



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 2 October 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

- Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson) MLA
- Ms Nicola Brogan (Deputy Chairperson) MLA
- Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
- Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA
- Mrs Pam Cameron MLA
- Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
- Mr Mark Durkan MLA (via Zoom)
- Mr Maurice Bradley MLA

In Attendance:

- Mrs Emer Boyle (Assembly Clerk)
- Mr Sean McCann (Assistant Clerk)
- Mr Chris McAfee (Clerical Supervisor)
- Ms Katie Egan (Clerical Officer)
- Ms Patrice Morris (Senior Assistant Clerk)

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



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1. Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared:

Andy Allen – Charity trustee, private sector landlord, stakeholder with Bryson Charitable Group on work on winter fuel scheme

Kellie Armstrong – Associate of Chartered Institute for Housing, stakeholder with Bryson Charitable Group on work on winter fuel scheme

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

Colm Gildernew - Private sector landlord, charity trustee, stakeholder with Bryson Charitable Group on work on winter fuel scheme

Maolíosa McHugh – Chairperson of pre-school Naíscoil na Deirge

Mark Durkan – Family members own licensed premises

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 10.03a.m.

2. Apologies

Sian Mulholland MLA

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee was briefed last week on the Disability and Work Strategy when Members were told that the Minister would make a statement on it this week and launch a 12 week consultation. An email from the Department was received on Monday stating that the statement will be delayed until October, however no reason for the delay was given.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister to ask what the reasons are for the delay in the statement and the launch of the consultation on the Draft Strategy.



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4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the meeting on 25 September 2025.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. Matters Arising

Department for Communities - Northern Ireland Community Infrastructure Fund

Department for Communities - Musical Instruments Programme

The Chairperson informed Members that, in the context of the Committee's statutory role in terms of budget scrutiny, he remained concerned that several Departmental funding announcements have been made via the media without any prior notification to the Committee.

While the Musical Instruments Programme and the intention to launch a community infrastructure grant were signalled to the Assembly in a Ministerial Statement on 2 June, detailed information only reached the Committee after the public launch.

The Chairperson further stated that the Committee had received no prior notification of a number of other announcements including the Travel Awards for Bands; the America 250 Culture Fund; the Ulster-Scots Agency uplift; and the Downpatrick public realm scheme. Furthermore, it is not clear from the Department's written updates where these allocations sit.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister seeking an explanation for this situation, a commitment to notify the Committee in advance of any future public announcements and to ask for a paper mapping each 2025 announcement to its budget line and monitoring position. The Committee also requested a list of forthcoming legislation as this planned legislation may have an impact on the overall Departmental budget.

Assembly Speaker - Ministerial announcements



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee to ask whether it plans to review the responsibilities of the Speaker in relation to the business of Assembly committees, particularly in relation to the need for Ministers to inform Committees of major announcements in advance of the media and any penalties for continued non-adherence to Speaker's directions.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Speaker to ask if he is taking action in relation to the late publication by the Executive Office of forthcoming legislation as required under Standing Orders.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Department for Communities	Assembly Executive and Review Committee - Community Voluntary And Charity Stakeholder List
Department for Communities	Personal Independence Payment Data Breach
Department for Communities	Disability and Work Strategy

The Committee noted the following tabled item:

Source	Subject Matter
Department for Communities	Disability and Work Strategy

6. Correspondence

Clerk to the Public Accounts Committee - correspondence from member of the public regarding Heritage Contracts

Agreed: That a copy of the correspondence is forwarded to the Department for comment.



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Department for Communities – offer to brief the Committee on the forthcoming fraud, error and debt Bill.

Agreed: That a briefing is arranged for a future meeting.

Northern Ireland Assembly Communications – Northern Ireland Football Fund

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister to ask if he is still considering the release of advice in relation to the fund and the submissions to the fund and, if so, when this information will be published.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask for clarification in relation to the process followed by the Department and the timescales within which it responds to Committee correspondence.

Clerk to the Committee for Finance - 2025-2026 Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to express the Committee's concerns in relation to Departmental overspends, to ask which areas might be cut as a result and how risks and associated implications are considered when making budgetary decisions which could lead to the inability to fund certain measures.

Queen's University Belfast - Invitation to Chair of Committee for Communities - AI and the Future of Work 22 Oct 2025

Agreed: That a letter is sent to Queens to advise that the Chairperson will attend.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Summary of content
Chinese Consulate	Invitation to China-Northern Economic, Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum 11 Nov 2025
Queen's University Belfast	Invitation to Chair of Committee for Communities - AI and the Future of Work 22 Oct 2025



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Source	Summary of content
Queen's University Belfast	Invitation to Deputy Chair of Committee for Communities - AI and the Future of Work 22 Oct 2025
Northern Ireland Assembly Communications	Media Clippings - Race Attacks and The Northern Ireland Football Fund
Ulster Hockey	Request to brief regarding facilities
Northern Ireland Assembly Communications	Media Clippings – The Northern Ireland Football Fund Council Spend on Security with reference to Vandalism of Portrait
Northern Ireland Assembly Communications	Funding for project to empower women to tackle on Paramilitarism People and Places Museum Anti-Social Behaviour
Individual	Report of the Independent Review of the Liquor Licensing System in Northern Ireland
Consumer Council of Northern Ireland	Consumer Council's recent research report "Enough on their plates? The food concerns and lived experiences of young adults in Northern Ireland."
Queen's University Belfast	Invitation to Delivering Better Health and Wellbeing Through Community Led Organisations Event 23 October 2025
Supporting Communities	Invitation to All-Ireland Tenant Engagement Conference 06 +07 Oct 2025
AHRC Creative Communities	Press Release Community Innovation Practitioner Awards 2025-26 AHRC Creative Communities



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In relation to the latter invitations from Queens for a Health & Wellbeing event and the invitation from Supporting Communities, whilst Members expressed interest in attending these, they highlighted that both are scheduled at the same time as the weekly Committee meeting.

Members asked the Committee team to let the organisers know about the commitments required by MLAs on plenary and Committee days and to kindly request that future events (to which they intend to invite Committee Members) could take place on alternative days.

The Committee further noted the following items of tabled correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Chinese Consulate	Invitation to China-Northern Economic, Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum 11 Nov 2025
Northern Ireland Assembly Communications	Media Clippings - Race Attacks and The Northern Ireland Football Fund
Ulster Hockey	Request to brief regarding facilities
Northern Ireland Assembly Communications	Media Clippings – The Northern Ireland Football Fund Council Spend on Security with reference to Vandalism of Portrait
Northern Ireland Assembly Communications	Funding for project to empower women to tackle on Paramilitarism People and Places Museum Anti-Social Behaviour
Clerk to the Committee for Finance	2025-2026 Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn
Individual	Report of the Independent Review of the Liquor Licensing System in Northern Ireland



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Source	Summary of content
Consumer Council of Northern Ireland	Consumer Council's recent research report "Enough on their plates? The food concerns and lived experiences of young adults in Northern Ireland."
Clerk to the Public Accounts Committee	Correspondence from member of the public regarding Heritage Contracts
Queen's University Belfast	Invitation to Delivering Better Health and Wellbeing Through Community Led Organisations Event 23 October 2025
Supporting Communities	Invitation to All-Ireland Tenant Engagement Conference 06 +07 Oct 2025
Department for Communities	Fraud and Error - Offer to brief Committee

7. Briefing by Bryson Charitable Group on the Emergency Fuel Payment Scheme

The Chairperson welcomed the following representatives to the meeting:

Shane Logan, CEO, Bryson Charitable Group

Steven Kelly, Head of Development, Bryson Charitable Group

Pam Cameron joined the meeting at 10.30a.m.

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

- The need for government to ensure that those in greatest need of support receive it
- Funding
- The Anti-Poverty Strategy



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- Housing and energy costs
- Bryson's remit and work across Northern Ireland
- Barriers for those living in rural areas
- Education
- Emergency assistance schemes
- Best practice globally to alleviate fuel poverty
- Root causes of fuel poverty
- Policy changes that are needed to alleviate fuel poverty
- Cost of living
- Partnership working

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Executive Office to ask if consideration can be given to establishing a cross-departmental PfG target to end poverty in Northern Ireland in either the current or updated Programme for Government.

8. Departmental briefing on the Climate Change Action Plan

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:

Angus Kerr, Director, Climate Change Division

Dominic Dorris, Departmental Climate Action Plan

Donna Knowles, Head of Residential Decarbonisation Branch

David Farry, Residential Buildings Sector, NI Climate Action Plan

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

- Delayed actions from the Departmental Climate Change Action Plan
- Geographic priorities for decarbonisation
- Housing
- Cross departmental working
- Design of new homes
- Improving building regulations
- Warm Healthy Homes Scheme
- Net zero targets and the barriers to achieving the targets
- Fuel Poverty Strategy



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to Belfast City Council to ask why there is a delay with Belfast City Council's action in the CCAP to plant 18,000 trees on the Department's land.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask whether any work is ongoing to understand the impact of Northern Ireland's climate change actions on a global scale and likewise to identify the impact of global climate change on Northern Ireland's action plans.

The Chairperson suspended the meeting at 11.56a.m.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 11.56a.m.

The meeting resumed at 12.02p.m. with the following Members present: Maurice Bradley, Pam Cameron, Kellie Armstrong, Mark Durkan, Nicola Brogan, Colm Gildernew, Maolíosa McHugh.

9. Briefing by Forum for Better Homes NI on Housing Decarbonisation

The Chairperson welcomed the following representatives to the meeting:

Martin Haran, Professor of Real Estate, Ulster University

Jan Sloan, Executive Director of Development and New Business, Clanmill Housing

Gavin McGuire, Director, Federation Master Builders, Northern Ireland

Ciaran Fox, Director, Royal Society of Ulster Architects

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

- Fuel poverty
- Housing
- Funding for retrofitting



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- The role of local councils
- The need for good design and quality control
- Building regulations
- Energy efficiency
- Engagement with stakeholders
- The need for an independent accredited supplier framework
- Carbon capture

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Forum for Better Homes NI to thank the organisation for their briefing session and to ask them to forward information on retrofitting in the Netherlands which they referenced during the session.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department of Finance to ask for an update on the reform of building regulations and a timeframe for bringing them forward.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask if it has engaged with its counterparts in the Republic of Ireland in relation to retrofitting and to ask if the Department has explored the potential to access Shared Island funding for retrofitting.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the UK Government to ask if it will be making funds available for retrofitting which Northern Ireland could potentially avail of.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to local councils to ask when their area plans will be finalised and whether plans to future-proof house building and retrofitting are included therein.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson informed Members that, for the meeting on October 9 there are currently 5 briefings listed. Committee staff are waiting to hear back in relation to whether some of these briefings will actually go ahead but it was not anticipated that there would be 5 briefings that day.



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The Chairperson drew Members' attention to an invitation from East Belfast Mission to host the Committee meeting on 4 December at The Skainos Centre.

Agreed: That the Committee meeting on 4 December is held at The Skainos Centre and a tour of the Mission's hostel is arranged.

Kellie Armstrong recorded her apologies for the meetings on 16 and 23 October.

11. Any other business

There was no other business.

12. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 9 October 2025, in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.58p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities