaf Community that the Committee will hold on 27 June immediately after the Committee meeting.

Agreed: That a notification is sent to invite all MLAs to attend the event.

The Chairperson raised the issue of an interview on Sunday Politics on 16 June with Gary Lightbody from Snow Patrol in relation to support for the Arts.

Agreed: That Gary Lightbody is invited to brief the Committee at a meeting in September 2024.

The Chairperson informed Members about a recent report by the Commissioner for Older People NI – “At the centre of government planning - The Programme for Government and preparing for an ageing population”.

Agreed: That a copy of the report is circulated to Members.



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3. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the draft minutes from the meeting on 13 June 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes as drafted.

4. Matters Arising

Members noted a reply from a reply from the Gambling Commission to Committee queries in relation to its remit in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for an update on ongoing work in relation to gambling regulation, for a timeframe for the Codes of Practice and to ask whether there is still a Bill team in place working to progress the next stages of Gambling law reforms.

Agreed: That a copy of the recent All-Party Group (APG) on Reducing Harm Related to Gambling report is requested and that members of the APG are invited to brief at a future Committee meeting.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a reply from the Department of Finance to Committee queries on The Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) Bill.

Agreed: That the response is included in an annex of the final Committee report on the Bill.

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting via Zoom at 10.13a.m.



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5. Briefing by Electrical Safety First (ESF)

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Karter Kane - Policy and Public Affairs advisor

Lesley Rudd - CEO

A question and answer session followed the representatives' briefing and the main areas of discussion were skills requirements for testing, regulating the safety of charging devices, the need for secondary legislation, the legal position of inspection of electricians when selling a house, lithium ion batteries, 5-year electrical safety checks and electrical capacity in homes.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for briefing the Committee.

Agreed: That a copy of the ESF briefing paper is forwarded to the Housing Executive, the Department for Communities, the Utility Regulator and the Health and Safety Executive NI for each organisation to comment on the issues raised within it.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for the Economy to ask about planning to support skills development needed to carry out electrical safety checks given the growth in battery use and the growing use of home-charging and the capacity of the domestic consumer unit.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department seeking an update on regulations still to be introduced under the Private Tenancies Act and further information on when these will be brought forward.

Agreed: That letters are sent to the Housing Executive and the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) to ask what work is ongoing in relation to electrical safety and how both organisations will transition from 10 year to 5-year checks. The Committee would also like to know if any work is being undertaken to plan for future capacity of the consumer units within existing housing portfolios and in relation to the Housing Condition Survey in terms of what future requirements may be needed.



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Agreed: That a copy of the ESF briefing paper is sent to the National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC) for comment and to ask NICEIC if they have been involved in discussions in bringing forward secondary legislation in relation to electrical safety.

6. Briefing by Renters' First

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Andrew Larmour – Renters' Voice member

Jennifer Millar – Renters' Voice member

Christine Crossan – Participation and Policy Officer

A question and answer session followed the representatives' briefing and the main areas of discussion were letting fees, no fault evictions, protection for renters, repairs, high levels of rent, mid tenancy fees, holding deposits, housing supply in the private rented sector, enforcement and the need for a fitness standard.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for briefing the Committee.

Agreed: That copies of any research reports published by Renters' Voice are forwarded to the Committee.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for more information on the areas that the Housing Miscellaneous Provisions Bill will cover and whether the Bill will address housing standards and affordability in the private rented sector.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to all local councils to ask for information on the number of reports made to environment health in relation to private rented



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sector housing over the last five years, to include tenure, actions taken and response time taken for completion.

Agreed: That letters are sent to NIFHA, the Housing Executive and the Home Office to ask if they are aware of dwellings being used for emergency accommodation and how they can ensure that these premises are not being made available for emergency use as a result of a no-fault eviction having taken place.

The Chairperson suspended the meeting at 11.39a.m.

The meeting resumed at 11.47a.m.

7. Briefing by Fuel Poverty Coalition

The following representatives joined the meeting:

Pat Austin - Chair of the Fuel Poverty Coalition NI and Director, National Energy Action NI

Christine Irvine – Senior Policy Manager, Marie Curie

Nichola MacDougall – NI Training Officer, National Energy Action NI

A question and answer session followed the representatives' briefing and the main areas of discussion were engagement with the public and the Department, the development of a fuel poverty strategy, the scale of fuel poverty and households impacted, the measurement of fuel poverty, a fuel poverty taskforce, the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP), cross departmental working, levels of funding for NISEP, energy cost mitigations.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for briefing the Committee.



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for the following information on the Affordable Warmth Scheme:

- The level of demand for the scheme over the last five years
- How quickly the budget for the scheme was exhausted each year
- The status of the current waiting list for the scheme (if there is one)

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Energy Saving Trust to ask for the following information on the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme:

- The level of demand for the scheme over the last five years
- How quickly the budget for the scheme was exhausted each year
- The status of the current waiting list for the scheme

8. SR 2024/131 - The Pensions (2005 Order) (Codes of Practice) (Revocation) Order (NI) 2024

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2024/131 - The Pensions (2005 Order) (Codes of Practice) (Revocation) Order (NI) 2024 and has no objection to the rule, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report.

9. Correspondence

The Chairperson drew Members attention to a letter from the Education Committee in relation to funding required for the Scoil Spreagtha Ócáidí Cheiliúrtha scheme.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister for Communities to ask that the Department provides funding for this scheme.



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The Chairperson drew Members attention to a letter from the Finance Committee Clerk to all Statutory Committee clerks seeking a formal response on whether briefings have been requested or received from Departments on post-budget allocations, departmental business plans and June Monitoring bids.

Agreed: That the Committee Clerk replies to state that the Committee has had an oral briefing, requested further details in writing and requested the Departmental Business plan setting out allocations but that the Committee has not yet received this detail and that the Committee did receive a paper outlining the bids being made as part of the June monitoring round.

10. Forward work programme

Members noted the forward work programme.

11. Any other business

There was no other business.

12. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00a.m. on Thursday 27 June, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.49p.m.



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Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities