



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Communities

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 24 October 2024

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

**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 Daniel McCrossan MLA  
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA  
Mr Brian Kingston 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 meeting commenced in open session at 10.02a.m.

Andy Allen declared an interest as a charity trustee.

Colm Gildernew declared an interest as a member of the GAA.

Daniel McCrossan declared an interest as a member of the GAA.

Maolíosa McHugh declared an interest as a member of the GAA and Treasurer of Conradh na Gaeilge na Deirge.

### 1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

### 2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson raised the issue of the recent news of the NI Housing Executive housing homeless people needing emergency accommodation in glamping pods.

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Housing Executive to ask the following:

- how often the pods have been used and how many people have used them
- whether the NIHE feels that this is appropriate accommodation
- what criteria are used to determine whether units / places meet temporary accommodation standards
- can a breakdown of the geographical areas where non-standard accommodation is being used be provided to the Committee
- can an update from the Housing Executive Taskforce in relation to meeting the 2-week target also be provided, and
- to ask again for progress on whether an additional drop-down can be integrated into the computer system for people making an application for social housing to indicate further preference(s) in relation to where they wish to live.



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- for a briefing from the Place Shaping Team at a future meeting

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 10.09a.m.

The Chairperson informed Members that he would be attending, in his role as Chairperson, an event on grassroots football that evening.

The Chairperson highlighted that it was Book Week and that he welcomed the initiative and encouraged people to take part in the activities in their local libraries arranged during the week.

### 3. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the draft minutes from the meeting on 17 October 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes subject to a minor amendment.

### 4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a reply from the BBC in relation to Committee queries on sign-interpreted news services from BBC NI.

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask if the forthcoming Sign Language Bill will include requirements for the visibility of sign language in local broadcast media.

Members noted a reply from Daera to Committee queries on disability rights and representation.

### 5. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

NIHE	House Sales - A Tenants Guide
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QUB	Centre for Public Policy and Administration Launch Event invite
Clerk to Chairpersons' Liaison Group (CLG)	CLG Update to Committees June 2024
IMTAC	Survey into transport to health services for deaf, disabled and older people
IMTAC	Response to comments made during Committee evidence session on 3 October 2024
Advice NI	Call for expansion of the Bereavement Service in NI to create a service equivalent to 'Tell Us Once'
Carers NI	Details of Carer Poverty Commission Conference, Thursday 7 November
Dept for Communities	Press release - Employer Adviser Damian McCorry highly commended at Newry Chamber of Commerce Employee and Team Awards
Dept for Communities	Press release - Over 1,000 new jobs within DfC to generate £35 million per year
Dept for Communities	Press release - Community Transport Week 2024
Dept for Communities	Press release - Launch of Institute of Conservation NI

Guardian Article on Carer's Allowance: DWP Inquiry Minister vows to end scandal that left thousands of UK carers in debt.

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask if it will be carrying out a root and branch review of Carer's Allowance in light of the review announced by DWP.



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Correspondence from Gerry Carroll MLA on his Private Member's Bill Consultation.

**Agreed:** That Mr Carroll is invited to brief on the outcome of the consultation at a future meeting.

The meeting went into closed session at 10.17a.m.

The meeting resumed in open session at 10.20a.m.

### 6. Ministerial Briefing

The Chairperson welcomed the Minister, Gordon Lyons, to the meeting along with the following Officials:

Mark O'Donnell - Deputy Secretary, Housing and Sustainability

Paddy Rooney – Dep Secretary, Work and Health

Emer Morelli – Dep Secretary, Engaged Communities

Cherrie Arnold - Director, Financial Planning

A question and answer session followed and the main areas of discussion were:

- the Minister's meeting with the LCC
- work on the Irish Language Strategy
- the redevelopment of Casement Park
- social housing and the need to build more houses
- the budget for housing
- the Right to Buy Scheme
- the Housing Supply Strategy
- the homeless support sector and homelessness
- the Anti-Poverty Strategy
- the Shared Prosperity Fund
- the Fuel Poverty Strategy
- welfare support mitigations



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- social inclusion strategies
- sports funding and;
- the rates support grant.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and Officials for their attendance and asked the Minister if he would agree to brief the Committee at 3 monthly intervals, starting in January/February 2025. The Minister agreed to meet on a 3-monthly basis.

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Minister to ask the following:

- What conversations have taken place with NI Water in relation to waste water (infrastructure) given the impact it is having on house building
- To provide clarification on the specific number of social houses that will be built this financial year and the number of homes started thus far in 2024
- To provide clarification in relation to the current governance arrangements for the Housing Executive and to request a briefing from Departmental Officials at a future Committee meeting on the future of these governance arrangements in the context of the Housing Executive' status potentially changing

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Executive Office expressing the Committee's concerns around the social inclusion strategies which, whilst the Department for Communities is the lead department, are cross-departmental pieces of work which leaves Committee's scrutiny role unclear. The Committee would like to know which Committee will be responsible for the scrutiny of these strategies.

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Minister for Finance to ask for an update on progress in respect of the possibility of the Treasury making the necessary arrangements to allow the Housing Executive to borrow funds. The Committee would also like to know if there are there any particular hurdles in allowing the necessary changes to be made and would like an anticipated timeframe for a decision.



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The Chairperson asked Members if they were content for the meeting to go into closed session to continue deliberations on the Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) Bill. Members agreed to go into closed session.

The meeting went into closed session at 11.58a.m.

### **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.

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 any issues raised by stakeholders or Committee Members and to ask for clarification on how the Bill addresses these concerns.

The Chairperson welcomed Stephen Orme, Assembly Bill Office, to the meeting and there was discussion on the Minister's reply to the possibility of taking forward a proposed 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.

The meeting went back into public session at 12.35p.m.

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

Clause 1 - Automatic enrolment: persons and earnings affected

**Agreed:** That the Committee is content with Clause 1 as amended by the Committee as follows:

After clause 1, insert –

'Report on the operation of powers affecting age and qualifying earnings



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2.-(1) The Department for Communities must lay before the Assembly a report setting out its assessment of the effects of any changes made by regulations under section 1.

(2) This report must be laid at least 36 months, and no more than 42 months, after the coming into operation of the first regulations made under section 1.'

Brian Kingston and Maurice Bradley indicated that they wished to abstain from agreeing to the Committee amendment.

Clause 2 - Commencement and short title

**Agreed:** That the Committee is content with Clause 2 as drafted by the Department.

The Chairperson informed Members that this concluded the Committee's formal clause by clause consideration of the Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) Bill and the Committee Stage of the Bill.

The Chairperson thanked the Departmental Officials Hayley Ward and Richard Jordan for all their support and patience with Committee queries and Stephen Orme from the Assembly Bill Office for his support as well as Eleanor Murphy from RaISe.

### **9. Forward Work Programme**

Members noted a copy of the forward work programme.

### **10. Any other business**

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee would now consider Committee strategic planning in closed session.

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

The next meeting is at 10am on Thursday 7 November 2024, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.39.p.m.





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