



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Communities

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 16 January 2025

**Meeting Location:** Room 29, Parliament Building

**Present:**

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

**Apologies:**

**In Attendance:**

- Ms Emer Boyle (Assembly Clerk)
- Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Clerk)
- Mr Chris McAfee (Clerical Supervisor)
- Ms Katie Egan (Clerical Officer)



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The following Members declared an interest:

Colm Gildernew – Charity Trustee and Private Sector Landlord

Andy Allen - Charity Trustee and Private Sector Landlord

Brian Kingston – Member of All Party Group on Gambling Related Harm

Maolíosa McHugh - Member of All Party Group on Gambling Related Harm

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

### 1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

### 2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that, in relation to the Committee's decision to rescind its motion on welfare reform mitigations, this needed to be considered formally as a separate agenda item and would be added to next week's meeting agenda for consideration.

The Chairperson informed Members he had held an informal meeting with the Departmental Permanent Secretary and a couple of senior departmental officials on Tuesday to discuss the need to improve the flow of timely information and communications between the Department and the Committee

The Permanent Secretary and officials are scheduled to brief the Committee at the meeting on 30 January and have asked that it takes place in closed session to allow for a more candid discussion of the priorities for the Committee and for the Department.

**Agreed:** That the briefing session with the Permanent Secretary and team take place in closed session.



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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 12 December 2024.

**Agreed:** That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

### 4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a summary table of Matters Arising and asked if there were any items Members wished to discuss further.

DoJ Response - Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask that, when officials are briefing on this issue at a future meeting, that they cover how actions belonging to other departments in this strategy will be monitored.

DfC - Briefing on gambling reform and briefing from NICVA

**Agreed:** In terms post-legislative scrutiny of the Committee, that a letter is sent to the Department seeking a breakdown of actions completed to date stemming from the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 10.14a.m.

Daniel McCrossan joined the meeting at 10.15a.m.

DfC - Disabled Facilities Grant and Home Improvement

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Housing Executive to ask what work it is doing to monitor and review the standard and quality of work being carried out by contractors engaged under the Disabled Facilities and Home Improvement grant schemes.



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DfC - Anti-Poverty Strategy and Active Ageing Strategy

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask that, once the Minister has considered the options available for the next Active Ageing Strategy, that the Committee is notified of the preferred options and also to ask whether there is a timeline for the completion of the strategy.

DfC - Statutory levy on gambling companies

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask if the National Lottery is considered to be a “land-based operator” in terms of the relevant definition.

DfC - Universal Credit Contingency Fund

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for an update on the progress of the re-naming of this fund.

DfC - Progress of the Irish Language Strategy

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for an update after the Minister’s meeting with the co-design group.

DfC - Peace Building

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for a breakdown of projects which have been implemented in line under the Fresh Start commitments and requesting that the information provided sets out whether the projects are cross-community or single identity projects.

DfC - Scheme of Delegation/ Rates Support Grant/Neighbourhood renewal capital bids

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask whether the proposed DEARA Dilapidation Bill has potential to have an impact on Neighbourhood Renewal and whether the Department’s Neighbourhood Renewal priorities will feed into this Bill? The letter should also to ask for an updated status of all capital projects to be progressed under Neighbourhood Renewal in the next financial year when the application process will open following a delay in applications due to problems with the IT system.



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NIHE - Home Improvement Agency/Shelter NI and Radius/Trusted Trader Scheme

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Housing Executive to ask for a copy of the information on the support available from the Home Improvement Agencies which is provided to applicants.

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask whether it is content that the Housing Executive will not be undertaking a review of the warranted builder scheme.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government - UK Shared Prosperity Fund

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ask when a final decision on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will be made as Committee is conscious that time is running out for voluntary and community organisations given that funding is due to end soon.

DfC – Affordable Warmth Scheme

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask if it has engaged with the UK Government in relation to a replacement for ERDF funding for retrofitting homes.

Members noted the following items:

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council/Causeway Coast and Glens / Derry City and Strabane District Council	Planning applications on hold
DfI	Work with the Voluntary and Community sector in relation to any aspects of public sector policy development, including transformation plans and with regard to ensuring fair pay, grant and any contract arrangements



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DWP	Winter Fuel Payment Eligibility
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	Landlord Registration Scheme
DfC	Care home residents and the definition of private tenancy
DfC	Disability Strategy
DfC	Employment Support Scheme
DfC	Pension Credit and Backdated Winter Fuel Payments
DfC	Welfare Supplementary Payments
DfC	Winter Fuel Allowance Payment, Welfare Mitigations and legislation associated with welfare reform mitigation payments
DfC	Welfare Supplementary Payment Schemes – Statutory Report
NIHE	Corrected information on land ownership
NIHE	Impact of lack of receipts from house sales
NIHE	Homelessness services
The Executive Office	Appointment of language commissioners
DAERA	Work being carried out with NICVA
DoJ	Work being carried out with NICVA



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### 5. Correspondence

Dept for Communities - Protocol for The Care of the Government Historic Estate – Fifth Report

**Agreed:** That a copy of this report is brought back for further review and consideration at the meeting on 6 March when the Committee is due to receive a briefing in relation to the emerging Heritage, Culture and Creativity Policies.

Co-Ownership - Request to brief Committee on recent roundtable on the future of housing policy

**Agreed:** That a briefing session is arranged for a future Committee meeting.

Women's Policy Group NI - Offer to brief on Gender Equality Strategy

**Agreed:** That a briefing session is arranged for a future Committee meeting.

Dept for Communities - PRONI - Deputy-Keeper's Report 2017-18

**Agreed:** That a meeting is arranged to take place in the PRONI office to receive a briefing on its work and the impact of retention and disposal schedules on the Committee's work.

Dept for Communities - Office of the Discretionary Support Commissioner - Annual Report 2023 – 24

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask whether there is any plan or work ongoing in relation to regulatory reform for Discretionary Support.

Youth Assembly - Youth Assembly Update - year end update and plans for 2025

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Youth Assembly to congratulate them on the work they carried out in 2024 and to wish them well with their work in 2025.

Business Office - Welfare Mitigations Scheme Statutory Report

**Agreed:** That a briefing on this report is requested for a future Committee meeting



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The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Committee for the Executive Office	NIHE Attendance at the Committee for the Executive Office
Solace NI	The Environment Protection (Single use vapes) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024
Dept for Communities	Arts Council NI - 2023-24 Annual Report and Accounts
Dept for Communities	PRONI - Deputy-Keeper's Report 2016-17
Committee for Finance	Spring Supplementary Estimates and January Monitoring
Committee for Finance	Department of Justice Budget 2025-2026 Equality Impacts
Dept for Communities	Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance - Consequential Amendments to NI Social Security Legislation
BFI	Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24
Dept for Communities	Press release - Minister announces funding boost for Musical Instruments Scheme
Dept for Communities	Press release - United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities celebrated
UK Anti-Doping	Annual Report and Accounts Anti-Doping 2023/24
Dept for Communities	FINAL Report NDNA NILGOSC
Dept for Communities	Move to Universal Credit (UC).





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Business Office	Sport NI - Annual Report & Accounts 2023-24
Strategic Investment Board	SIB Assembly Committee Report
Dept for Communities	Fraud Act - Code of Practice Consultation Responses
CEF	Press Release - Downturn in the NI Construction Sector must be alleviated by Executive action
Advice NI	AGM invite
SBNI	Conference Invitation
Eoin Tennyson MLA	Conversion Practices Consultation
Dept for Communities	January Monitoring
Dept for Communities	Fuel Poverty Consultation
Speaker's Office	Public Petition - Carers Allowance
Dept for Communities	Welfare Supplementary Payments Schemes - Statutory Report

**6. Retention and Disposal Schedule for Armagh Observatory and Planetarium**

The Chairperson informed Members that, in line with the principle that Assembly committees have a role in scrutinising the actions of their respective Departments, the retention and disposal schedules that are sent to the Committee will be considered as a separate agenda item moving forward, much like SRs subject to the negative resolution procedure.

**Agreed:** That the Committee is content with the Retention and Disposal Schedule for Armagh Observatory and Planetarium.



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**Agreed:** That a research paper is requested from RalSe on how retention and disposal schedules are handled elsewhere and internationally, particularly where there are EU funded activities reported in the schedules.

The Chairperson informed Members that he would move to discussion on the next agenda items to allow time for Mr Carroll to be in place to brief the Committee as the meeting was running ahead of schedule.

**7. SR 2025/2 The Gaming (Variation of Monetary Limits) Order (NI) 2025**

**Agreed:** That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/2 The Gaming (Variation of Monetary Limits) Order (NI) 2025 and recommends that it is affirmed by the Assembly.

