



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 15 January 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Cathy Mason MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mrs Pam Cameron MLA
Mr Mark Durkan MLA (via Zoom)
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mrs Sian Mulholland MLA

In Attendance: Mrs Emer Boyle (Assembly Clerk)
Mrs Victoria Bourquin (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Chris McAfee (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Katie Egan (Clerical Officer)
Ms Patrice Morris (Senior Assistant Clerk)
Ms Kathryn Black (Senior Assistant Clerk)



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The meeting commenced in public session at 10.00 a.m.

1. Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared:

Kellie Armstrong – Member of the Deaf Community, Associate of Chartered Institute of Housing.

Pam Cameron – former Junior Minister with sight of Executive and Cross Departmental policy, strategy and legislation.

2. Apologies

There were no apologies.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members of the recent media attention in relation to the request for guidance from Commonwealth Games Northern Ireland.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister requesting a copy of the correspondence sent to Commonwealth Games Northern Ireland setting out the Minister for Communities Guidance.

The Chairperson then informed Members about concerns which has been raised directly with him at a constituency level which he had heard reiterated at an All Party Group meeting on Social Enterprise earlier in the week – specifically, the impact of the (change to) the Local Growth Fund and the cliff edge being experienced across the CVS.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Northern Ireland Office requesting a copy of the communication which was circulated about the Local Growth Fund; to express Committee's concern about the impact on the CVS's ability to continue to deliver essential (often statutory) services locally; seeking clarification on when the communication was sent to stakeholders and to further request a response to the Committee's letter of 11 November 2025 which sought specific detail in relation to the criteria and timeframes for the Fund.



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Agreed: That the above letter is copied to the Minister for Finance with a further request for detail of ongoing communication between the Finance Minister and HM Treasury in relation to opportunities for Local Growth Fund allocation in Northern Ireland.

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 10.07 a.m.

4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the meeting on 8 January 2026.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. Matters Arising

Northern Ireland Housing Executive - Delivering Accessible Homes

Agreed: That the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is asked to provide a formal response to the Committee, listing the “Category types” for build in full and to ask if these are aligned to Section 75 identified needs.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department in relation to the Review of Design Standards to request the following:

- A timeline for the review and for information on the process being followed (ToRs)
- How the Service-User voice / needs of tenants will be incorporated into the review process
- How will cost, quality and sustainability be ensured

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department of Infrastructure seeking information on the application process for “dropped kerbs”, with particular attention to the criteria applied to applications and what the process involves.

Northern Ireland Office - Funding for Housing Retrofitting

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

- The extent to which the National Wealth Fund will be allocated to Northern Ireland



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- Whether any of the £13.2 billion allocation in relation to the Warm Homes Plan is available to Northern Ireland and if the offer of knowledge sharing in relation to this Plan been accepted by the Department?

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Committee for the Economy and the Committee for Finance highlighting the £13.2 billion fund and to ask whether those Committees have knowledge of the Fund, are aware of the application process(es) or have information in relation to any departmental plans for its effective use in Northern Ireland?

Department for Communities - The Northern Ireland Football Fund – Request for evidence of ongoing legal proceedings

Agreed: That the Clerk seek clarity from Assembly's Legal Services that the Committee has taken all reasonable steps it can at this stage in relation to requesting information from the Department.

Committee for Communities - Draft Report on Homelessness

Agreed: That the Draft Report is updated to include additional information supplied by Members and returned to the Committee for consideration at a future meeting.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Department for Communities	Northern Ireland Football Fund Performance Programme – Itemised list of Football Clubs' meetings with Minister for Communities / Officials from Department for Communities
Minister for Communities	Northern Ireland Football Fund Legal Challenges
Department for Communities	Accessibility guidelines and regulations for ALBs



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6. Correspondence

Individual - Eviction Notice

Agreed: That a response is sent to the individual indicating that the Committee cannot act on an individual's behalf and to suggest they contact their local MLA / MP.

Construction Employers Federation - Response to DoF budget consultation Jan 26

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Committee for Infrastructure and the Committee for the Economy forwarding the correspondence and to ask:

- If the Committee had also received the CEF correspondence
- What response (if any) the Committee has provided / what action had been taken
- For detail on cross-departmental working ongoing in relation to the Housing Supply Strategy.

Northern Ireland Screen - Invite to Preview - A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms - Game of Thrones prequel filmed in Northern Ireland

Agreed: That Maurice Bradley confirmed that he planned to attend the event.

Minister for Communities - Delayed LCM re removal of 2 Child Limit

Agreed: That the letter agreed at the meeting on 8 January 2026 to the Minister for Communities is amended to reflect the updated approach and emphasise the requirement to act in accordance with the requirements of Standing Order 42A.

Agreed: That the amended letter is copied to the Speaker and the Chairpersons' Liaison Group for information.

Agreed: That a briefing is scheduled for a future meeting in relation to the LCM.

Agreed: That a briefing is scheduled for a future meeting in relation to data collection and local impact in the context of forthcoming legislative reforms and existing mitigations.

The Committee noted the following items:



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Source	Summary of content
Department for Communities	Legislation arising from the Pathways to Work - reforming benefits
Assembly Business Office	Charity Commission Partnership Agreement
Assembly Business Office	USEL Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25

The Committee further noted the following items of tabled correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Examiner of Statutory Rules	53rd Report Of the Examiner of Statutory Rules

7. SR 2026/2: The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit Housing Costs (Executive Determinations) (Modification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2026/2: The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit Housing Costs (Executive Determinations) (Modification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and has no objection to the Rule, subject to the report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

Agreed: That the Northern Ireland Assembly's Research and Information Service (RaISe) is asked to provide a research report on the LHA freeze and its impact on rent levels across Northern Ireland in the context of the Discretionary Housing Support Fund and its ability to support local levels of need.

8. SR 2026/4: The Universal Credit (Transitional Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Chairperson reminded Members that following consideration of the SL1 at the Committee Meeting on 8 January 2026, Members agreed to request the Law Centre's views in relation to Transitional Provisions and a briefing from the



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Department for Communities on the breakdown of Transitional Provisions and the move to Universal Credit.

Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2026/4: The Universal Credit (Transitional Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and has no objection to the Rule, subject to the report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

9. Oral evidence from the Department of Communities - Review of the Rates Support Grant:

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental officials to the meeting:

Mr Gerard Murray, Director of Local Government and Housing Regulation Division, Department for Communities

Mr Jeff Glass, Head of Local Government Finance Branch, Department for Communities

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

- Engagement with Councils
- Implementation of recommendations
- Rural Needs Impact Assessment and Grant Allocation for rural communities
- Multi-Year Budget and its impact on Grant availability
- Legislative Amendments
- Local Development Plans, Community Planning and Council Guidance
- Minimum levels of funding to Councils
- Relationship and engagement between DfI and DfC regarding Rating Policy
- Council expenditure and allocation of the grant
- Councils not in receipt of the Rates Support Grant

Andy Allen left the meeting at 11.23a.m



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department requesting information on action taken following receipt of a paper sent to the Minister for Communities from Derry City and Strabane Council in relation to the RSG.

10. Oral evidence from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland - An equality review of the governance, practices, and procedures applicable to Ulster Boxing

Sian Mulholland left the meeting at 11.26a.m

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Geraldine McGahey, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Louise Conlon, Chief Executive, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Alden Henderson, Director of Advice and Compliance, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Sian Mulholland rejoined the meeting at 11.32a.m.

Andy Allen rejoined the meeting at 11.34a.m.

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

- Governance and implementation
- Flags, Emblems and neutral venues
- Monitoring and reporting procedures
- Enforcement recommendations
- Independent Oversight Panel
- Embedding of Policy and Procedures
- Ministerial Involvement in the Independent Oversight Panel
- Development of clubs, training and importance of sport in supporting cross-community relationships
- Role of the ECNI with the Independent Oversight Panel in future



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- Pathways for athletes competing at national level and the role of Sport NI within this

The Chairperson suspended the meeting at 12.10 p.m.

The meeting resumed in open session at 12.19 p.m. with all Members present.

11. Sign Language Bill – Departmental amendments

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental officials to the meeting:

Mr Iain Greenway, Sign Language Policy and Legislation Branch, Department for Communities

Mr Tommy McAuley, Sign Language Policy and Legislation Branch, Department for Communities

Mr Gerard Flynn, Sign Language Policy and Legislation Branch, Department for Communities

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

- Fully Funded Sign Language Classes
- Personal Development Plans in education
- CODAs access to Sign Language Classes
- Hearing loss in adulthood

The Chairperson informed Members that the next agenda item would take place in closed session in order for the Committee to be briefed by the Bill clerk.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session to undertake consideration of the Departmental amendments to the Bill.

The meeting moved into closed session at 12.34 p.m.

Liz Marsh, Bill Clerk joined the meeting to address any queries during the consideration of draft amendments.



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12. Sign Language Bill – Review of Departmental amendments

Maolíosa McHugh left the meeting at 12.58 p.m.

Maolíosa McHugh rejoined the meeting at 1.06 p.m.

Maurice Bradley left the meeting at 1.24 p.m.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 1.24 p.m.

The meeting resumed in open session at 1.25 p.m. with the following Members present: Mr Colm Gildernew, Ms Cathy Mason, Mrs Kellie Armstrong, Mrs Pam Cameron, Mr Mark Durkan, Mr Maolíosa McHugh and Mrs Sian Mulholland.

Agreed: That this agenda item is paused, to be re-visited for further consideration at the next meeting of the Committee.

13. Sign Language Bill – Formal Clause by Clause consideration

Agreed: That this agenda item is deferred until the next meeting of the Committee.

14. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

15. Any other business

Pam Cameron proposed that the Committee seek a briefing at a future meeting in relation to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive succession to Tenancy Policy.

Agreed: That an oral briefing with Northern Ireland Housing Executive is scheduled for a future meeting.

16. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 22 January 2026, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.27p.m.



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Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities