



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 30 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
- Ms Sian Mulholland MLA

Apologies:

- Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA

In Attendance:

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



Northern Ireland Assembly

The meeting commenced in open session at 10.01a.m.

1. Apologies

Apologies are listed above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that he welcomed that the Minister accepted the Committee amendment to the Pensions Automatic Enrolment Bill.

The Chairperson also welcomed the Minister's statement in relation to the Intimidation Points Policy Change and would request that the Committee receive a briefing from Departmental officials at the earliest possible opportunity.

Agreed: That a briefing is arranged for a future Committee meeting to include information on how the Department/NIHE intends to monitor intimidation going forward.

The Chairperson also welcomed the announcement on the £1M storm Fund and propose that a written briefing is requested on it to explain the criteria for it and how it will be distributed.

Agreed: That a written briefing is requested from the Department.

3. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the draft minutes from the meeting on 23 January 2025.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

4. Matters Arising



Northern Ireland Assembly

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.

Members noted the following items:

DWP	Carer's Allowance
Gerry Carroll MLA	People's Housing Bill
DfC	Statutory Review of Welfare Mitigations
DfC	Queries for Housing and Sustainability Group
DfC	Update on Anti-Poverty Strategy

5. Correspondence

Kellie Armstrong joined the meeting at 10.06a.m.

Committee for Finance - PAC Report "Child Poverty in Northern Ireland"

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask why it is not accepting all the recommendations contained in the report.

Committee for Finance - Budget 2025-26 Round Robin

Agreed: That the Committee Clerk drafts a response for consideration at a future meeting.

Strategic Investment Board - Investing Activity Report for Department for Communities

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Strategic Investment Board to ask for an update on the Creggan MEI project and whether it is at pre or post procurement stage.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Intac	Intac launches recruitment process for new Chairperson and Members
Committee for Finance	NICS Sickness levels
Dept for Communities	Sign Language Bill
Northern Ireland Screen	Save the Date - ILBF 20th Anniversary Event
Department for Communities	Minor Changes to Emergency Fuel Payment Scheme
Department for Communities	NIHE appearance at the Committee for the Executive Office re Refugees

6. SL1 - The Draft Universal Credit (Welfare Supplementary Payment) Regulations (NI) 2025

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed Rule will make provision for Welfare Supplementary Payments for people currently in receipt of Universal Credit and for those who move to Universal Credit in the future.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask, without a review of measures such as the 2-child benefit cap, what effect this regulation could have on child poverty and what work has been done to look at this in advance.

Agreed: That the Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule subject to the queries from this meeting being responded to in line with the Committee's request.

7. SL1 - The Draft Universal Credit (Welfare Supplementary Payment) (Social Sector Size Criteria) Regulations (NI) 2025

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed Rule will make provision for Welfare Supplementary Payments for people currently in receipt



Northern Ireland Assembly

of Universal Credit and for those who move to Universal Credit in the future who are impacted by the Social Sector Size Criteria.

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

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 10.16a.m.

8. SL1 - The Draft Welfare Supplementary Payment (Extension) Regulations (NI) 2025

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed Rule will make provision for Welfare Supplementary Payments to continue to be paid for the Benefit Cap, Employment and Support Allowance Time Limiting, transition from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment, Loss of Disability-Related Premiums and Loss of Carer Payments until 31 March 2028. It will also ensure that scenarios that led to certain exclusions from mitigation in relation to the Benefit Cap and Social Sector Size Criteria prior to 10 February 2022 will not be re-applied.

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

9. SL1 - The Period Products (Department for Communities Specified Public Service Bodies) regulations (NI) 2024

The Chairperson informed Members that the proposed Rule will ensure the Department fulfils its statutory duty under the Period Products (Free Provision) Act (NI) 2022 to make regulations specifying the “public service bodies” within its functions that are subject to the duty under the Act to establish and maintain arrangements to ensure that period products are obtainable free of charge by persons on their premises who need to use them.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask whether these regulations will apply to the individual organisations which are aligned to the public bodies listed and to ask what regulations, if any, will apply to public bodies not specified in these regulations.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: That the Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule subject to the queries from today's meeting being responded to in line with the Committee's request.

The Chairperson informed Members that, as per the agreement at the meeting on 16 January, the next briefing session would take place in closed session.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.18a.m. to allow time for the Departmental officials to join the meeting.

The meeting went into closed session at 10.29a.m.

10. Briefing from the Departmental Leadership Team

Daniel McCrossan joined the meeting at 10.39a.m.

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Colum Boyle - Permanent Secretary

John Greer - Deputy Secretary Corporate Services Group

John McCord – Engaged Communities Group

Mark O'Donnell – Deputy Secretary Housing & Sustainability Group

John Smith – Deputy Secretary Communities, Place and Local Government Group

Brenda Henderson – Deputy Secretary Operational Delivery Group

Paddy Rooney – Deputy Secretary Work and Health Group

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

- The timeliness of the provision of papers



Northern Ireland Assembly

- The delays in the Committee being provided with information in advance of announcements to the media
- The removal of intimidation points policy change
- The Housing Supply Strategy
- The Private Rented Sector
- Empty homes
- Anti-Poverty Strategy
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- Social Inclusion Strategies
- Workforce planning
- The need for reform of gambling legislation

Agreed: That the Department will reply to the Committee with more information on the process for using temporary promotions, to include information on the longest time period that a temporary promotion has been in place.

Agreed: That informal sessions with the Department are arranged on the following topics:

- Housing
- Workforce planning
- Gambling Reform

The meeting resumed in open session at 12.17p.m.

11. Briefing by NI Housing Executive Place Shaping Team

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Grainia Long, Chief Executive

Elma Newberry, Director of the Strategic Housing Authority



Northern Ireland Assembly

Sinead Collins, Head of South Place Shaping

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

- Housing Supply Strategy
- Use of public sector land
- Community planning
- Housing need assessment
- Waiting lists
- Development and infrastructure challenges
- Fundamental review of allocation
- Empty homes
- Tower block strategy
- Local development plans
- Land availability notification
- Developer contributions
- Mixed tenure
- House building targets and alignment with the Housing Supply Strategy

Agreed: That an informal session on housing needs assessment is arranged with the NI Housing Executive.

Ciara Ferguson left the meeting at 12.47p.m.

Daniel McCrossan left the meeting at 12.48p.m.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

13. Any other business

The Chairperson raised the issue of the briefing by Gerry Carroll on his People's Housing Bill.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Agreed: That a letter is sent to Mr Carroll to ask if he can forward the RalSe research paper on rent controls.

14. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10am on Thursday 6 February 2025, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 13.16 p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities