



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Communities

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 19 March 2026

**Meeting Location:** Room 29, Parliament Buildings

**Present:** Mr Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)  
Ms Cathy Mason MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA (via Zoom)  
Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA  
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 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:

Colm Gildernew - Private sector landlord, Member's Bill on mitigating the threat of homelessness.

Andy Allen - Private sector landlord.

Kellie Armstrong – Associate of the 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 made reference to the announcement in relation to the NI Executive being pledged £17million to mitigate heating costs in Northern Ireland. The Chairperson further advised that while it was a welcome announcement, the Committee should be aware of plans for the distribution of the funds. The Chairperson then proposed that an urgent briefing by the Department is sought in order that Members can be informed about any planning or scheme for distribution of the funds.

**Agreed:** That an urgent briefing on plans to mitigate rising energy costs and allocation of the £17M is sought from the Department for Communities.

### 4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the meeting on 12 March 2026.

**Agreed:** That the minutes are agreed as drafted.



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**5. Housing (Amendment) Bill 2026: Pre-introductory evidence from the Department for Communities**

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Ms Heloise Brown, Acting Director, Social Housing Policy and Oversight,  
Department for Communities

Mr Stephen Baird, Deputy Principal, Social Housing Policy Branch, Department  
for Communities

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

- Current Legal Thresholds
- Safeguards and Human Rights
- Human Rights Commission input to Legislation
- “Unacceptable Behaviour” versus “Anti-Social Behaviour” - definitions and relevant examples
- Court Injunctions and Possession Orders
- Data Sharing across organisations
- Supporting People Housing Associations role
- Cost and resources
- Department of Justice and wider Stakeholder engagement
- The Bill’s role in helping vulnerable individuals
- Prohibiting Abuse of Power
- Location of Tenants placement and NIHE powers
- Eligibility Provisions of potential tenants
- Wider Social Impact and displacement issues
- Homeless individuals and availability of supporting people services to assist individuals
- Process prior to Injunction between Tenant and Landlord
- Best Practice Guidance



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**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and to Housing Associations seeking detail on each organisation's process for dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour, in writing.

**Agreed:** That a research paper is requested from the Assembly's Research and Information Services (RaISe) regarding comparatives of Anti-Social Behaviour in other jurisdictions.

### **6. Funding for social housing: Oral evidence from Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA)**

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Mr Seamus Leheny, Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations

Mr Michael Rafferty – Group Director of Finance & Resources – Choice Housing Ireland

Ms Jan Sloan – Director of Development, Clanmil Housing

Mr Barry Kerr – Director of Development & Assets, Apex Housing Association

Ms Anita Conway – Director of Development, Radius Housing

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

- Gap between targets and delivery of homes
- Borrowing of funds for Housing Associations
- Recommendations in relation to a Sustainable Funding Model
- Average HAG rates
- Developer Contributions
- Inflationary Costs
- Design Standards of Social Housing
- Departmental Engagement
- Impacts of Grants and Schemes
- Prioritisation of Funding and certainty of Budget



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- Infrastructure Requirements
- Public Land for Social Housing
- Future Proofing of Units

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 11.35 a.m.

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask, should the position re Housing Executive being able to borrow change, whether a percentage of Northern Ireland Housing Executive's allocated budget (in future) would come from the Housing Association Grant.

**Agreed:** That a summary of points made by NIFHA reps on the payback period discussed during the briefing session is sent to the Department for comment and to seek clarification on whether global events will trigger a review prior to the planned 2027 date.

The Chairperson informed Members that the next agenda item would take place in closed session in order for the Committee to receive a briefing from the Department for Communities on The Northern Ireland Football Fund.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move into closed session to receive a briefing from the Department for Communities on The Northern Ireland Football Fund.

The meeting moved into closed session at 11.49 a.m.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 11.49 a.m.

### **7. The Northern Ireland Football Fund: Oral evidence from the Department for Communities**

The Chairperson provided Members with a Sub-Judice warning prior to the briefing session.

The Chairperson then welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Ms Emer Morelli, Interim Permanent Secretary, Department for Communities



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Mr Iain Greenway, Acting deputy Secretary, Engaged Communities Group,  
Department for Communities

Ms Joanna Gray, Senior Responsible Owner for The Northern Ireland Football  
Fund (TNIFF), Department for Communities

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

- Transparency of Fair, Consistent and Evidence Based Selection Process
- Affordability and Expectations of the Scheme
- Individual Teams and the application process
- Scoring Matrix
- Legal Challenges and Financial Implications
- Support for applicants during the application process
- Ministerial options - Order of Preferences
- Additional Funding for other sports (FTC Funding)
- Sectoral Panel

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to request detail of all ongoing  
legal cases involving the Department and the associated financial implications,  
and to further seek detail in relation to the range of FTC options for funding  
currently being considered by the Department.

Maolíosa McHugh left the meeting at 12.33 p.m.

The meeting resumed in open session at 12.33 p.m. with the following Members  
present: Mr Colm Gildernew, Ms Cathy Mason, Mrs Kellie Armstrong, Mr  
Maurice Bradley, Mrs Pam Cameron, Mr Mark Durkan and Mrs Sian Mulholland.

**8. SL1 The Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment, Jobseeker's  
Allowance and Employment Support Allowance (Claims And Payments)  
Amendment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**

Maolíosa McHugh rejoined the meeting at 12.38 p.m.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the SL1 was received on 13 March  
2026 and that the Department intends to lay the rule as soon as possible after  
DWP lay its corresponding SI (expected to be laid on 20 March).



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The Chairperson informed the Committee that a Draft Statutory Rule and Explanatory Memorandum had *yet to be* received for the SL1.

The Chairperson then welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Ms Hayley Ward, Policy Lead, Department for Communities

Ms Catriona Coulter, Deputy Policy Lead, Department for Communities

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

- Delay of consideration of the SL1
- Timelines and Best Practice

The Chairperson informed Members that, the absence of a draft copy of the rule does not prevent the Committee from proceeding, however, this should be exceptional.

The Chairperson further advised the Committee that the Minister for Communities had requested that the Committee consider the proposed statutory rule within a *shortened timeframe*.

The Chairperson then advised Members that a shortened timeframe did not preclude the Committee from issuing a call for views and that this could result in the Committee making a decision on an SL1 before responses were received, and that any responses would contribute to Committee scrutiny at the Statutory Rule stage, rather than at the SL1 stage.

The Chairperson finally informed Members that:

- The Committee team would issue a call for views on the SL1 using the standard survey on Citizen Space from 19 March 2026.
- The SL1, and any relevant papers from the Department would be published on the Committee website and notified to relevant stakeholders, alongside the relevant deadline, when available.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider the SL1 again at its meeting on 26 March 2026 when the Draft Rule and EM have been provided by the Department.



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## 9. Matters Arising

### **Department for Communities - Welfare Supplementary Payments Annual Report 2024-25**

**Agreed:** That a briefing on Transitional Protection, is scheduled for a future meeting.

### **Department for Communities - Legislative amendments proposed by HM Treasury**

**Agreed:** That a briefing is scheduled in relation to this SI, for a future meeting.

### **Department for Communities - Building Safety Policy**

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask whether it is undertaking any work to streamline regulatory responsibilities in relation to Building Safety.

### **Department for Communities - Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy Progress**

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask what Cross-Departmental work is ongoing during the interim period.

### **Department for Communities - Financial Issues Faced by Supporting People Providers**

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask whether it intends to review the Supporting People Programme given the ongoing current financial situation and the loss of skilled employees.

**Agreed:** That a follow-up letter is sent to the Minister for Communities requesting his response to the Committee's report into Homelessness and Supporting People.

### **Department for Communities - Review of Design Standards**

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to ask if any consideration is being given during the Review to the changing demographics and an aging population.



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The Committee noted the following items:

<b>Source</b>	<b>Subject Matter</b>
Department for Communities	Treasury Open Book Exercise
Department for Communities	Review of Carer's Allowance
Department for Communities	Funding provided to Disabled Sports Clubs – Sport NI Information Provided to Department for Communities
Department for Communities	Department of Work and Pensions - Universal Credit Bill
Department for Communities	Rates Support Grant Paper sent to the Minister from Derry City and Strabane District Council
Department for Communities	National Wealth Fund
Department of Communities	Benefit Fraud and Error – Minister for Communities Good Morning Ulster Interview
Department for Communities	Sign Language Masters Course at QUB
Department for Communities	Local Housing Allowance and average rents
Department for Communities	2026 03 13 DfC Private Tenancies Act (NI) 2022

## 10. Correspondence

**Assembly Business Office - Written Ministerial Statement Review of COPNI and NICCY Recommendations - New Decade New Approach (NDNA), & NICCY - Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25**



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**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to both NICCY and COPNI to seek each Commissioner's views on the Ministerial Statement setting out the Department's response to recommendations made in the NDNA Reviews.

**Department for Communities - Breathing Space - Debt Respite Scheme - for Northern Ireland – Update on Legislative Approach**

**Agreed:** That a briefing is scheduled for a future meeting.

**Inspire Wellbeing - Request for informal oral briefing with Committee for Communities and Committee for Health with regards to Supported Housing**

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department of Health to ask what work is currently ongoing in relation to the issues raised by Inspire.

**Agreed:** That Committee reserves any decision until after the Committee for Health considerations.

**Housing Rights - Briefing on the draft Notice To Quit Regulations**

**Agreed:** That a briefing is scheduled for a future meeting.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Summary of content
RaISe	Government launches consultation on making public services quicker, easier and more secure to access with Digital ID
Executive Information Service	Press Release - Lyons announces continuation of Integrated Advice Partnership Fund
Committee for Finance	Outworkings of Chancellor's Spring Statement Summary
Executive Information Service	Press Release - Armagh Observatory and Planetarium unveils stellar vision for the future



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<b>Source</b>	<b>Summary of content</b>
Executive Information Service	Press Release - Funding Neighbourhood Renewal Programme
Committee for The Executive Office	Historical Clerical Childhood Abuse
Committee for Finance	Administrative and Financial Provision Bill
Committee for Finance	Tech Secure - Pilot Digital Infrastructure + Cybersecurity Risks across the Community Voluntary Sector
Minister for Communities	North South Ministerial Council Language Body Statement
Executive Information Service	Service Press Release - Lyons – Ulster's ties with the US stronger than ever
Northern Ireland Housing Executive	Individual Formal Record Procedural Concerns Governance Questions and Ongoing Habitability Issues

The Committee further noted the following items of tabled correspondence:

<b>Source</b>	<b>Summary of content</b>
Department for Communities	Amendment of the legislation governing the Local Government Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) using the McCloud Remedy
IMTAC	Draft Disability Consultation – briefing paper response

## 11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.



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**12. Any other business**

Sian Mulholland raised concerns regarding the delayed consultation of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Policy.

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to the Department to request an update and timeline of the Policy work to be undertaken.

**13. Date, time and location of the next meeting**

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 26 March 2026, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.09 p.m.

**Colm Gildernew MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Communities**