



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 23 May 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

- Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson) MLA
- Ms Ciara Ferguson (Deputy Chairperson) MLA (via Zoom)
- Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
- Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA
- Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
- Ms Sian Mulholland MLA
- Mr Brian Kingston MLA

Apologies:

- Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA
- Mr Maurice Bradley MLA

In Attendance:

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



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

Andy Allen declared an interest as a private landlord.

Colm Gildernew declared an interest as a private landlord.

Ciara Ferguson declared an interest as a family member is employed in the construction industry.

1. Apologies

Apologies are listed above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister offered to meet with him and the Deputy Chair to try to get an understanding of any concerns that Committee Members had raised in relation to the Defective Premises Bill, given that Accelerated Passage would remove the Committee scrutiny stage.

The meeting took place on Tuesday 21 May and the Chair communicated the concerns raised by Committee Members to the Minister around accelerated passage and the absence of a Committee stage for scrutiny. The Minister advised that he remains assured that the Bill, as introduced, will provide an opportunity for people affected by Defective Premises and his preferred position is that it progresses through the Assembly via Accelerated Passage.

Indicative timings published on Wednesday 22 May indicate that the Motion for Accelerated Passage and the Second Stage are both scheduled for Monday 3rd June.



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The Chairperson informed Members that, on that basis, it is for the Minister to move the motion, which will be determined by a decision of the House.

3. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the draft minutes from the meeting on 16 May 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes as drafted.

4. Matters Arising

Members noted a reply from Ulster University on its report on housing affordability.

Members noted a reply from the Minister for Infrastructure on wastewater challenges.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a reply from the Housing Executive on homelessness prevention and Housing First.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Housing Executive to ask for sight of the preliminary findings of the feasibility study for Housing First for Northern Ireland, to ask what the challenges are in scaling up provision of the Housing First model in Northern Ireland and to ask how the Inter-departmental Task and Finish Group contributes to this work.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a reply from OFCOM in relation to its role in gambling regulation.



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the UK Gambling Commission to ask for an update on its regulatory activities in Northern Ireland.

Members noted a Ministerial reply on an anti-poverty strategy and it was agreed that this issue could be discussed in further detail at the Departmental briefing session on social inclusion strategies at the meeting of the Committee on 30 May.

Members noted a Departmental reply on the Universal Credit Migration Team vacancies and payment timeliness.

Daniel McCrossan joined the meeting at 10.14a.m.

Members noted a Departmental reply on thatched roofs.

Members noted a Departmental reply on SL1 - The Social Security (State Pension Age Claimants).

Members noted a Departmental reply on the European Commission's Pay Transparency Directive and Article 2(1) of the Windsor Framework.

Members noted a Department for Infrastructure reply on an anti-poverty strategy.

5. Departmental briefing on The Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) Bill

The following officials joined the meeting:

Hayley Ward, Head of State Pensions & Private Pensions branch

Richard Jordan, State Pensions & Private Pensions

A question and answer session followed the officials' briefing and the main areas of discussion were the need for an appropriate communication strategy which would engage with and reach younger workers who may be affected by this Bill, the financial implications of the Bill, the numbers of young people that might be impacted by the Bill and the ability to opt out.



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Examiner of Statutory Rules seeking her advice in relation to the delegated powers referred to in the Bill.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department of Finance to ask if it is able to provide the estimated costs of this Bill to the public purse.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for briefing the Committee.

6. Departmental briefing on SL1 - The Smoke Heat and Carbon Monoxide Alarms for Private Tenancies Regulations (NI) 2024

The following Departmental officials joined the meeting:

Julie Lavery, Head of Private Rented Sector branch

Heather Cammock, Private Rented Sector

Donna Donnelly, Private Rented Sector

Audrey Fallon, Private Rented Sector

A question and answer session followed the officials' briefing and the main areas of discussion were how this legislation will impact on houses of multiple occupancy, the financial implications for landlords, enforcement and consultation with landlords and local councils.

Agreed: That the Department provides an update to the Committee on the current regulatory standards for smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarms for housing associations.

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

The Chairperson thanked the officials for briefing the Committee.



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The Chairperson informed Members that the meeting would go into closed session to receive a briefing from Assembly Legal Services on accelerated passage for the Defective Premises Bill.

The meeting went into closed session at 11.12a.m.

7. Assembly Legal Services briefing on accelerated passage for the Defective Premises Bill

The following Assembly official joined the meeting:

Jonathan McMillen, Head of Assembly Legal Services

The Chairperson thanked the official for briefing the Committee.

The meeting went back into public session at 12.00p.m.

8. SL1

The Chairperson informed Members that the Department had advised that it would need to table an SL1 for consideration at the meeting but that it had not been received.

9. Correspondence

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a correspondence memo with proposed actions.



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The Chairperson drew Members' attention to a request from Ulster Rugby to brief the Committee.

Agreed: That Ulster Rugby is invited to a future stakeholder event on sport.

The Chairperson drew Members' attention to an email from an individual in relation to the Committee meeting on 16 May when the Committee was briefed by RSUA on the Defective Premises Bill.

Agreed: That a reply is sent to state that the RSUA had requested the opportunity to brief the Committee and that was the reason for their representatives' appearance at the meeting.

The Chairperson drew Members' attention to the Budget publication which was in the Tabled Pack and expressed concern that there is a budget debate scheduled for Tuesday 28 May at which statutory Committee Chairs will be invited to outline the Committee's views on the Departmental allocations. However, the Committee for Communities had still not received any detail or briefing on the 2024-25 budget allocation despite requests having been made to the Department.

Agreed: That the Department is contacted again to ask for an urgent update on the Department's 2024-25 budget allocation.

10. Forward work programme

Members noted a forward work programme which had been updated with a number of further briefings.



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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 30 May, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.04p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities