



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 17 October 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

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

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 meeting commenced in open session at 10.02a.m.

Andy Allen declared an interest as a private sector landlord and a charity trustee.

Colm Gildernew declared an interest as a private sector landlord.

Maolíosa McHugh declared an interest as Chairman of pre-school Naíscoil na Deirge.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that the Minister has confirmed that he will make himself available to attend the meeting on 24 October instead of on 7th November as originally scheduled.

Agreed: That the Housing Supply Strategy and Social Inclusion strategies are added to the items to be discussed as well as the current fiscal situation of the Department and the Minister's recent meeting with the LCC.

The Chairperson raised the Older People's Parliament event that took place on Saturday 12 October 2024 in the Assembly Chamber which was a great opportunity for older people to have their say on issues and decisions that affect their lives. The Chairperson stated that he believed it is essential for older people to have this forum, to have their voices heard and to be able to communicate their lived experience to this place and to inform the decisions made here.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the outgoing Older People's Commissioner to ask if there are any issues he wants to highlight that the Committee should be aware of that might need to be raised with the new Commissioner when appointed.



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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 10 October 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes as drafted.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a reply from the Gambling Commission to Committee queries on changes in relation to online gambling and associated regulatory activities.

Agreed: That Departmental Officials are invited to brief the Committee at a future meeting on the timescales for bringing forward the different aspects of gambling reform.

Agreed: That the Gambling Commission is invited to brief the Committee at a future meeting on online gambling, the coverage that currently extends to Northern Ireland and clarification on the roles and responsibilities in terms of the regulation of online gambling in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the All-Party Group on Gambling to invite them to discuss the work of the group at a future Committee meeting.

Members noted a Departmental letter in relation to the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a reply from the Arts Council to Committee queries on the working and living conditions of artists.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Arts Council inviting them to brief at a future meeting on the pressure points it faces and to ask for a timeline for completion of the review and a copy of the review when completed.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply to Committee queries on housing issues.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for the following:



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- The criteria used for the decision for Lisburn and Castlereagh Council to lead on the Landlord Registration Scheme
- Information on the new organisational structure which will be or is being established in Councils to operate the scheme
- Information on the funds transferred from the NI Executive to councils to support the operation of the scheme
- the budget and timescale for the implementation of whatever IT scheme is needed to run the scheme
- an update on the progress of work to implement the scheme

Agreed: That a research paper is requested from RalSe on the operation of right to buy schemes in the other parts of the UK and the numbers of homes that are sold through right to buy schemes which have then gone into the private rented sector.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister to ask if he would consider a moratorium on the Right to Buy Scheme until such time as building and financial arrangements change as there is currently a housing crisis in Northern Ireland. The Committee would also like to know if there is a mechanism to ascertain the number of homes sold under the scheme, which, after the 5-year ownership period, then become available for rent via the private rental sector.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Housing Executive to ask if it has had access to capital receipts from the sale of houses under the Right to Buy Scheme over the past 5 years.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for Infrastructure to ask for a breakdown, by constituency, of the number of planning applications on hold due to the provision of water, waste water and sewerage facilities.

Members noted a Departmental reply on public sector transformation proposals.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a Departmental reply on social inclusion strategies.

Agreed: That this issue would be raised with the Minister at his briefing session at the meeting on 24 October.



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Members noted a reply from National Museums NI on the details of its current work.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Operational Delivery Group from the Department had offered to brief the Committee on WSP and Carer's Allowance.

Agreed: That a briefing session with the Operational Delivery Group is arranged for a future meeting.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to DWP to ensure that the payment of Carer's Allowance is re-considered very seriously as the Committee feels that it needs to be fit for purpose.

5. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

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| DfC | Annual Report on Decision Making and Financial Accuracy 2023 |
| Committee for Finance | Analysis of 2024-25 Outturn and Forecast Outturn |
| Examiner of Statutory Rules | 20241011 ESR - Twenty Fourth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules |
| DfC | National Museums NI reply |
| DfC | Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations NI 2024 |
| QUB | QUB - Centre for Public Policy and Administration Launch Event Schedule |



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Letter from individual re Ministerial meeting with LCC.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the individual to advise that the Minister will brief the Committee on this issue at the meeting on 24 October.

Correspondence from NIFHA re proposed changes to social housing grant.

Agreed: That a copy of the correspondence is forwarded to the Department for comment.

Correspondence from Colm McGrath MLA re youth homelessness.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for an update in relation to any ongoing or planned work on the issue of youth homelessness.

The Chairperson asked Members if they were content to move into closed session for the next 2 agenda items.

Agreed: That the Committee moves into closed session for the next 2 agenda items.

The meeting went into closed session at 10.35a.m.

6. Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) Bill - briefing by Examiner of Statutory Rules on the Delegated Powers Memorandum

The Chairperson welcomed Angela Kelly to the meeting and invited her to brief the Committee in relation to her advice on the Delegated Powers Memorandum associated with the Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) Bill.

The Chairperson thanked Angela for briefing the Committee.

7. Committee deliberations on the Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) Bill

The Chairperson informed Members that they would now continue their deliberations on the Bill.



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The Chairperson reminded Members that this was not the formal clause by clause stage but an opportunity to go through the Clauses and comprehensively review with the Department any issues raised by stakeholders or Committee Members and to ask for clarification on how the Bill addresses these concerns and any additional action that the Department intends to take on the back of the evidence the Committee has received.

The Chairperson welcomed Stephen Orme, Assembly Bill Office, to the meeting and there was discussion on the possibility of a Committee amendment to the Bill to ensure that a review of the impacts of the legislation is undertaken, reported and laid with the Assembly within 3 years of the powers of the Bill being used.

Agreed: That the Committee asks the Bill Office to draft an amendment for discussion at the meeting on 24 October.

Maurice Bradley and Ciara Ferguson left the meeting at 11.48a.m.

The meeting went back into public session at 12.08p.m.

8. Formal Clause by Clause Consideration of the Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) Bill

The Chairperson informed Members that, as they had agreed to seek advice from the Bill office on the wording of a potential Committee amendment to the Bill, it would not be possible to conduct formal clause by clause consideration of the Bill and this would be conducted at either the meeting on 24 October or 7 November.

The Chairperson further informed Members that they still had the opportunity to ask questions of the Departmental Officials.

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental Officials to the table:

Hayley Ward



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Richard Jordan

The Chairperson read the potential Committee amendment to the Officials and asked if the Department would consider making the amendment.

Agreed: That the Department considers the amendment and if possible responds to the Committee in time for the meeting on 24 October in relation to whether it would be prepared to take forward the proposed amendment.

A draft Committee report had been included in meeting papers and the Chairperson asked that Members take the report away for further reading, with particular focus on the draft recommendations, to be considered in further detail at the meeting on 24 October.

9. Child Support Enforcement Bill - Child Support Enforcement Bill - overview of Call for Evidence

The Chairperson informed Members that the call for evidence on Citizen Space closed on 4 October and only attracted one response.

The Chairperson stated that he realised that the Bill is technical in nature but thought he should ask Members if there is any other organisation or group that they felt should be specifically targeted to ask to provide oral evidence.

Agreed: That the Committee secretariat continues to ask organisations to brief on the Bill at future meetings.

10. SR 2024/0000 - The Electrical Safety Standards for Private Tenancies Regulations (NI) 2024

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2024/0000 - The Electrical Safety Standards for Private Tenancies Regulations (NI) 2024 and recommends that it is confirmed by the Assembly.

11. Forward Work Programme

Members noted a copy of the forward work programme.

12. Any other business

There was no other business.



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13. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10am on Thursday 24 October 2024, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.28p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities