



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 18 June 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mr Mark Durkan MLA
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)

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



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1. Declarations of Interest

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 10.03a.m.

The following interests were declared:

Colm Gildernew - Member's Bill on mitigating the threat of homelessness, private sector landlord, charity trustee, Secretary, Brantry Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

Andy Allen - private sector landlord, trade union member, charity trustee, former Member of the Armed Services.

Kellie Armstrong – Associate member of the Chartered Institute of Housing.

Maurice Bradley – member of Harry Gregg Foundation.

Mark Durkan – Family member owns a licensed premise.

Maolíosa McHugh – Chairman of pre-school Naíscóil na Deirge.

2. Apologies

Pam Cameron MLA

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that he delivered the opening remarks, as Chair of the Committee, at the KESS seminar on Wednesday, 17 June, in the Long Gallery. The Seminar was on Place-Based research in Education & Housing: considerations when legislating and addressed themes that are relevant to the Committee's remit.

The Chairperson reminded Members that there will be an informal meeting on supported housing with Inspire Wellbeing on Tuesday 23 June from 12.30-2pm, in Room 29 and encouraged Members to attend, if possible.

The Chairperson informed Members that the meeting on 25 June will be a short formal meeting in The Senate Chamber, to complete Committee Business prior to the reciprocal informal meeting between the Committee and the Joint



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Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection, Rural and Community Development.

The Chairperson informed Members that he recently visited a development in Dungannon for ARC social housing and suggested that the Committee potentially conduct a visit later in the mandate.

4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the Committee meeting on 11 June 2026.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. Matters Arising

Department for Communities - Northern Ireland Place-Name Project

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for Communities to ask what discussions are ongoing between the Department and the NI Placenames Project to secure future funding.

Individual - Formal complaint – social media posting by employee of the Department of Communities

Agreed: That the correspondence is circulated to all Committee Members for information.

Department for Communities - Three Year Social Housing Development Programme

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for Communities to ask whether the Minister has contacted the Department for Infrastructure to request that prioritisation is given to social homes in future schemes.

Department for Communities - NI Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) regarding the sustainability of funding for social housing



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Agreed: That a copy of the letter is sent to NIFHA and to advise that a further update would be welcomed by the Committee in the Autumn.

Motability Foundation - changes being made to the Motability Scheme

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Motability Foundation to ask for a breakdown by council/postcode areas of numbers of people that will be adversely affected financially by the changes in the scheme as there seems to be a disproportionate impact on those living in rural areas, particularly for those using the vehicle for work purposes.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for the number of people in receipt of the mobility element of PIP and who avail of the vehicle for work purposes.

The Chairperson suspended Agenda Item 5 (Matters Arising) to facilitate Agenda Item 7.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Minister for Health	Supported Accommodation in Northern Ireland
Department for Communities	The Northern Ireland Football Fund
Department for Communities	Anti-Poverty Strategy Citizen Space Consultation

The Chairperson brought forward Agenda Item 7 – Minister for Communities quarterly update.

6. Minister for Communities quarterly update

The Chairperson welcomed Minister Gordon Lyons to the meeting along with the following officials:

Paul Price, Deputy Secretary, Housing Sustainability Group

Iain Greenway, Deputy Secretary, Engaged Communities Group



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

- Housing Supply Strategy
- Infrastructure impact on the supply of social housing
- Funding for Social Housing Development Programme
- Supporting People Programme
- Prevention of homelessness
- Recent unrest and number of families relocated into temporary accommodation
- Irish language
- Gaps in safeguarding in sport
- Integration of communities
- Arts funding and budget
- Contingency Planning in the event of a budget not being agreed
- The number of social homes currently being constructed
- Disabled Facilities Grant
- Forthcoming legislation
- Cost of damage to social housing following recent unrest
- Welfare mitigations
- The Sign Language Bill
- Warm Healthy Homes fund
- Partnership with housing associations
- Right to try timeline
- Economic inactivity and benefit fraud

Mark Durkan left the meeting at 11.25 a.m.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 11.25 a.m.

Agreed: That the Committee revisits its strategic planning and legislative timelines.

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

- Information on the number of social homes currently under construction
- An update on the Affordable Warmth Scheme



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- The economic and inactivity rates across Northern Ireland
- Identify the number of homes and where the pressures are post HAG
- Re-identify the current position post legislation (particularly with the Sign Language Bill)

The Chairperson brought forward Agenda Item 8 - Finance update: Oral briefing from the Department for Communities.

7. Finance update: Oral briefing from the Department for Communities

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental Officials to the meeting:

John Greer, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services Group

Kathy Sands, Finance Director

Olga Beagon, Finance Director

Mark Durkan rejoined the meeting at 11.27 a.m.

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

- AME underspend
- Inflationary pressures
- Engagement with DoF and other departments
- Contingency planning in the absence of a budget
- Reallocation of underspend
- Lack of monitoring rounds
- Arms Length Bodies' quarterly funding
- Intermediate rent and maximising Financial Transaction Capital (FTC)
- Prioritisation list of FTC projects
- Departmental income receipts

Andy Allen rejoined the meeting at 11.32 a.m.



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for a breakdown distinguishing genuine efficiencies from service reductions, deferrals, unmet pressures and reductions in discretionary activity in relation to savings options being RAG-rated for deliverability and impact.

The Chairperson suspended the meeting at 11.52 a.m.

The meeting resumed in open session at 11.59 a.m. with all Members present.

The Chairperson brought forward Agenda Item 9 - Review of the Decent Homes Standard: Oral briefing from the Department of Communities

8. Review of the Decent Homes Standard: Oral briefing from the Department of Communities

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental Officials to the meeting:

Heloise Brown, Director, Social Housing Policy and Oversight

Ingrid McKinney, Social Housing Sustainability Branch Head

Donna Donnelly, Policy Lead, Review of the Decent Homes Standard

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

- The use of new technology for construction of social homes
- Dampness and mould in social homes and penalties for landlords
- Complaints process and tenants protection
- Warm Homes and Decent Homes Standard
- Rural need
- Timeline for fitness standards
- Consideration of a retrofitting strategy
- Savings used to invest in efficient homes
- Safety and anti-social behaviour
- Decent homes strategies and design standards



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for Communities to ask whether there is any work ongoing regarding the standards applied in correlation of the Decent Homes Standard between rural and urban areas.

The Chairperson brought forward Agenda Item 10 - Home Heating Oil Support Scheme: Oral briefing from the Department of Communities.

9. Home Heating Oil Support Scheme: Oral briefing from the Department of Communities

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental Officials to the meeting:

Cherrie Arnold, Deputy Secretary, Work and Health Group

David Tarr, Director, Social Security, Policy, Legislation and Decision-Making Services

Conrad McConnell, Director, Benefit Delivery

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

- Timeline for issue of vouchers
- Impact on other benefits
- Application process
- Model of scheme
- Engagement and Communication Plan
- Eligibility criteria
- Stakeholder engagement
- Potential for fraud
- Accessibility of communications
- Home mover eligibility
- The need for draft regulations
- Lessons learned from previous schemes

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for Communities to seek clarity on whether industrial injuries and war pensions recipients will be able to avail from the scheme.



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The Chairperson brought forward Agenda Item 11.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 12.54 p.m.

**10. Public Consultation on Liquor Licensing for Fleadh Cheoil na Éireann:
Oral briefing from the Department for Communities**

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental Officials to the meeting:

Gerard Murray, Director, Local Government and Housing Regulation Division

Nicola McEvoy, Deputy Director, Social Policy Unit and Local Government

Lynne Brennan, Deputy Principal, Liquor Licensing Branch

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

- Stakeholder involvement and engagement
- Public consultation
- Additional licensing costs to ratepayers
- Pop-up licensed premises

The Chairperson reverted to Agenda Items 5 and 6 – Matters Arising and Correspondence.

5. Matters Arising (continued)

**Committee for Communities - Draft response to Department for
Communities' Museums Policy Consultation**

Agreed: That the response to the consultation is submitted following any amendment(s) suggested.

The Committee noted the following items:

Department for Communities	Disabled Facilities Grant
Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA)	Role of RHAs - Response to Anti-Social behaviour



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Department for Communities	Guidance to Departments in the Absence of a Budget for 2026-27, issued by the Department of Finance (DoF)
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11. Correspondence

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs - Request for feedback - Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill

Agreed: That the Committee is content for the secretariat to review the Bill for intersection with Department for Communities' area of responsibility and draft a Committee response for consideration, if appropriate.

Department for Communities - response to Committee for Education – proposal to link Holiday Meal Provision to Social Supermarket Provision

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Committee for Education to highlight Committee concerns with availability of social supermarkets and that they should not be considered as a provision point for holiday meals.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Summary of content
House of Lords	Correspondence from Lord Carlile of Berriew to Department of Work and Pensions - proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008, (EC) No 1223/2009 and (EU) 2019/1009 as regards simplification of certain requirements and procedures for chemical products (referred to as COM(2025)531)
House of Lords	Copy of correspondence from Department of Work and Pensions from Lord Carlile of Berriew - exceptional



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Source	Summary of content
	circumstances to chemicals health and safety regulations amendments, consequential and transitional provision regulations 2026
Sense	Issue 2 of Sense Newsletter
Department for Communities	Housing (Amendment) Bill cannot be introduced by the end of June 2026
Committee for The Executive Office	Grand Central Station - Signage
Department for Communities	Draft SR - The Occupational Pension Schemes (Preservation of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2026
Department for Communities	Response to Committee for Education Free School Meals (FSM) scheme
Executive Information Service	Press Release - Lyons congratulates recipients of King's Birthday Honours
Department for Communities	DfC Pension Schemes Bill
Minister for Communities	Oral Statement - Update on the Affordable Rent Programme
Department for Communities	The Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 (Commencement No. 18) (Abolition of Benefits) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee noted the following items of tabled correspondence:



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Source	Summary of content
Minister for Communities	Oral Statement - Update on the Affordable Rent Programme
Northern Ireland Fiscal Council	Sustainability Report 2026
Executive Information Service	Affordable Rent Programme
Department for Communities	Circulation of addresses of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) on social media

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

The Committee considered a Clerk's memo in relation to the Pensions Schemes Bill summer recess meeting dates.

Agreed: That Members will attend the informal information sessions, subject to their availability.

The Chairperson reminded Members of the agenda for the informal meeting with the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection, Rural and Community Development and proposed that Members indicate their availability to the Committee team.

13. Any other business

There was no other business.

14. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 25 June 2026, in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.18p.m.



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Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities