



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 11 June 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

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

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

Colm Gildernew - Member's Bill on mitigating the threat of homelessness.

Kellie Armstrong – Tester of the UKGov.com Pensions Dashboard.

Pam Cameron – former Junior Minister with sight of Executive and cross-departmental policy, strategy and legislation

Maolíosa McHugh – In receipt of a NILGOSC Pension, Chairman of pre-school Naíscoil na Deirge.

2. Apologies

There were no apologies.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson thanked Members for attending the meeting on 4 June at Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Library and Archive in Armagh and stated that it was so interesting to hear from the local groups and about some of the collections held in the archive.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Minister will be in attendance next week for his quarterly meeting with the Committee. In advance of the session, the Department has requested a draft agenda and outline of proposed areas for discussion to support a focused and constructive session.

The Chairperson asked Members for priorities or topics to provide to the Department in advance of this briefing.

Pam Cameron also advised that she would be an apology for the (next) Committee meeting - on 18 June 2026.

Agreed: That Members would contact the Clerk with any topics for discussion.



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The Chairperson reminded Members that he will be delivering the Opening Remarks, as Chair of this Committee, at the KESS seminar scheduled for Wednesday, 17 June, in the Long Gallery. The seminar addresses themes that are relevant to the Committee's remit.

The Chairperson reminded Members that they had called an emergency meeting with Departmental officials to discuss housing arrangements for people displaced by the recent unrest. Members expressed gratitude to the DfC official and described the update meeting as helpful and informative.

Agreed: That an update is sought from the Department for Communities and Housing Associations on the number of people that were seeking emergency accommodation as a result of the unrest and on the extent of damage to social housing and Housing Executive properties.

4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the Committee meeting on 4 June 2026.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. Homelessness policy implementation: Oral briefing from Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Belfast City Council

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Catherine McFarland, Interim Chief Executive, NIHE

Jennifer Hawthorne, Direct of Housing Services, NIHE

John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy, Belfast City Council

Nicola Lane, Neighbourhood Services Manager, Belfast City Council Manager

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

- Belfast City Council's role and involvement
- Life-cycle approach
- System approach



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- Prevention strategies
- Establishment of Local Area Groups
- Reduction of stigma associated with homelessness
- The effectiveness of existing policies
- Relationship between addiction and chronic homelessness
- Anti-social behaviour and its role in homelessness
- The Dime Project
- Cost of Services
- Data sharing and data protection controls

Agreed: That a letter is sent to Belfast City Council and Northern Ireland Housing Executive to request that that work is undertaken to estimate the cost of a potential province-wide rollout of the policy through local area groups and to also request further information on any plan for day centre provision in Belfast, specifically where a day centre may be located and the type of services that will be provided from the day-centre.

6. Irish Language Commissioner: Oral briefing

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Pól Deeds, Irish Language Commissioner, Office of the Irish language Commissioner

Terry Curran, Director of Policy & Standards, Office of the Irish language Commissioner

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

- Update on the progress of the Irish Language Strategy
- The visibility of the Irish language
- Engagement with the Minister and Department for Communities
- Functions and future objectives
- System and structures of the Commissioner's office
- Staffing resources
- Engagement with regional Commissioners



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- The role of the Inter-Departmental Group
- Statutory obligations in relation to complaints
- Standards and best practice
- Funding and education
- Annual operating budget
- Minority languages protections
- Irish Language role in inclusion and bringing communities together
- Irish language street signs

The Chairperson advised that any further actions would be considered following Agenda Item 9.

7. Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and the Ulster British Tradition: Oral briefing

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Lee Reynolds, Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and the Ulster British Tradition

Alan Cree, Head of Establishment Team, Office of the Commissioner for Ulster-Scots and Ulster-British Tradition

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

- Update on the Ulster-Scots Language Strategy and its timeline for publication
- Importance of visibility in promotion of the language
- Budget pressures
- Engagement on education curriculum review
- Priority of language, vulture and heritage
- Local dialects
- The Strategy and its role in securing historical culture
- Challenges faced by the Office
- Engagement with the Department and Minister for Communities



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- Engagement with all Departments

8. Belfast Orangefest: Oral briefing

The Chairperson welcomed the following representatives to the meeting:

Rev Mervyn Gibson - Chairman of Directors, Orangefest

Billy Mawhinney - Company Secretary, Orangefest

Spencer Beattie - Senior Director, Orangefest

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

- Role of Orangefest
- Funding
- Role of volunteers
- Data for evidencing economic return
- Long-term support and funding
- Engagement with local groups and education
- Role of Tourism NI
- Plans to roll-out the structure of Belfast Orangefest regionally
- Community outreach
- Evaluation measures
- Outreach to ethnic minorities

The Chairperson suspended the meeting.

The meeting was suspended at 12.50 p.m.

Mark Durkan left the meeting at 12.50p.m.

Pam Cameron left the meeting at 12.55p.m.

The meeting resumed in open session at 12.12p.m. with the following Members present: Colm Gildernew, Cathy Mason, Andy Allen, Kellie Armstrong, Maurice Bradley, Maolíosa McHugh and Sian Mulholland.



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9. Retention and Disposal Schedule – General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland

The Chairperson informed Members that this schedule had been considered by the Committee for Education which had corresponded to confirm that it was content with the schedule.

Agreed: That the Committee is content to approve the schedule.

10. SL1 The Occupational Pension Schemes (Collective Money Purchase Schemes) (Extension to Unconnected Multiple Employer Schemes and Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Chairperson reminded Members that the SL1 was received on 8 June 2026, that the Minister had requested consideration of the SL1 to be expedited and within a shortened timeframe, and that a draft copy of the Rule had not yet been provided.

The Chairperson then provided with an overview of the SL1.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the absence of the draft copy of the rule does not prevent the Committee from proceeding, but the Committee was reminded a number of weeks ago that this should be *exceptional* and should be recorded in the minutes of proceedings.

Agreed: That the Committee consider the proposed statutory rule within the shortened timeframe, and that:

- The Occupational Pension Schemes (Collective Money Purchase Schemes) (Extension to Unconnected Multiple Employer Schemes and Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 would be considered at the Committee Meeting on 2 July 2026.

The Chairperson reminded Members that a shortened timeframe does not preclude the committee from issuing a call for views. However, this requires the committee making a decision on the SL1 proposal at this meeting and before any responses are received.



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The Chairperson then informed Members that:

- The Committee will next consider the SR on 2 July alongside a summary of any comments and feedback received via Citizen Space.
- The Committee team will issue a call for views on the SL1 using the standard survey on Citizen Space from 11 June 2026.
- The SL1, and any relevant papers from the Department will be published on the Committee website and notified to relevant stakeholders, alongside the relevant deadline, when available.

Finally, the Chairperson informed Members that:

- The Department had not yet confirmed when it intended to lay the Rule, however, as it is confirmatory procedure, the 21 day rule did not apply.
- The Committee should indicate whether it *is content* or *not content* for the Department to make the Statutory Rule.

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

Agreed: That the Department is asked to provide a 'plain English' explanation of CMP schemes and how they differ from defined benefit contributions and to ask whether Northern Ireland employees are likely to use these schemes and what safeguards are in place to protect scheme members.

11. SL1 The Occupational Pension Schemes (Preservation of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Chairperson reminded Members that the SL1 was received on 8 June 2026, that the Minister had requested consideration of the SL1 to be expedited and within a shortened timeframe, and that a draft copy of the Rule had not been provided.

Maurice Bradley left the meeting at 1.03 p.m.

The Chairperson then provided with an overview of the SL1.



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The Chairperson reminded Members that the absence of the draft copy of the rule does not prevent the Committee from proceeding, but the Committee was reminded a number of weeks ago that this should be *exceptional* and should be recorded in the minutes of proceedings.

Agreed: That the Committee consider the proposed statutory rule within the shortened timeframe, and that:

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The Chairperson reminded Members that a shortened timeframe does not preclude the committee from issuing a call for views. However, this requires the committee making a decision on the SL1 proposal at this meeting and before any responses are received.

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Finally, the Chairperson informed Members that:

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



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12. Matters Arising

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) - Consistency and effectiveness of CRIAs and EQIAs

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the TEO Permanent Secretary and to the Permanent Secretary Group as a whole and to the Head of the NI Civil Service to state that the Committee feels that there needs to be more consistency across Departments on the completion of CRIAs and the use of the information collated through the process and to state that the Committee feels they should be completed as standard.

Department for Infrastructure - Map of Closed Areas

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for Communities and the Housing Executive to ask that they confirm areas of social housing need and where the overlap is with closed areas. The Committee would also like to know if the Department and Housing Executive have mapped areas of need against closed areas.

Agreed: That this issue is raised at the Ministerial briefing session at the Committee meeting on 18 June.

Department for Communities - Pathways to Work and Wellbeing Transformation Project

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask what is being done to ensure that employees' needs are taken into account as well as employers' needs, particularly in relation to transport.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 1.11p.m.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Department for Communities	Building Safety Regulatory Responsibilities



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Department for Communities	Consultation on the draft Local Government (Cremation) Regulations
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13. Correspondence

IMTAC - Open letter to the NI Executive: The Draft Disability Strategy is a massive disappointment, work with us to deliver a Strategy that will make a difference.

Agreed: That a copy of the correspondence is sent to the Department for comments regarding concerns raised and that this issue is raised at the Ministerial briefing session on 18 June.

NICVA - Request to Brief – Impact of Local Growth Fund Cuts on the Community and Voluntary Sector

Agreed: That a briefing session is arranged for a meeting post summer recess.

Assembly Business Office - A Review of Probation Approved Premises in Northern Ireland

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Housing Executive to ask for an update on the review of the allocations scheme and for information on how the Housing Executive will deal with tenants that are engaged with probation services.

Department for Communities - Home Heating Oil Support Scheme

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for a timeline for the legislation required for this scheme and to ask if the Department is having discussions with oil companies in relation to this.

The Committee noted the following items:



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Source	Summary of content
House of Lords	Correspondence - Lord Carlile to Sir Stephen Timms - MP extension of certain data protection periods
Executive Information Service	Press release Minister Lyons hosts visit of UK Veterans Minister

The Chairperson then raised correspondence received by a number of MLA's and proposed that it be circulated in Members Meeting Packs for consideration at the Committee Meeting on 18 June 2026.

Agreed: That the correspondence is circulated in Members Packs for consideration on 18 June.

14. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

15. Any other business

Sian Mulholland raised an issue in relation to Section 62 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 and the requirement to publish a list of HMOs.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister to ask that, with the current period of unrest, the requirement to publish a list of HMOs is suspended.

16. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 18 June 2026, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.18 p.m.



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Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities