



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 6 March 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

Apologies:

- Ms Sian Mulholland MLA

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 10.00 a.m.

The following interests were declared:

Maurice Bradley – member of Impress and volunteer at Coleraine Football Club

Brian Kingston – member of Greater Shankill Partnership Board

Andy Allen – Charity Trustee and Trade Union member

1. Apologies

Sian Mulholland.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that, following the meeting on 20 February, the Committee wrote to the Department to ask for a response in regards to what work is ongoing to ensure that Arts Organisations receive funding letters more promptly in the financial year. The Department has advised that these queries will be addressed on 13 March at the Historic Environment, Culture, and Creativity Policies briefing to members.

The Chairperson informed Members that he was growing increasingly frustrated with the delays in bringing to the Committee any details in relation to the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Committee had been scheduled to receive an update from the Department at the end of March but the Chairperson noted the Minister's comments about taking the draft "to the Executive by the end of the month". The Chairperson therefore proposed that the Committee writes to the Department to ask for an urgent oral briefing on the draft strategy and for this to be provided in advance of it going to the Executive.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for a briefing on the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy and that this should be provided in advance of the draft strategy going to the Executive. The Committee would also like to know



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whether the strategy will contain targets against the relative measures in the strategy.

The Chairperson informed Members that he had attended the Speaker's event on Tuesday 4 March on Seachtain na Gaeilge and commended him for hosting what was a very interesting event which delved into the history of the Gaelic languages and history, emphasising the need to preserve them and share them, improving our understanding of what we have in common with our geographical neighbours. Seachtain na Gaeilge is the largest celebration of Irish language and culture, with events taking place throughout Ireland and all across the world and the Chairperson encouraged Members to attend an event if they get the chance.

The Chairperson welcomed the recent announcement of the commencement of the recruitment process for both language commissioners.

3. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of the draft minutes from the meeting on 27 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.

DfC - Staffing Pressures

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

- Information on the powers that have been devolved to councils in relation to urgent work notices and if councils have any enforcement powers to compel owners to carry out work
- Information on the trend in staff vacancies from 2019 to 2025,
- How the Department is tracking leavers, movers and the recruitment process



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- What intelligence the Department is gathering from leavers interviewers
- Whether there is potential to focus recruitment efforts in those geographical areas which were not included in the recent allocation of the 1000 DWP jobs

Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council - Housing and homelessness aspect of community plans

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask what level of clarification/communication is provided to councils in relation to the Department's strategic development priorities, in order that this information can be reflected in the development of council's local development plans.

TEO - Wastewater infrastructure

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Head of the Civil Service to ask if she can advise in relation to the most appropriate route for the Committee to express its support for the Ministers for Communities and Infrastructure in order that the Executive can clearly prioritise progress on building social homes.

The Committee would also like to know, given the TEO response stating that the Committee's request was not a matter for it, what the most appropriate route to scrutinise the work of the Executive Strategies is; including the most appropriate lines of communication when trying to contact The Executive Office in relation to progress and updates on these cross-cutting strategies.

DfC - Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for more information on the outcomes and measure of success in relation to these projects.

DfC - Affordable Warmth Scheme and ERDF Replacement Funding / Disabled Facilities Grant and Home Improvement Grants

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for the Economy to ask whether it is taking forward any projects or schemes to mitigate the loss of ERDF funding to support the retrofitting of homes.



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the NIHE Research Team to ask if it will be taking forward the lessons learned from the master builder scheme before commencing a new scheme for the Disabled Facilities Grant.

DfC - PAC Report on Child Poverty

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for Communities and the Department of Finance to ask what the barriers are to bringing forward the Anti-Poverty Strategy and to ask who will be in the lead role for the delivery of the strategy and be accountable for it.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to The Executive Office and the Head of the Civil Service seeking clarification in relation to accountability for delivery of the Anti-Poverty Strategy, in light of a recent legal judgment on this issue.

DfC - HMRC Employment Allowance and the Impact on the Voluntary and Community Sector

Agreed: That a letter is sent to NICVA to ask that they highlight the guide from HMRC on this issue to the sector and that there is help available.

Members noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
DfC	HMRC Employment Allowance and the Impact on the Voluntary and Community Sector
DfC	Response following briefing by Departmental Leadership Team
DfC	Help with Health Costs - consultation
	Warranted Buildings Scheme
DfC	SL1 - The Social Security Revaluation of Earnings Factors Order (Northern Ireland) 2025
DfC	Neighbourhood Renewal Programme



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5. Correspondence

Homeless Connect - Email to Clerk to Committee for Communities re CRISPP Sub Draft Budget Consultation 2025-6

Agreed: That a copy of the email is sent to the Department for comment.

Department for Communities - Update on Building Safety Policy Development

Agreed: That a briefing is requested for a future Committee meeting.

Department for Communities - Written Ministerial Statement: Update on Intermediate Rent Funding Competition

Agreed: That a briefing is requested for a future Committee meeting, pre-summer recess.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Department for Communities	Workable (NI) and Access to Work (NI) Assessment Services - Outcome of Competitive Grant Calls
Department of Finance	Assembly Business Office publication of October 2024 - December 2024 Quarterly Sickness Absence Report
Department for Communities	Commencement Order for Section 7 of Private Tenancies Act
Individual	Choice Housing Ireland Ltd and SSE Airtricity Gas NI installing pre-paid gas heating boilers
Press Recognition Panel	Press Recognition Panel Annual Recognition Report Laid in Parliament 27 February 2025
Public Accounts Committee	Clerk to Public Accounts Committee - Memo to Clerks re release of Reports



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Source	Summary of content
Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	Call for Views from Statutory Committees on Agriculture Bill as introduced
Children's Law Centre	Annual Lecture 2025 - Invite 30 April 2025 3.30pm
Department for Communities	Universal Credit -Overpayment of Housing Costs

The Committee noted the following tabled items of correspondence:

Assembly Business Office	Programme for Government 2024-2027- Our Plan Doing What Matters Most
Northern Ireland Screen	NI Screen - event invite
Minister – Department for Communities	Ministerial letter to Committee Chair Re Celebration of Sport Event
Department for Communities	Press Release - Registration open for this years' European Heritage open Days
Department for Communities	Press Release - Minister officially opens new Fivemiletown Library
Department for Communities	Press Release John Smith attends the official launch of PEACEPLUS
Construction Employers Federation	Submission to the consultation on the draft Northern Ireland Executive Budget 2526

6. Departmental Briefing on The Northern Ireland Football Fund (TNIFF)

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Emer Morelli – Deputy Secretary Engaged Communities Group



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Kathryn Hill – Director Active Communities Division

Joanna Gray – Head of TNIFF

Willie Devlin – Sport NI Sports Infrastructure Expert

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

- Partnership funding
- Engagement with local councils
- Changes to the fund from the Sub Regional Stadia Funding
- Feedback on the application process
- Potential extensions to the deadline for applications
- Timescale for securing match funding
- Timescale for spending the funding
- The potential to increase the funding
- The potential for a rolling programme for clubs to apply for ongoing maintenance issues

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask if it will consider an extension to the deadline for applications as raised with the Minister at his briefing session on 27 February 2025.

7. Employment Rights Bill Legislative Consent Motion

Daniel McCrossan left the meeting at 11.19a.m.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with submissions on the LCM from ICTU, NIC-ICTU, Unite the Union, the Committee for Finance and the Equality Commission.

Agreed: That a copy of the submissions is included in the final Committee report.

Agreed: That a recommendation is included in the Committee report to ask that the Committee on Procedures consider whether greater flexibility can be



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afforded to Committees, in relation to the time afforded to them, when considering a Legislative Consent Motion.

8. SR 2025/000 - The Welfare Supplementary Payment (Extension) Regulations (NI) 2025

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee had considered this Rule at the meeting on 30 January when Members were content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/000 - The Welfare Supplementary Payment (Extension) Regulations (NI) 2025 and recommends that it is affirmed by the Assembly.

9. SR 2025/000 - The Welfare Supplementary Payment (Universal Credit) Regulations (NI) 2025

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee had considered this Rule at the meeting on 30 January when Members were content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/000 - The Welfare Supplementary Payment (Universal Credit) Regulations (NI) 2025 and recommends that it is affirmed by the Assembly.

10. SR 2025/000 - The Welfare Supplementary Payment (Universal Credit) (Social Sector Size Criteria) Regulations (NI) 2025

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee had considered this Rule at the meeting on 30 January when Members were content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/000 - The Welfare Supplementary Payment (Universal Credit) (Social Sector Size



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Criteria) Regulations (NI) 2025 and recommends that it is affirmed by the Assembly.

Daniel McCrossan re-joined the meeting at 11.29 a.m.

11. SR 2025/36 - The Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2025

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee had considered this Rule at the meeting on 23 January when Members were content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2025/36 - The Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2025 and has no objection to the Rule subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11.30 a.m.

The meeting restarted at 11.37a.m.

12. Departmental briefing on the removal of intimidation points from the Housing Selection Scheme

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Heloise Brown – Acting Director of Social Housing Policy and Oversight

Ciara Lynch – Head of Social Housing Policy

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

- The period of time for the removal of intimidation points and whether this was adequate
- Whether the sector was prepared for the change



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- The breakdown of primary social needs criteria
- The numbers of people that currently have intimidation points
- If legislative change will be needed
- Communication with tenants on the changes to the points system
- The level of engagement with stakeholders on the changes

Agreed: That the Department forwards a copy of the current points system and clarification on the standard of acceptable evidence for housing points as the Committee feels that there is a disparity in the level of evidence being accepted and that this should be standardised.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for a copy of its legislative timetable, for the remainder of the mandate, for both primary and delegated legislation.

13. Briefing by Broomhall Trust

The Chairperson welcomed the following representatives to the meeting:

Bart O'Donnell – Trustee, Boomhall Trust

Karen Latimer

Pauline Ross

Patrick Cregg

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

- Funding for the project
- The length of time for the project to be completed
- The core elements of the project that will raise revenue
- Environmental aspects of the project



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister outlining Committee support for the project and to ask him to support the Boomhall Trust's application for Shared Island funding.

Daniel McCrossan left the meeting at 12.39 p.m.

14. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

15. Any other business

There was no other business.

16. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00a.m. on Thursday 13 March 2025, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.47p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Communities