**8. SR 2025/1 - The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit Housing Costs (Executive Determinations) (Modification) Regulations (NI) 2025**

**Agreed:** That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/1 - The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit Housing Costs (Executive Determinations) (Modification) Regulations (NI) 2025 and has no objection to the Rule.

**9. SL1 - The Social Security (Income and Capital Disregards) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2025**

The Chairperson informed Members that the purpose of the proposed Rule is to ensure payments made by the Ministry of Defence LGBT Financial Recognition Scheme, to those personnel affected by the ban on LGBT personnel serving from 1967 to 2000, are disregarded indefinitely for the purposes of calculating entitlement to means-tested benefits.

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

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 10.40a.m.



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The meeting restarted at 10.47 a.m.

### **10. People's Housing Bill - briefing by Gerry Carroll MLA**

The Chairperson welcomed the following people to the meeting:

Gerry Carroll, MLA

Rebekah Corbett, Policy & Communications Officer

Mr Carroll briefed the Committee on his proposed Bill and a question and answer session followed. The main areas of discussion were:

- Housing supply
- Rent controls
- Empty homes
- The lack of social housing
- Landlord Registration Scheme
- The right to housing
- Rent regulation and reduction
- No fault evictions ban
- Private rental sector
- Engagement with the Housing Executive on empty homes
- Rental control board
- Unintended consequences
- Financial implications of a rental control board

**Agreed:** That Mr Carroll provides the Committee with a copy of the UN report on housing.

Daniel McCrossan left the meeting at 11.15 a.m.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11.43 a.m.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 11.43 a.m.



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The meeting restarted at 11.48 a.m.

### **11. All-Party Group briefing on Reducing Harm Related to Gambling**

The Chairperson welcomed the following people to the meeting:

Philip McGuigan MLA, Chair of APG

Danny Donnelly MLA, Secretary of APG

Connor Hogan, All-Party Group on Reducing Harm Related to Gambling (via Zoom)

Will Chambré, All-Party Group on Reducing Harm Related to Gambling

The representatives briefed the Committee and a question and answer session followed. The main areas of discussion were:

- Advertising
- Code of Practice
- Resources within the Department to work on the necessary legislation
- Online gambling
- Public health approach to gambling
- Gambling levy
- Debt respite scheme
- The need for a gambling regulator

Daniel McCrossan re-joined the meeting at 12.25p.m.

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department outlining the Committee's support for the APG's main asks, namely:

1. Monitor and Enforce Compliance: Establish clear reporting processes and proactive monitoring mechanisms for breaches of the Gambling Code of Practice.
2. Address Gaming Machines: Reinstate guidance on gaming machines in the Gambling Code of Practice to enforce lower stakes and prize limits under current laws.



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3. Tackle Advertising Harms: Develop accountability mechanisms for regulating gambling advertising in Northern Ireland and advocate for restrictions similar to the Republic of Ireland.
4. Implement Industry Levy: Introduce an industry levy without delay to fund research, prevention, and treatment of gambling-related harms.
5. Introduce Debt Respite Scheme: Develop a Debt Respite Scheme tailored to address financial strain caused by gambling-related harms.
6. Support Legislative Overhaul: Allocate resources for drafting a new regulatory framework for comprehensive gambling reform readiness for the next Assembly mandate.

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department also raising the following issues:

- The Committee's concern that a gambling prevalence survey takes 6 years to complete and that the Committee feel these surveys should take place more regularly.
- To ask for a Departmental briefing on the Gambling Prevalence Survey once it is published
- To ask what the timelines are for the legislative framework needed to introduce a levy on land-based gambling operators
- To ask for an update on the staff resource plans for the preparatory work for the next gambling bill
- To ask if a financial analysis has been carried out on what the potential dividend could be for Northern Ireland from a levy on online gambling operators
- To ask for an update on the current status of the Code of Practice and what measures are contained in it
- To ask what the Department is doing, in the absence of a levy on land-based gambling operators, to ensure protection for those that are subject to gambling related harm

## 12. Forward Work Programme



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Members noted a copy of the forward work programme and an update was given by the Clerk on the format of the Committee's Arts Event which will take place on 13 February.

### **13. Any other business**

Sian Mulholland raised the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network and welcomed that the group had received funding from the Department and also from the National Lottery and thanked the Department and Members for their support in this matter.

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

The next meeting is at 10am on Thursday 23 January 2025, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 13.00.

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