



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Communities

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 21 May 2026

**Meeting Location:** Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

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

The meeting commenced in public session at 11.25 a.m.



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### 1. Declarations of Interest

Colm Gildernew - Member's Bill on mitigating the threat of homelessness, Member of Public Accounts Committee.

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

### 2. Apologies

Mr Maurice Bradley MLA

Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA

### 3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that the debate on the Committee's Anti-Poverty Motion is scheduled to take place in plenary on Tuesday 26 May. The Chairperson informed Members that they have been provided with a press release in relation to the motion for consideration and agreement.

**Agreed:** That the press release is issued.

The Chairperson informed Members that an informal overview and presentation by the Department of Communities on the Universal Credit Journal, would take place from 12.30 – 2pm on Tuesday 26 May, in Room 29.

### 4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the meeting on 14 May 2026.

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

### 5. Retention and Disposal Schedule – The Executive Office

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee had deferred a decision on this schedule until The Executive Office Committee confirmed it was content. The Executive Office Committee considered the schedule again at its



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meeting on 20 May, when Members indicated that they were content with the schedule.

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

The Chairperson informed Members of his growing concern that other Statutory Committees may consider that this Committee holds full responsibility for scrutiny of the content of each of the other Department's Schedules. He therefore proposed that the Committee writes to each of the Statutory Committees to remind them of their individual obligations in respect of review of the substance and content of individual Retention and Disposal Schedules before sending notification to the Communities Committee for recording.

**Agreed:** That a letter is sent to all Statutory Committees to remind them of their individual obligations in respect of the substance and content of their own Retention and Disposal Schedules.

### **6. A Discussion Paper to Support Homeless Prevention in Northern Ireland: Oral briefing from Housing Rights**

The Chairperson welcomed the following representatives to the meeting:

Kate McCauley, CEO, Housing Rights

Jamie Miller, Head of Policy and Development, Housing Rights

Stephen Morrison, Policy Lead, Housing Rights

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

- A duty to prevent homelessness
- Departmental priorities
- Resources and funding
- Preventative services in other jurisdictions
- Inclusion of the lived experience
- Policy proposals and legislative reform
- Role of local government and the Voluntary and Community Sector
- Cross – Departmental collaborative working



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- Social housing supply
- New Foundations Policy
- Housing Miscellaneous Bill and Anti-Social Behaviour
- Stakeholder involvement
- Measuring outcomes

Andy Allen left the meeting at 12.19 p.m

**Agreed:** That the Committee share the Housing Rights briefing paper with the Department for Health and the Department for Justice and ask if there is any work ongoing in relation to homelessness prevention in each of the Departments.

## 7. Matters Arising

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Equality Commission	Easy Read Accessibility
Committee for Assembly Executive and Review Committee	Scrutiny of Policy Delivered by Arm's-Length Bodies (ALBs)
Department for Communities	The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

## 8. Correspondence

**Committee for Justice - SL1 – The Justice (2011 Act) (Amendment of Schedule 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 – request for Committee’s views.**

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



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The Committee noted the following items:

<b>Source</b>	<b>Summary of content</b>
Committee for Education	Copy of letter to Department for Communities regarding Automatic enrolment to free school meals for Universal Credit Claimants
Committee for Education	Copy of letter to Department for Communities regarding Education (Holiday Meal) Payments Bill
Assembly Business Office	General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland - Retention and Disposal Schedule
Mark Simpson, Ulster University	The welfare of nations – research launch
Assembly Communications Office	Committee for Communities media clippings
Assembly Communications Office	Minister for Communities appearance on Stephen Nolan Show 15 May 2026 transcript

## 9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson informed Members that, due to a bank holiday on Monday 25 May, the papers for the meeting on 28 May would be circulated to Members on Friday 22 May 2026.

## 10. Any other business

Sian Mulholland raised an issue in relation to the 2024 consultation on the draft Local Government (Cremation) Regulations. Those working within the funeral sector have communicated that they are still awaiting updated regulations.



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**Agreed:** That the Committee writes to the Department to ask for an update on the updated regulations following the consultation and to ask what engagement and communication takes place between the Department and the National Association of Funeral Directors (Northern Ireland) (NAFDNI).

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

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 28 May 2026, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings, following an informal demonstration on the Universal Credit Journal on Tuesday 26 May.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.35 p.m.

**Colm Gildernew MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Communities**