



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 8 October 2026

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

- Mr Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)
- Ms Nicola Brogan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Mr Andy Allen MBE MLA
- Mrs Kellie Armstrong MLA
- Mr Paul Boggs MLA
- Mr Maurice Bradley MLA (via Zoom / In Person)
- Mrs Pam Cameron MLA
- Mr Mark Durkan MLA (via Zoom)
- 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.

1. Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared:

Colm Gildernew - Member's Bill on mitigating the threat of homelessness, Charity Trustee.

Andy Allen – Charity Trustee, Private Sector Landlord, Trade Union Member.

Maurice Bradley - Member of Harry Gregg Foundation.

Pam Cameron – Former Junior Minister with sight of Executive and cross-departmental policy, strategy and legislation. Director of a production company, family member is a member of the Arts Council.

2. Apologies

There were no apologies.

3. Chairperson's Business



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The Chairperson thanked Members for their attendance at the Committee meeting on 1 October which took place in the Ulster Rugby, Affidee Stadium. The Chairperson further placed on record his thanks to Ulster Rugby and witnesses who attended the venue to provide evidence to the Committee.

The Chairperson then informed Members that he had attended a Homeless Connect Conference and highlighted concerns which were raised there in relation to *how* local expertise, service-user voice and the Northern Ireland overall experience would be incorporated into the work of the Homeless Commission announced by the Minister.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to request information *how* local expertise, service-user voice and the Northern Ireland experience will be incorporated into the work of the Homeless Commission announced by the Minister?

Finally, the Chairperson informed Members about an addition to the meeting agenda, due to an additional SL1 received from the Department after the issue of Member's meeting packs.

The Chairperson further highlighted the impact of this late addition to the meeting agenda in terms of time pressure, setting out that due to the timescale for implementation of the SL1, that the Committee could not delay consideration of it.

4. Draft Minutes

The Chairperson informed Members that they had been provided with a copy of draft minutes from the Committee meeting on 1 October 2026.

Agreed: That the minutes are agreed as drafted.



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5. Finance update: Oral briefing from the Department for Communities

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental Officials to the meeting:

John Greer, Deputy Secretary Corporate Service Group

Olga Beagon, Finance Director

Clodagh Valentine, Interim Assistant Finance Director

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 10.11a.m (via Zoom)

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

- Funding cuts and impact
- Delivery Partners Funding
- Communication and engagement with CVS organisations
- Timeline for the purchase of 600 homes
- Underspend for 2025-26
- Job losses as a result of reduced funding to ALB's
- Joint bids for Housing
- AME underspend
- Welfare Mitigations and Benefit Delivery
- Bids for the updated Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Revenue raising proposals with the Executive
- Fraud and Error revised figures

Maurice Bradley joined the meeting at 10.52a.m. (in person)

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to reflect Members concerns and to ask:



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- For updated detail on the Department's commitment to purchase 600 homes for social housing
- Whether a Fraud & Error sanction could potentially impact on a Universal Credit claimant in search of employment
- Whether the Department has devolved *all* of its Homelessness budget to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and whether this represents a dilution of its policy responsibility
- How allocations are made for the Severe Weather Emergency Payment (SWEP) and to whom?

The Chairperson then informed Members that the next two agenda items would take place in closed session to allow the Committee to receive briefings from the Examiner of Statutory Rules and Legal Advice in relation to the Charities (Amendment) Bill.

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

The meeting moved into closed session at 10.55a.m.

6. Charities (Amendment) Bill: Examiner of Statutory Rules advice on Delegated Powers

The Chairperson welcomed the following Official to the meeting:

Angela Kelly, Examiner of Statutory Rules, Northern Ireland Assembly

Roisin Mallon, Legal Advisor, Examiner of Statutory Rules, Northern Ireland Assembly

The Examiner of Statutory Rules and Legal Advisor briefed the Committee on the Delegated Powers of the Bill and a question-and-answer session followed the briefing.



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**7. Charities (Amendment) Bill: Legal Advice on Convention Rights
Memorandum**

The Chairperson welcomed the following Official to the meeting:

Caroline Byers, Legal Advisor, Northern Ireland Assembly Legal Services

The Legal Advisor briefed the Committee on the Convention Rights Memorandum for the Bill and a question-and-answer session followed the briefing.

The Chairperson proposed that the meeting move back into public session to continue with the remainder of the agenda.

The meeting resumed in open session at 11.57a.m. with all Members present.

Agreed: That Legal advice is sought in relation to the Official Warnings (Clause 3) of the Bill and whether an appeals process could be built in to this Clause.

**8. Charities (Amendment) Bill: Oral evidence from the Department for
Communities**

The Chairperson welcomed the following Departmental Officials to the meeting:

Ray Caldwell, Director Voluntary and Community Division

Colleen Bell, Head of Charities Policy and Legislation Team

Martin Ireland, Deputy Principal Charities Policy and Legislation Team



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Gerard Reilly, Deputy Principal Charities Policy and Legislation Team

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

- Multi – Year Funding Model and “*smoothing mechanism*”
- Definitive Definition of “*Office-Holder*”
- Rationale for excluding Designated Religious Charities
- DPM Regulation Powers
- Official Warnings appeals process
- Consultations for Charity Commission NI for Section 70
- Asset Register

Agreed: That a letter is sent to charity regulators in neighbouring jurisdictions seeking procedural details in relation to how they exercise their “official warnings” power.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Charities Tribunal to request cost information in relation to the handling of a tribunal case.

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to highlight the unintended consequence of the Westminster Finance Act (Finance (No. 2) Act 2023 - Section 344) on some Charities delivering services in Northern Ireland, and to ask if the Department would consider whether this could be addressed in future legislative developments related to Charities.

Agreed: That the Committee will proceed with deliberations in relation to the Charities Bill at its meeting on 15 October 2026.



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**9. SL1 - The Social Fund (Child Funeral Fund) (No. 2) (Amendment)
Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**

The Chairperson reminded Members that the initial correspondence in relation to this SL1 was received on 9 September 2026 and that the Committee had considered this proposal at the meeting on 17 September 2026 when Members agreed to:

- Publish the Department's papers
- Issue a call for evidence - with a closing date of 30 September
- Reconsider the SL1 together with any responses from the call for evidence;
and
- Request a briefing from the Department

The Chairperson then welcomed the following witnesses to the meeting:

Hayley Ward, Policy Lead, Social Security Policy, Legislation and Decision-Making
Services

John McGrath, Operations Lead, PDCCD Pension Centre

Christopher Cowan, Operational Manager, Pension Centre CFF

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

- Part payment management
- Pre-24 week baby loss
- Numbers of cases affected

Finally, the Chairperson informed Members that:

- The Committee should indicate whether it *is content* or *not content* for the Department to make the Statutory Rule.



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

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to request that the Committee be kept informed of any consideration or arrangements for pre-24 week baby loss.

The Chairperson brought forward Agenda Item 17 for consideration.

17. SL1 The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Chairperson reminded Members that the SL1 was received on 6 October 2026, and therefore, would be considered under the new process for delegated legislation.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the Minister for Communities had requested that the Committee consider the proposed statutory rule within a *shortened timeframe*.

The Chairperson then advised that a draft SR and Explanatory Memorandum had not yet been received.

The Chairperson further advised the Committee that due to the compressed timeframe, Departmental Officials had been requested and were in attendance to brief the Committee.

The Chairperson then welcomed the following Departmental officials to the meeting:

Aoibhinn Corrigan, Grade 7, Universal Credit Policy and Legislation Branch

Cathal Shields, Deputy Principal, Universal Credit Policy and Legislation Branch

Seamus Breen, Staff Officer, Universal Credit Policy and Legislation Branch



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

- Timeline for introduction
- Maximum deduction for Benefit Fraud
- Westminster timeline for the related Statutory Instrument

Agreed: That the Committee consider the proposed statutory rule within the shortened timeframe.

The Chairperson reminded Members that a shortened timeframe does not preclude the committee from issuing a call for views. However, this requires the committee making a decision on the SL1 proposal at this meeting and before any responses are received.

The Chairperson then informed Members that:

- The Committee team will issue a call for views on the SL1 using the standard survey on Citizen Space from 9 October 2026.
- The SL1, and any relevant papers from the Department will be published on the Committee website and notified to relevant stakeholders, alongside the relevant deadline, when available.

Finally, the Chairperson informed Members that:

- The Department intends to lay the rule on 9 October 2026
- The Committee should indicate whether it *is content* or *not content* for the Department to make the Statutory Rule.

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

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to highlight the recent amendment to Standing Order 43A as well as to the need to adhere to the new scrutiny process for delegated legislation, including Commencement Orders and to further welcome sight of Westminster Statutory Instruments, as soon as these



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are available, in the event that the Committee is being asked to undertake its scrutiny within a compressed timeframe.

10. SL1 - The Social Security (Income and Capital Disregards) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Chairperson reminded Members that the initial correspondence in relation to this SL1 was received on 9 September 2026 and that the Committee had considered this proposal at the meeting on 24 September 2026 when Members agreed to:

- Publish the Department's papers
- Issue a call for evidence - with a closing date of 7 October
- Reconsider the SL1 together with any responses from the call for evidence; and
- Ask the Department for further information

Finally, the Chairperson informed Members that:

- The Committee should indicate whether it *is content* or *not content* for the Department to make the Statutory Rule.

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

11. Matters Arising

Homeless Connect - Winter pressures on homelessness services

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to request responses to the series of questions posed by Homeless Connect.



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Agreed: That the Simon Community is requested to provide oral evidence to the Committee at a future meeting in relation to the Housing (Amendment) Bill.

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

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to request the Terms of Reference in relation to the Domestic Energy Efficiency and Low Carbon Heat Programme Project Board.

Department for Communities - Recommendations contained within the Committee's 2025 Report on Engagement with the Arts Sector

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department highlighting disappointment with the update and to further request that the Committee see sight of a specific timeline and that it be published by the Department.

The Committee noted the following Matters Arising:

Source	Subject Matter
NI Housing Executive	Provision of Solar Panels in Rural Areas
Department for Communities	Business Plan 2026-27 – Housing Bill Accelerated Passage
Libraries NI	Resources on Consent
Belfast City Council	Belfast Local Development Plan
Department for Communities	Personal Independence Payment – Award Extensions
Department for Communities	Timms Review – PIP Engagement with disabled people and experts in Northern Ireland so far
Department for Communities	Forthcoming Legislation and Committee Planning
Department for Communities	Tackling social housing tenancy fraud and misuse - consultation “Every House Matters” Consultation



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Department for Communities	Use of Administrative Data in the Development of Draft Strategies
Department for Communities	Unpaid Carers Action Plan: Recognise, Refer, Reach and proposed reforms to Carer's Allowance

12. Correspondence

**Committee for Justice – Safeguarding, accountability and justice in faith organisations; and
Individual - Member of Cycling Ireland - National BMX Race Concern -
Safeguarding**

Agreed: That the Assembly Research and Information Services (RaISe) is requested to develop a research paper in relation to safeguarding measures, with a particular focus on ALB's and Sporting Bodies.

Assembly Business Office - SR 2026/162 (C.9) The Sign Language (2026 Act) (Commencement No. 1) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Assembly Speaker to request that he highlights to all Departments the need to adhere to the new Delegated Legislation scrutiny process, including for Commencement Orders, and that he further highlights the need for Departments to provide advance and timely communication with Committees in relation to forthcoming legislation (primary, delegated and LCMs).

Committee for the Economy - Local Growth Fund

Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department to encourage timely communication of the requested information to the Committee for the Economy.



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Agreed: That a letter is sent to the Department for the Economy to request further sharing of any updates for Members' information.

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Source	Summary of content
Assembly and Executive Review Committee	Briefing Paper - Westminster Statutory Instruments
Department for Communities	Ministerial Statement - Public Consultation for the Public Libraries Policy
Executive Information Service	Press release - Lyons announces next stage of £9million Grassroots Facilities Programme
Department for Communities	Ministerial Statement – The NI Football Fund
Assembly Engagement	Older People's Parliament
Executive Information Service	Press release - Records from 2004 and 2005 made publicly available online for first time
Youth Assembly	Update - September 2026
Committee for Economy	Regional Balance Bill
Department for Communities	Secondary legislation programme for the final Assembly session of the current mandate
Executive Information Service	Press release - Blacks Gate completion latest boost for social housing delivery



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Source	Summary of content
Executive Information Service	Press release - Minister pledges continued support for veterans as he attends Invictus event
Committee for Finance	Data Sharing Strategy
Department for Communities	Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has launched two consultations on historic Guaranteed Minimum Pension (GMP) arrangements
Department for Communities	Update on Timms Review of Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
CILIP Ireland	Event in Parliament Buildings - Libraries Deliver Impact, Outcomes and Value for Communities

13. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson advised Members that the consideration of two SL1's previously agreed to be considered at the Committee Meeting on 22 October, would now need to be considered at the Committee Meeting on 15 October due to the Department laying the SR in the Business Office sooner than expected.

Agreed: That the relevant SL1's are now considered on 15 October alongside the relevant SR.

The Committee noted a copy of the Forward Work Programme.



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14. Any other business

There was no other business.

15. Date, time and location of the next meeting

The next meeting is at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday 15 October 2026, in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson then informed Members that the next agenda item would take place in closed session to allow the Committee to receive a briefing from the Bill Clerk in relation to the Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill.

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

The meeting moved into closed session at 1.22p.m.

16. Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill: Oral briefing from Bill Clerk

The Chairperson welcomed the following Official to the meeting:

Stephanie Mallon, Bill Clerk, NI Assembly Bill Office

The Bill Clerk briefed the Committee on the Clauses of the Bill and a question-and-answer session followed the briefing.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.37p.m.



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Colm Gildernew MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Communities