



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 27 February 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Building

Present:

Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson) MLA
Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
Ms Kellie Armstrong MLA
Ms Nicola Brogan (Deputy Chairperson) MLA
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA (via Zoom)
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 meeting commenced in open session at 9.42a.m.

The following interests were declared:

Kellie Armstrong – member of the deaf and hard of hearing community

Colm Gildernew – private sector landlord and involved with several community organisations.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that he had no business to report.

3. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the draft minutes from the meeting on 20 February 2025.

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.

Belfast City Council - Youth Homelessness

Agreed: That an informal meeting with Departmental officials is requested for a future meeting on Complex Lives and Supporting People.

DfC - Active Ageing Strategy



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for a copy of the draft plan and timescale for the publication of the Active Ageing Strategy.

DfC - Fresh Start Projects

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask how it is monitoring the outcomes of the projects and detail in relation to the measures of success.

Homeless Connect - HMRC Employers' Allowance

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask if voluntary and community groups will be penalised for not achieving their outcomes as a result of the financial pressures they are facing due to the impact of increased Employers' National Insurance Contributions (ENIC). The Committee would also like to know what the Department is doing to recognise the pressures that increased contributions are having on the voluntary and community sector.

NIHE - Youth homelessness

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the NI Housing Executive to ask what assurances it can provide that funding for tenancy sustainment projects will continue beyond 2025 and what alternative funding streams are being explored to ensure ongoing support for vulnerable tenants. The Committee would also welcome clarification on whether funding for tenancy comes from the landlord or authority side of the Housing Executive.

Daniel McCrossan joined the meeting at 9.49a.m.

Members noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Dept of Health	Care Leavers
NICVA	Impact of increased ENIC on the Voluntary and Community Sector
NIFHA	Tenancy Support
DfC	The Period Products Regulations NI 2025
Individual	Mother and Baby Payment Scheme Query



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5. Correspondence

Individual - Northern Ireland Football Fund

Agreed: That this information is sent to the Department in advance of its briefing session on this subject at the meeting scheduled for 6 March.

DFC - Independent Review of the Liquor Licensing System in Northern Ireland

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask what it intends to do with the information gathered by this review and whether there is any ongoing work, or planned work, on future licensing legislation.

Men's Shed - Request to brief the Committee

Agreed: That Men's Shed are invited to brief the Committee at a future meeting.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Source	Subject Matter
Individual	Private Landlord Registration
Ciara Ferguson MLA	Consultation on Banning Unfair Letting Fees
Queens University Belfast	Centre for Public Policy - Invitation - April 2025
Examiner of Statutory Rules	Thirty third Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules
Clerk to Finance Committee	National Insurance Contributions
Strategic Investment Board	Assembly Committee Report Investing Activity Report for Department for Communities

The Committee noted the following items of tabled correspondence:



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Source	Summary of content
APG – Reducing Harm Related to Gambling	Briefing Note - The Gaming Machines in Registered Clubs Regulations Northern Ireland 2025
The Christian Institute	Labour party position on gambling advertising - NI Policy Advisor
The National Lottery Heritage Fund	Event Invitation to Members
Department for Communities	Press Release: The Northern Ireland Football Fund Update
Department for Communities	Workable (NI) and Access to Work (NI) Assessment Services - Outcome of

The Christian Institute - Labour party position on gambling advertising

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister to ask him to write to his counterpart in the UK Government to ask for urgent action on gambling advertising.

6. SR 2025/22 The Gaming (Gaming Machines in Registered Clubs) Regulations (NI) 2025

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee had considered this Rule at the meeting on 20 February when a decision was deferred until further information on the Rule was provided by the Department. The Department had now provided a written briefing on gambling reform which included an update on a levy. Members had also been provided with a copy of a note on gaming machines from the All-Party Group on gambling related harm and with a Departmental reply to queries on the Rule.

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/22 The Gaming (Gaming Machines in Registered Clubs) Regulations (NI) 2025 and has no objection to the Rule.



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The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 9.54a.m.

Maolíosa McHugh and Nicola Brogan joined the meeting at 10.01a.m.

The meeting restarted at 10.07a.m.

The Chairperson informed Members that, as the meeting was running ahead and the Minister was not yet ready to join the meeting, he proposed to move to the agreement of items for the Sign Language Bill.

7. Sign Language Bill

The Chairperson informed Members that they now needed to consider a few items in relation to the Sign Language Bill.

Draft timetable for consideration of the Bill.

Agreed: That the Committee is content with the timetable.

Draft motion to extend Committee Stage until 13 February 2026.

Agreed: That the Committee is content that the motion is lodged with the Business Office.

Draft signposting advert calling for evidence on the Bill.

Agreed: That a copy of the advert is placed in the 3 main daily newspapers.

Draft questions for the call for evidence

Agreed: That the Committee is content with the questions for the call for evidence.

The Chairperson informed Members that he was aware that this Bill contains far reaching Henry VIII powers and this wasn't mentioned by the officials when they briefed the Committee a few weeks ago. The Chairperson also referred to the fact that the Committee hadn't yet seen a delegated powers memorandum to seek the Examiner of Statutory Rules advice.



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Agreed: That Departmental Bill Team is asked to brief again to address the Henry VIII powers in the Bill and to ask the Department to supply a delegated powers memorandum as soon as possible.

8. Ministerial Briefing Session

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Gordon Lyons - Minister

Mark O'Donnell – Deputy Secretary Housing and Sustainability Group

Paddy Rooney – Deputy Secretary Work and Health Group

Emer Morelli – Deputy Secretary Engaged Communities Group

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

- Progress on drafting the Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Budgeting across departments for the actions in the Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Representations to the UK Government on the Shared Prosperity Fund
- Progress on the Irish Language Strategy and all social inclusion strategies
- Progress on the Ulster Scots Strategy
- Redevelopment of Casement Park and the work of the GAA
- Funding for all sports
- Arts sector funding and policy
- The Housing Supply Strategy
- Removal of intimidation points
- Intermediate rent
- Derelict properties
- Increased National Insurance contributions and work with Treasury on this issue
- Revitalisation of the Housing Executive



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- The possibility of higher taxes/rates on second homes
- Social housing
- Engagement with local councils on the Northern Ireland Football Fund

Agreed: That the Department will report back to the Committee on meetings at official level with Conradh na Gaeilge and whether there have been discussions with the First Minister and Finance Minister in relation to progressing the Irish Language Strategy.

Daniel McCrossan left the meeting at 11.25a.m.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 9.54a.m.

The meeting restarted at 11.36a.m.

9. Departmental briefing on the January Monitoring Round

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

John Greer - Deputy Secretary of Corporate Services Group

Kathy Sands – Finance Director

Cherrie Arnold – Finance Director

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

- Contingency plans if Executive funding does not materialise
- The budget for social housing
- Tackling welfare fraud and error
- Revenue raising options
- Disabled adaptations
- Measures to mitigate against the impact of increased National Insurance contributions



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- Shared housing
- Asset transfers
- Core funding cuts to charities

Agreed: That the Department reports back to the Committee on engagement with the Department of Health on measures to mitigate against the impact of increased National Insurance contributions in relation to its contracts with the CVS.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask what work it is carrying out with local councils to urge them to publish their Local Development Plans and to ask what the delays are in publishing the plans.

10. Departmental Briefing on the Employment Rights Bill Legislative Consent Motion

Richard Jordan - DfC Head of Income Based Benefits

Dr Nichola Connery – DAERA Head of Equine Identification Policy Branch

Donna Kavanagh – DoF Construction and Procurement Delivery, Director of Policy, Performance and Assurance.

Kellie Sprott – DfE Head of Employment Conditions and Collective Rights Policy and Legislation Branch

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

- The remit of the Fair Work Agency
- The Procurement Act
- The effect of the Bill on Northern Ireland specific employment rights

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for the Economy why contracts are covered by the Procurement Act but not grants.



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Andy Allen left the meeting at 12.36p.m.

11. Briefing by RalSe on the Sign Language Bill

The Chairperson welcomed the following Assembly RalSe officials to the meeting:

Karen McCallion

Aidan Stennett

Nicola Brogan left the meeting at 12.47p.m.

Maolíosa McHugh left the meeting at 12.58 and quorum was lost.

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

- Costs of implementing the Bill
- Potential gaps in the Bill
- Sign language legislation in other jurisdictions
- Prescribed organisations
- Cost comparisons with other jurisdictions

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

13. Any other business

There was no other business.

14. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00a.m. on Thursday 3 March 2025, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.



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The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 13.06p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities