



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 25 June 2026

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA
Mrs Pam Cameron MLA (via Zoom)
Mr Mark Durkan MLA
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA
Mrs Sian Mulholland MLA

In Attendance: Mrs Emer Boyle (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Sean McCann (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 10.00 a.m.



Northern Ireland Assembly

1. Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared:

Colm Gildernew – Member's Bill on mitigating the threat of homelessness, charity trustee, Member of the Public Accounts Committee

Andy Allen – charity trustee

Maolfosa McHugh – charity trustee

2. Apologies

Maurice Bradley MLA

Mark Durkan joined the meeting at 10.02 a.m.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson thanked Members for their attendance and engagement at the informal meeting on supported accommodation and young people with Inspire Wellbeing on Tuesday 23 June.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister to ask what engagement he has had with Executive colleagues in regard to introducing a strategy specifically for supported housing and accommodation for young people and those with mental health and other issues and to ask if he has considered the use of Financial Transactions Capital as a means of increasing the number of units of supported accommodation / homes.

The Chairperson reminded Members that today's meeting is a short formal meeting to complete essential Committee business ahead of the reciprocal informal meeting with the Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Social Protection, Rural and Community Development.

4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the Committee meeting on 18 June 2026.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. Charities (Amendment) Bill: Committee stage arrangements

The Chairperson informed Members that the Clerk's memo set out the proposed approach to handling the Committee Stage of the Bill — including the proposed extension of the Committee Stage, the Call for Evidence, stakeholder engagement and the Bill timetable.

Agreed: That the Committee is content that the Committee Stage of the Bill be extended to 11 December 2026, and that the draft Motion to extend at Appendix A be submitted to the Business Committee accordingly.

Agreed: That the Committee is content to agree a 12-week Committee Call for Evidence, with the call closing on 10 September 2026 and oral evidence sessions scheduled from 24 September.

Agreed: That the Committee is content to agree the draft signposting notice and the draft consultation letter.

Agreed: That the Committee is content to agree to the publication of social media posts relating to the Bill.

Agreed: That the Committee is content that appropriately redacted responses to its Call for Views, correspondence, and written evidence are published on the Committee webpage as they are received.

Agreed: That the Committee is content that the Delegated Powers Memorandum is forwarded to the Examiner of Statutory Rules for her advice.

Agreed: That the Committee is content that the Assembly Legal Team is instructed to assess the Bill in relation to potential Human and Convention Rights implications.

Agreed: That the Committee is content to agree the draft timetable.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: That organisations which are established outside of Northern Ireland, but which operate for charitable purposes in or from Northern Ireland (Section 167 charities) are added to the list of consultees as well as the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) in GB and equivalent bodies in the Republic of Ireland (The Wheel and the Charities Institute Ireland).

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the PSNI and the NCA to ask whether it feels that the proposed regulatory powers in the Bill are sufficient to deal with charitable organisations that may be engaging in illegal activity.

Agreed: That the Charity Regulator in England and the Republic of Ireland are asked to provide written evidence with a view to inviting them to also provide oral evidence during Committee Stage, if appropriate.

6. Matters Arising

Department for Communities - SR 2026/59 The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 – Help with Funeral Fees

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask if it is considering an increase in the amount being paid to help with funeral fees given the large increase in the cost of funerals.

Department for Communities - Retrofitting and Future-Proofing Homes – Action Plans and Sub-Groups

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for Communities to request copies of the minutes of the Project Board and sub-group meetings for the Domestic Energy Efficiency and Low Carbon Heat Programme.

Department for Communities - Child Maintenance Service

Agreed: That Departmental officials are invited to brief on this issue at a future Committee meeting.

Department for Communities – The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

Agreed: That the Department's response is forwarded to the individual who originally raised the matter.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Department for Communities - Request for information following briefing by Permanent Secretary and Deputy Secretary

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for Communities to request an update on the business case discussions with HM Treasury in relation to benefit fraud and error, with the Committee to be updated as soon as a response is received.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for Communities to ask that, in undertaking its work on the better use of existing spaces and homes (including the empty homes pilot), the homes identified are mapped against Northern Ireland Water's closed capture areas, so that the position on wastewater connectivity is clear.

Committee for Communities - Draft Memo to Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs - Areas with Natural Constraints Payments Bill

Agreed: That the draft nil response is agreed and may be provided to the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Department for Communities	Legislative Reform to Prevent Homelessness
Department for Communities	Review of Homelessness Legislation - Data Breakdown
Department for Communities	Consultation timeline - Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme
Department for Communities	SL1 The Registered Rents (Increase) Order
Department for Communities	Request for information following Quarterly Financial Update Briefing
Department for Communities	UK Statutory Instrument - Breathing Space (Debt Respite Scheme) for Northern Ireland
RaISe	Executive Programme Funds Briefing Note



Northern Ireland Assembly

The Committee noted the following tabled item:

Source	Subject Matter
Department for Communities	Response to individual complaint regarding social media comments by potential DfC official

7. Correspondence

Individual – Information request: access to benefits and social security for Traveller Communities

Agreed: That the Committee team responds to the individual with the relevant RalSe signposting information.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Summary of content
Pivotal	Report - Improving the Institutions - Suggested Reforms to Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive
Committee for Health	Support for Young Adults with Complex Needs
Department for Communities	Consultation Paper - Surplus Flexibilities for Defined Benefit Pension Schemes Unlocking Value for Employers and Scheme Members
IMTAC	Open letter re Disability Strategy
Department for Communities	SR 2026/115 (C.4) The Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 (Commencement No. 18) (Abolition of Benefits) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026
Executive Information Service	Press Release Lyons launches PRONI's five-year strategy



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Source	Summary of content
Individual	Information request - access to benefits and social security for Traveller Communities
Outscape	Report - New Findings Highlight the Need for a New Outdoor Recreation Strategy for Northern Ireland
Executive Information Service	Press Release - Lyons welcomes commencement of £7million Strabane Public Realm Scheme
Committee for Finance	Cash Profiles and Use of Vote on Account
Committee for Finance	2025-26 Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn
Committee for The Executive Office	Armed Forces Covenant
Committee for The Executive Office	Access to Records
Individual	Housing Issue
RAIn - Residents Against Incineration	Waste Incineration – A Threat to our Community Now and in the Future
Executive Information Service	Press release - Lyons reiterates commitment to supporting veterans
Executive Information Service	Press release - Appointment to the Libraries NI Board
Department for Communities	Key findings from the Pensions Commission Interim Report
Department for Communities	NIHE decision not to appoint a new CEO at present



Northern Ireland Assembly

Consulate General of India - Invite to Chair to welcome the India Men's Cricket Team to Belfast

Agreed: That Members are content that the Chairperson attends on behalf of the Committee.

The Committee noted the following items of tabled correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Public Records Office Northern Ireland (PRONI)	Laying addendum to Department for Economy - Disposal of Docs Order 1925 Retention and Disposal Schedule
Executive Information Service	Lyons announces £7.6million investment in Stormont sporting facilities
Executive Information Service	Press Release - Suspended sentence for benefit fraud at Craigavon Crown Court

8. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

The Committee discussed the online sessions on the Pensions Schemes Bill during summer recess.

Agreed: That, if possible, the online meetings are recorded and forwarded to Members or that minutes are taken and shared.

9. Any other business

There was no other business.

10. Date, time and location of the next meeting



Northern Ireland
Assembly

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 2 July 2026, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 10.31 a.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities