Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Communities
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From: Emer Boyle, Clerk to the Committee for Communities

To: Peter Hall, Clerk to the Committee for Finance

Date: 28 May 2026

Subject: Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill

Dear Peter,

1. Thank you for your memo of 24 April 2026 seeking the views of Statutory Committees on the Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill.
2. The Committee for Communities has considered the matter and confirms a Nil Return. A brief explanation of the basis on which the Committee has reached that position is set out below.
3. In reaching its position, the Committee considered the Bill as introduced, the accompanying Explanatory and Financial Memorandum, the Official Report of the Bill's Second Stage debate on 20 April 2026, and the oral evidence provided by Department of Finance officials to the Committee for Finance on 22 April 2026.
4. The Committee has considered whether any aspect of the Bill engages the statutory responsibilities of the Department for Communities and is satisfied that it does not.
5. The Committee has carefully considered the wider safeguarding and gender-equality dimensions of Part 2 of the Bill, in light of the disproportionate impact of under-18 marriage on girls noted by the Minister at Second Stage. The Committee acknowledges the significance of those dimensions, but observes

that the policy lead for the relevant cross-cutting strategies — the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and the Gender Equality Strategy — sits with The Executive Office, that forced marriage and human trafficking policy sits with the Department of Justice, and that child safeguarding policy sits with the Department of Health and the Department of Education.

6. The Committee for Finance is well placed to take those dimensions forward in its scrutiny of the Bill, including through the engagement it has signalled with the Equality Commission, the Human Rights Commission, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, faith and belief bodies, and other interested stakeholders.

Yours sincerely,

Emer Boyle

Clerk to the Committee for Communities