



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 28 May 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Cathy Mason MLA (Deputy Chairperson) (via Zoom)
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mrs Pam Cameron MLA
Mr Mark Durkan MLA (via Zoom)
Mr Maolíosa 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)

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



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1. Declarations of Interest

Colm Gildernew - Member of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

Maurice Bradley - Member of Harry Gregg Foundation, member of Coleraine and District League Management, member of North West Football Association, member of Irish Football Association Council.

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

Cathy Mason – Member of Drumaness GAA.

Maolíosa McHugh – In receipt of a NILGOSC Pension, member of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

Sian Mulholland – Member of a NILGOSC Pension Scheme, family member involved with Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

2. Apologies

Mr Andy Allen MBE

Mrs Kellie Armstrong

Pam Cameron proposed that the Committee send its well wishes to Kellie Armstrong.

Agreed: That well wishes are sent to Kellie Armstrong on behalf of the Committee.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson reminded Members that the debate on the Committee's Report on Engagement with Local Councils and the Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy took place in Plenary on Tuesday and stated that he thought it was a very



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constructive piece of work and thanked all Members for taking part in the debate on the Committee motion.

The Chairperson stated that he was alarmed that, during the debate, the Minister referred to the updated Strategy being available after the Summer recess / in September. The Chairperson further stated that he was conscious that the Committee could be perceived as a further step or delay to the progress of the final Strategy. The Chairperson reminded the Committee that when the Minister was in attendance at the meeting on 14 May, the Committee had agreed it would meet during recess in the event that the updated strategy was ready for review.

The Chairperson proposed that the Committee issue a Statement emphasising that it has completed its contributions to a refresh of the draft strategy and re-stating its commitment to working urgently to see the updated Anti-Poverty strategy finalised in good time.

Agreed: That the Committee team draft a statement for Members' consideration.

The Chairperson also reminded Members that the informal meeting with the Department on the UC Journal took place on Tuesday which he found to be a very useful and informative session.

The Chairperson informed Members that the Committee and Member Support office is holding a sign language drop in event on Tuesday 2 June in Room 135. The event will start at 12pm and is aimed at marking the passage of the Sign Language Bill through the Assembly and will explore deaf culture and Members of the deaf community will be in attendance to share their perspectives on the Bill. It will also include an interactive opportunity to learn some basic British Sign Language (BSL) and provide advice on how to work with an interpreter.

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 10.04 a.m.

Finally, the Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee meeting on 4 June will take place in Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Library and Archive, Armagh. The Chairperson also informed Members that there is no capacity for the provision of remote links for that external meeting.



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4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the concurrent Committee meeting on 21 May 2026.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed subject to a minor amendment.

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the Committee meeting on 21 May 2026.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.

5. Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 and 2027: Oral briefing from Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

The Chairperson welcomed the following representatives to the meeting:

Brendan McAleer, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann
Grainne Scullion, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann
Damien Martin, Belfast City Council
Lesley Ann O'Donnell, Belfast City Council

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

- Diversity of applications
- Role of volunteers in planning and execution
- Engagement and working groups
- Housing and short term lets
- Tourism benefits
- Logistical challenges
- Investment in young people and the Bands Forum
- Economic benefits
- Legacy and business plans

The Chairperson suspended the meeting.

The meeting was suspended at 10.58 a.m.



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The meeting resumed at 11.05 a.m. with all Members present.

Agreed: That feedback following the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann event is provided to the Committee.

**6. The Northern Ireland Football Fund: Grassroots Facilities Programme:
Oral briefing from the Department for Communities**

The Chairperson informed Members that agenda item 7 was a briefing on the Performance Programme which was remained *sub judice* and the officials could therefore be restricted in the information they could provide in answer to Members' questions.

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental Officials to the meeting:

Iain Greenway, Deputy Secretary for Engaged Communities Group
Joanna Gray, Senior Responsible Owner for TNIFF
Nicola Leckie, Head of Grassroots

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

- Geographical spread of funding applications
- Similar funding for other sports
- Casement Park funding
- Barriers and challenges
- Affiliated teams and applications
- Shared facilities
- Communication and engagement with grassroots clubs
- Questionnaire responses and participation of grassroots clubs
- Promotion of the funding

Agreed: That the Department forwards a copy of the grassroots questionnaire to the Committee.

The Chairperson advised Members that the Officials would remain to brief the Committee on Agenda Item 7.



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The Chairperson informed Members that the next agenda item would take place in closed session due to ongoing legal proceedings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move into closed session to receive the briefing.

The meeting moved into closed session at 11.39 a.m.

7. The Northern Ireland Football Fund: Performance Programme: Oral briefing from the Department for Communities

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Performance Programme was sub judice.

The Department Officials updated Members on the Performance Programme.

A question-and-answer session followed the update.

Agreed: That the Department continues to update the Committee on the progress of the Performance Programme.

Pam Cameron left the meeting at 11.54 a.m.

The meeting resumed in open session at 11.56 a.m. with the following Members present:

Mr Colm Gildernew, Ms Cathy Mason, Mr Maurice Bradley, Mr Mark Durkan, Mr Maolíosa McHugh and Mrs Sian Mulholland.

8. SL1 The Draft Local Government Pension Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 – McCloud remedy and Annual Benefits Statements

The Chairperson reminded Members that the initial correspondence in relation to this SL1 was received on 24 April, and therefore was considered in line with the new process for delegated legislation.

The Committee considered this Rule on 7 May when Members agreed to:

- Publish the Department's papers



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- Issue a call for evidence - with a closing date of 20 May (*no responses were received*)
- Reconsider the SL1 together with any responses from the call for evidence, and;
- Request a briefing from the Department to answer Members queries

The Chairperson informed Members that Departmental officials were present to brief at today's meeting and welcomed the following officials:

Simon Sloan, Principal, Local Government Policy and Legislation

Willy Dobbin, Deputy Principal, Local Government Policy and Legislation

Pam Cameron rejoined the meeting at 11.58 a.m.

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

- The McCloud remedy and timeline for calculations and payments
- Communications to members regarding the McCloud remedy
- Safeguards in place to prevent a rolling delay in implementing the remedy
- Capacity and resource issues for NILGOSC
- Software issues contributing to the implementation of the remedy

Agreed: That the Committee is content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.

9. SR 2026/88 The Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment, Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance (Decisions and Appeals) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2026

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee considered the SL1 at its meeting on 7 May 2026 in line with the new process for scrutiny of delegated legislation. Following consideration of the proposal, the Committee confirmed it was content for the Department to proceed to make the Rule.



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Agreed: That the Committee for Communities has considered SR 2026/88 The Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment, Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance (Decisions and Appeals) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2026 and has no objection to the rule.

10. Matters Arising

Committee for Communities - MEMO - Nil Return - Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill

Agreed: That a nil return response is sent to the relevant Committee.

Committee for Communities – MEMO - Nil Return - Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill

Agreed: That a nil return response is sent to the relevant Committee.

Committee for Communities – MEMO - Nil Return - Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill

Agreed: That a nil return response is sent to the relevant Committee.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Subject Matter
Department for Communities	Home Heating Oil Support Package

11. Correspondence

Committee for Finance - Guidance to Departments in absence of a budget for 2026-27

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to ask:

- For clarification on its views on AME spending and what its plans are in relation to the guidance letter, in particular paragraph 17



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- What level of communication there has been with Arms Length Bodies and the Voluntary and Community sector on the absence of a budget
- What projects and programmes may be stalled in the event that a budget is not agreed
- What contingency planning the Department has in place in the event of a budget not being agreed
- If the recently announced £19.2m funding to help with the increase in energy prices is fully additional to the Departmental budget or if activities will have to reduce to take account of this spend
- What programmes will be protected by the Department in the event of a budget not being agreed
- Whether the Departmental Accounting Officer has provided guidance for application across the Department on what is required in the event of a budget not being agreed

IMTAC – Publications: Motability Statement 2026 | The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC)

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Minister to ask what engagement the Department for Communities is having with the UK government in relation to changes to the Motability Scheme and how these changes will impact on people in Northern Ireland, particularly in border areas where an administration charge for crossing the border is currently proposed.

Correspondence from an individual – ESA overpayment

Agreed: That a response is sent to the individual to advise that the Committee cannot get involved in individual cases and to advise that the individual should contact their local MLA.

Executive Information Service - Press Release - Minister launches Veterans Support Line NI

Agreed: That a follow-up letter is sent to the Department in relation to the outstanding response to the Committee's previous questions sent in March 2026.

Executive Information Service - Press Release - Commission on Work and Wellbeing welcomed by Minister Lyons



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department seeking further information on:

- How the £16 million Transformation Fund will be divided between departments and the Commission
- Ongoing communication between departments, and;
- Timeline for the establishment of the Commission.

The Committee noted the following items:

Source	Summary of content
Sustainable Energy Communities NI	Invite to Sustainable Energy Communities NI Conference, Monday 8 June, Long Gallery.
Department for Work and Pensions	Proposal for a regulation amending regulation (EU) No 528/2012
IMTAC	Petition to urge NI executive to allow free travel for those with disabilities
Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee, House of Lords	Draft Chemicals (Health and Safety) (Amendment, Consequential and Transitional Provision) Regulations 2026
Committee for the Executive Office	Retention and Disposal Schedule – The Executive Office
Executive Information Service	Press release Lyons announces start of public realm works in Downpatrick
Executive Information Service	Press release Minister Lyons delivers successful heritage revival project in Coleraine
Department for Communities	Launch of Veterans Support Line NI
Minister for Communities	Written Ministerial Statement - Update on Northern Ireland Housing Executive Out of Hours Service

The Committee noted the following items of tabled correspondence:



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Source	Summary of content
Executive Information Service	Press Release - Minister launches PRONI's Ulster American Treasures The Migration Story
Department for Communities	Warm Healthy Homes Fund

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.

The Committee then considered a draft agenda in relation to its meeting on 4 June 2026 at Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Library & Archive, Armagh.

Agreed: That the Committee is content with the draft agenda for its meeting on 4 June 2026.

13. Any other business

There was no other business.

14. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 4 June 2026, in Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich Library & Archive, Armagh.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.24 p.m.

Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities