



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 27 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
- Ms Sian Mulholland MLA
- Mr Maolíosá McHugh MLA
- Mr Brian Kingston MLA
- Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA

Apologies:

- Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA

In Attendance:

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



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The meeting commenced in open session at 10.00a.m.

1. Apologies

Apologies are listed above.

2. Chairperson's Business

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 10.01a.m.

The Chairperson informed Members that he needed to deal with several housekeeping issues as this was the last Committee meeting before summer recess.

The Chairperson informed Members that it is standard practice to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, during periods of recess, to submit views on the releasing or withholding of information in any non-routine or contentious Freedom of Information requests received by the Committee; and that any such views expressed would be brought to the attention of the committee at the first meeting after summer recess.

Agreed: That the Committee delegates authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to submit views on the releasing or withholding information in any non-routine or contentious Freedom of Information requests received by the Committee.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee team will continue to receive correspondence from stakeholders over the summer period. It is standard practice that the team includes such items for consideration at the Committee's first meeting of the new session in September 2024. However, it



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is up to each Committee whether they wish to agree any urgent matters via correspondence. If this is the case, it should be included in the minutes of the next formal meeting of the Committee.

Agreed: That any urgent matters are dealt with via correspondence and all non-urgent correspondence received over summer are considered at the first meeting back in September.

The Chairperson informed Members the Forward Work Programme will be revisited after summer recess.

The Chairperson informed Members that the minutes of this meeting will be signed off, as usual, at the next formal meeting of the Committee in September.

The Chairperson informed Members that, historically, at the end of each session in a mandate, each committee produced an End of Session Report. However, given that this session has been very short, the Chairpersons' Liaison Group agreed that End of Session reports are not required for the February – July 2024 session and Committees will next be due to produce End of Session reports in September 2025.

The Chairperson reminded Members of the Committee event with the Deaf Community at 11.30a.m. in the Long Gallery and encouraged as many Members to attend as possible.

3. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the draft minutes from the meeting on 20 June 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes as drafted.



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4. Matters Arising

Members noted a Ministerial reply to Committee queries on whether work is ongoing on a publicly owned land/asset register and whether this can be shared with the Communities Committee.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply to Committee queries on JobStart Scheme 50+.

Agreed: That a 6-monthly update on the pilot scheme is requested from the Department along with details of the geographical spread of the 180 places available as part of the scheme. The Committee would also like to know how the Department will engage with experts in the sector.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply to Committee queries on the Framework for Interpretation, Translation, and Transcription Services.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for the current rate of pay for these services and to ask how often the rates are reviewed and updated.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply to Committee queries on the ongoing review of grant funding, the Committee's concerns regarding the impact of salary freezes and the Department's contractual perspective relating to the Living Wage.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to express the Committee's concerns about the treatment of the community and voluntary sector and the Arts sector as budgets are being held at the same level year on year which is, in effect, a budget cut when rates of inflation are factored in and not in line with the fair funding framework.

The Committee is supportive of budgetary uplifts in line with the rate of inflation and is also supportive of multi-year funding but only if the level of funding is increased and that staff are paid the national living wage. The Committee would like to know if the Department is committed to supporting the sectors in paying the living wage.



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Members noted a Departmental reply to Committee queries on Neighbourhood Renewal.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply to Committee queries on Carer's Allowance overpayments.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask what measures are being taken to ensure that repayments are affordable and manageable, to ask how flexible the Department is on repayment plans and to ask for more details on the process for agreeing a repayment plan.

5. Child Support Enforcement Bill

The Chairperson informed Members that they needed to consider several items in relation to the Bill.

Agreed: That the motion to extend Committee Stage of the Bill is lodged with the Business Office.

Agreed: That the Bill timetable is agreed.

Agreed: That the Citizen Space call for evidence is published on the Committee's pages on the Assembly website.

Agreed: That the signposting ad is placed in the 3 main newspapers.

6. SR 2024/136 The Occupational Pension Schemes (Collective Money Purchase Schemes) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024



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Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2024/136 The Occupational Pension Schemes (Collective Money Purchase Schemes) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2024 and recommends that it is approved by the Assembly.

7. Correspondence

The Chairperson informed Members that they have been provided with a correspondence memo.

Sian Mulholland referred to the correspondence from Action for Children.

Agreed: That Action for Children are invited to brief the Committee at a future meeting.

The Chairperson referred to the Commissioner for Older People's report on preparing for an ageing population.

Agreed: That the Commissioner for Older People is invited to a future Committee meeting to brief on this report.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to all departments to ask for views on the report and an update on the work they are carrying out to address the issues raised in this report in relation to preparations for an ageing population.

Daniel McCrossan joined the meeting at 10.29a.m.

The Chairperson referred to correspondence from Disability Action in relation to a UN report on the rights of disabled people.

Agreed: That Disability Action is invited to brief the Committee on the report at the meeting on 19 September 2024.



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8. Forward work programme

Members noted the forward work programme.

Ciara Ferguson raise the possibility of a future meeting being held in her constituency.

Agreed: That a meeting is arranged for September/October 2024.

9. Any other business

There was no other business.

10. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00a.m. on Thursday 12 September, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 10.31a.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities