



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 22 January 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Cathy Mason MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mrs Pam Cameron MLA (via Zoom)
Mr Mark Durkan MLA (via Zoom)
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA (via Zoom)
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 10.00 a.m.

1. Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared:

Kellie Armstrong – member of the Deaf Community.

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

Andy Allen – acknowledged the he was mentioned in an item of correspondence under agenda item 6.

2. Apologies

There were no apologies.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson welcomed the commencement of ground works at Casement Park.

The Chairperson then confirmed that the Minister's office had advised that the briefing session should be able to go ahead at the Committee meeting on 29th January 2026 (following cancellation of today's attendance).

4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the meeting on 15 January 2026.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. Matters Arising

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 10.09 a.m.



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Simon Community - List of organisations affected by reduced income allocations

Agreed: That the substance of the correspondence be added to the Committee's mini-report on Homelessness and Supporting People.

Committee for Communities - Draft Report on Homelessness

Agreed: That the Draft Report is updated to include the additional information supplied by the Simon Community and forwarded to the Minister for Communities in the first instance, seeking his response to the Committee's recommendations.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department seeking clarification on the resource allocation to homelessness services for the next year and the subsequent two years.

Committee for Communities - Memo for the Universal Credit Removal of Two Child Limit &

Committee for Communities - Legislative Consent Memorandum: Universal Credit Removal of Two Child Limit Bill

Agreed: That briefings with Department for Communities officials and relevant stakeholders are scheduled for a future meeting.

Committee for Communities - Memo for the Pensions Schemes Bill & Assembly Business Office - Legislative Consent Memorandum Pensions Schemes Bill

Agreed: That the Chairperson reflects in his speech during the debate on the motion that the Committee has not had time for scrutiny of this subsequent LCM and therefore, there is no position to reflect.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Committee for The Executive Office	The Executive Legislative Programme 2025 - 2026 – Response to query re Proposed Legislation



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6. Correspondence

Committee for Finance - Advice NI request regarding implementation of scrapping of the 2 child limit in Northern Ireland

Agreed: That the Committee for Finance is advised that Advice NI are scheduled to brief the Committee for Communities on 29 January 2026.

Committee for Finance - Scrutiny of the draft Multi-Year Budget for 2026-29/30

Agreed: That the Committee team draft a response for consideration at a future meeting (once a reply from the Department has been received).

Individual – Disability Discrimination Issue

Agreed: That a response is sent to the individual indicating that the Committee cannot act on an individual's behalf and to suggest they contact their local MLA / MP.

Department for Communities - Request to postpone briefing on the Children Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 to 12 March 2026.

Agreed: That the briefing is rescheduled to take place on 12 March 2026.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Summary of content
Lidl Northern Ireland	Invitation - Celebrating Local Suppliers and Communities
Assembly Communications	Media Clippings: "DUP's Lyons requested meeting to 'express concern' over asylum seekers' impact on housing market"
Youth Assembly	Invitation - Big Youth Survey - the views of children and young people aged 12–21 living in Northern Ireland on the issues that matter most to them
Assembly Business Office	Office of Discretionary Support Annual Report 2024 – 2025



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Source	Summary of content
Committee for The Executive Office	Barnardo's access to records and PRONI visit
Committee for The Executive Office	Inquiry Mother and Baby Institutions

The Committee further noted the following items of tabled correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Department for Communities	DWP consultation paper entitled "Trust-based pension schemes: Trustees and governance, building a stronger future."
Arts and Humanities Research Council	Co-Lab Policy Network Awards 2026 – Arts and Humanities Research Council - Creative Communities.
Construction Employers Federation	Press release - updated figures for the Infrastructure Levy introduced in June 2025 by CEF, the NI Chamber and NIFHA
Clerking and Members Support Office	The scheduled CLG meeting on 20/01/2026 did not go ahead due to lack of quorum.
Open University	Response to Draft Disability Strategy
Executive Information Service	Press Release - Lyons announces projects receiving USA NI250 Funding

The Chairperson informed Members that the next agenda item would take place in closed session in order for the Committee to discuss text of amendments with the Bill clerk.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session to undertake consideration of the Departmental amendments to the Bill.

The meeting moved into closed session at 10.13 a.m.

Liz Marsh, Bill Clerk joined the meeting to address any queries during the consideration of draft amendments.

7. Sign Language Bill – Committee Review of Departmental amendments

The Committee considered the Clause by Clause table which detailed all the comments and evidence received as part of its Call for Evidence on the Sign Language Bill.

Mark Durkan left the meeting at 10.55 a.m.

The meeting resumed in open session at 11.09 a.m. with the following Members present: Mr Colm Gildernew, Ms Cathy Mason, Mr Andy Allen, Mrs Kellie Armstrong, Mr Maurice Bradley, Mrs Pam Cameron, Mr Maolíosa McHugh and Mrs Sian Mulholland.

8. Sign Language Bill – Formal Clause by Clause consideration

The Committee commenced its formal Clause-by-Clause consideration of the Sign Language Bill.

Long Title

The Committee considered the Long Title as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the Long Title of the Bill as drafted.

Clause 1 – Official recognition of sign languages

The Committee considered Clause 1 as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 1 as drafted.

Clause 2 – Promotion of interests by lead Department



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The Committee considered the Department's proposed amendments to Clause 2.

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 13

After 'classes' insert 'free of charge'

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 15

Leave out 'deaf children' and insert 'young people who are deaf'

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 17

Leave out 'children are persons under 19' and insert 'young people are persons under 25'

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 2 as amended by the Department.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed that its report should emphasise that the Committee **advise** the Department that the EFM should be updated to make explicit what it means by the term "Promote".

Kellie Armstrong recorded her dissent regarding agreement of Clause 2 as drafted.

Clause 3 - Organisations to take reasonable steps

The Committee considered Clause 3 as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 3 as drafted.

Clause 4 - Organisations to be listed in regulations

The Committee considered the Department's proposed amendments to Clause 4.

Clause 4, Page 3, Line 7

Leave out 'are subject to negative resolution' and insert 'may not be made unless a draft of them has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly'



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Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 4 as amended by the Department.

Clause 5 - Department to issue guidance

The Committee considered the Department's proposed amendments to Clause 5.

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 27

Leave out 'one person or group' and insert 'two persons or groups'

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 27

Leave out 'acting on behalf' and insert 'representative or cognisant of the views or interests'

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 5 as amended by the Department.

Kellie Armstrong recorded her dissent regarding agreement of Clause 5 as amended by the Department.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed that its report should emphasise that the Committee **advise** the Department to ensure that "at least two persons or groups" in Clause 5 are not two from the same section of the Deaf Community (BSL /ISL).

Clause 6 – Best Practice to be in Guidance

The Committee considered Clause 6 as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 6 as drafted.

Clause 7 – Department may make Regulations

The Committee considered the Department's proposed amendments to Clause 7.

Clause 7, Page 5, Line 1



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Leave out 'each Northern Ireland department in the same way' and insert 'one or more of the Northern Ireland departments separately or together in different or similar ways'

Clause 7, Page 5, Line 4

After 'acting' insert 'on behalf or'

Clause 7, Page 5, Line 5

After 'functions' insert 'on behalf or'

Clause 7, Page 5, Line 15

After 'relevant' insert 'material or'

Clause 7, Page 5, Line 18

After 'behalf' insert 'or in the interests'

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 7 as amended by the Department.

Clause 8 – Procedure for Making Regulations

The Committee considered the Department's proposed amendments to Clause 8.

Clause 8, Page 5, Line 27

Leave out 'one person or group' and insert 'two persons or groups'

Clause 8, Page 5, Line 27

Leave out 'acting on behalf' and insert 'representative or cognisant of the views or interests'

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 8 as amended by the Department.

Kellie Armstrong recorded her dissent regarding agreement of Clause 8 as amended by the Department.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed that its report should emphasise that the Committee **advise** the Department to ensure that “at least two persons or groups” in Clause 8 are not two from the same section of the Deaf Community (BSL /ISL).

Clause 9 – Department to publish 5 yearly reports

The Committee considered the Department’s proposed amendments to Clause 9.

Clause 9, Page 5, Line 38

After ‘be’ insert—

‘(a) laid before the Assembly by the Department, and (b)’

Clause 9, Page 6, Line 4

Leave out ‘5’ and insert ‘3’

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 9 as amended by the Department.

Clause 10 – Accreditation of Teachers and Interpreters

The Committee considered the Department’s proposed amendments to Clause 10.

Clause 10, page 6, Line 25

Leave out ‘are subject to negative resolution’ and insert ‘may not be made unless a draft of them has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly’

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 10 as amended by the Department.

Clause 11 – Members of the Deaf Community

The Committee considered a Bill Office Amendment to Clause 11.

Clause 11, page 6, line 33

Leave out “normally”



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The Committee failed to reach consensus in relation to clause 11 as drafted.

The question was put that the Committee is content with Clause 11 as drafted.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6; Noes 2; Abstain 0

AYES

Mr Colm Gildernew
Mrs Cathy Mason
Mr Andy Allen
Mr Maurice Bradley
Mrs Pam Cameron
Mr Maolíosá McHugh

NOES

Mrs Kellie Armstrong
Mrs Sian Mulholland

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 11 as drafted.

Clause 12 – Different Forms of Sign Languages

The Committee considered Clause 12 as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 12 as drafted.

Clause 13 – Everyday reliance on Sign Languages

The Committee considered Clause 13 as drafted.

Kellie Armstrong recorded her dissent regarding agreement of Clause 13 as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 13 as drafted.

Clause 14 – Commencement

The Committee considered Clause 14 as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 14 as drafted.

Clause 15 - Short Title

The Committee considered Clause 15 as drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 15 as drafted.



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The Chairperson advised Members that the formal Clause by Clause scrutiny of the Sign Language Bill had concluded.

The clause by clause consideration of the Bill was reported by Hansard.

Members noted that the draft Report on the Bill would be available for review and consideration at next week's meeting.

The Chairperson thanked the Departmental officials, the Bill Clerk, RaISe, Legal Services, Events, Education and Engagement and the Committee Team for their assistance throughout the Committee scrutiny stage of the Bill.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson reminded Members of an informal meeting with Department Officials scheduled for 27 January in relation to the new process for managing SL1s.

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

10. Any other business

There was no other business.

11. Date, time and location of the next meeting

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

The Chairperson informed Members that the final agenda item would take place in closed session in order for the Committee to be briefed by the Clerk to the Chairperson's Liaison Group.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session to receive a briefing by the Clerk to the Chairperson's Liaison Group.

The meeting moved into closed session at 11.31a.m.

12. Internal Briefing/Training

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials to the meeting:



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Mrs Roisin Kelly, Clerk to the Chairperson's Liaison Group
Mrs Sinead Kelly, Senior Assistant Clerk

The Committee received a briefing followed by a question and answer session relating to the new process for managing SL1s.

Andy Allen left the meeting at 12.17p.m.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.27p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities