



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Communities

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 30 May 2024

**Meeting Location:** Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:**

- Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson) MLA
- Ms Ciara Ferguson (Deputy Chairperson) MLA
- Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
- Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA (via Zoom)
- 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 Chris McAfee (Clerical Supervisor)
- Mrs Tracey McCaughey (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in open session at 10.02a.m.



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Brian Kingston declared an interest as a Director of Greater Shankill Partnership.

Ciara Ferguson declared an interest as she managed Neighbourhood Renewal projects in a previous job.

### 1. Apologies

Apologies are listed above.

### 2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson raised an issue in relation to people losing their right to stay in Home Office accommodation once leave to remain status is granted.

**Agreed:** That letters are sent to the Home Office, the Housing Executive and the Mears Group to ask how the current situation works in relation to housing for people who have been granted asylum and how this can be improved as there is a sense of confusion at the current system which is leading to distress for people who have to leave communities which they have become a part of.

### 3. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the draft minutes from the meeting on 23 May 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes as drafted.



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### 4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a reply from Derry City and Strabane District Council to Committee queries on equality screening for the hybrid working regulations.

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to all councils to ask that, once the hybrid working regulations are in place and the arrangements for hybrid meetings have been made, they provide the Committee with the equality screening outcomes pertaining to the updated regulations.

Members noted a Departmental reply to a Committee request for a copy of the finalised report from the Strategic Review of Sport NI which is currently being undertaken by Deloitte.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a reply from the Housing Executive to Committee queries in relation to the Housing Transfer Application form, the criteria for house building and whether there are any plans to engage in-house Occupational Therapists.

**Agreed:** That the Housing Executive is invited to brief Committee on the criteria for house building for housing associations at a future meeting and that the Housing Executive is asked to provide the Committee with the outcome of the consultation process from the review of the Disabled Facilities Grant.

Members noted a reply from Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council on equality screening for the hybrid working regulations.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply in relation to overpayments of Carers Allowance.

**Agreed:** That a copy of the Departmental response is sent to Carers' NI.

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask that Committee receive a quarterly update in writing on discussion / work ongoing with the Department for Work and Pensions in relation to access to gaining access to its Verification of Earnings and Pension (VEP) system and to ask if there is any other work that can be done by the Department, whilst awaiting access to VEP, which could help mitigate overpayments of Carers' Allowance.



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**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department for Work and Pensions, post General Election, to ask for information on what the barriers are to the Department for Communities accessing the VEP system, what work is being carried out to remove these barriers and for a timeline of when access might be granted. The Committee would also like to know if the DWP has plans to review Carers' Allowance and to ask for the rationale for Carers' Allowance remaining the only benefit that is non-tapered.

Members noted a memo from the Clerk in relation to the Defective Premises Bill which is now listed in a Motion scheduled for debate next Monday 3 June.

Members noted a reply from the NIO in relation to the Committee's queries about Casement Park.

### 5. Departmental briefing on Neighbourhood Renewal

The following officials joined the meeting:

Tony Murphy, Director of Community Empowerment Division

Colette Toman, Acting Head of Business Innovation Team

Nichola Creagh, Head of People & Place Review Team

A question and answer session followed the officials' briefing and the main areas of discussion were initial feedback on the Test and Learn initiative, staffing issues, criteria for smaller rural areas, funding for 2024, the living wage, funding from other departments, the review of People and Place, the definition of urban and rural under neighbourhood renewal, neighbourhood renewal structures, the costs of a new IT system, the need for multi-year funding cycles, definition of place and full cost recovery.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for briefing the Committee.



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**Agreed:** That the Departmental officials keep the Committee informed of the next steps in the letters of offer process and that a copy of the research report carried out in conjunction with Queens University is forwarded to the Committee.

**Agreed:** That the Department forwards information to the Committee in relation to the maps of areas of multiple deprivation.

The Chairperson informed Members that the meeting would go into closed session to receive a confidential briefing from the Department on Social Inclusion Strategies.

*The meeting went into closed session at 11.10a.m.*

### 6. Departmental briefing on Social Inclusion Strategies

The following Departmental officials joined the meeting:

John McCord, Director of Central Policy

Carl Savage, Deputy Director of Central Policy

A question and answer session followed the officials' briefing and the main areas of discussion were the co-design process, the need for better communication with stakeholders, the impact of staff vacancies on the development of strategies, budgetary pressures on resources, the alignment between People and Place and an anti-poverty strategy, the work of the cross-departmental working groups and the timeline for an anti-poverty strategy and disability strategy.

**Agreed:** That the Department provides a response to the Committee setting out where responsibility lies for the Inclusion and Social Change Strategy, in



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particular the Framework for interpretation, translation and transcription services.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for briefing the Committee.

*The meeting went back into public session at 12.01p.m.*

### 7. Correspondence

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

**Agreed:** That Development Trusts NI is invited to brief the Committee at a future meeting.

### 8. Forward work programme

Members noted the forward work programme.

**Agreed:** That the meeting currently scheduled for 4 July is cancelled.

### 9. Any other business

There was no other business.



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#### **10. Date, time and location of the next meeting**

The next meeting is at 10.00a.m. on Thursday 6 June, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.06p.m.

**Colm Gildernew MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Communities**