Northern Ireland Assembly

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

To: Michael Potter, Clerk to the Committee for Infrastructure

Date: Thursday 22 October 2026

Subject: Harbours Bill: Nil Return

Dear Michael,

1. Thank you for your memo of 7 October 2026 seeking the views of statutory committees on the Harbours Bill, which was introduced by the Minister for Infrastructure on 15 June 2026 and which completed its Second Stage on 23 June 2026.
2. The Committee for Communities has considered the matter, having reviewed the Bill as introduced, the accompanying Explanatory and Financial Memorandum (EFM) and the Official Report of the Bill's Second Stage debate on 23 June 2026. **The Committee confirms that it returns a Nil Response.** A brief explanation of the basis on which the Committee has reached that position is set out below for the assistance of the Committee for Infrastructure.
3. The Committee has considered whether any aspect of the Bill engages the statutory responsibilities of the Department for Communities (DfC) and is satisfied that it does not. The Bill does not confer any function on, or alter any function of, the Department or any of its arm's-length bodies. Its financial effect, as set out in the EFM, relates to the treatment of trust port borrowing within DfI's capital budget, and it has no bearing on the Department for Communities' budget or programmes.
4. The Committee notes that a number of Members raised, at Second Stage, the accountability of trust ports to the communities in which they are situated, with particular reference to the effect on residents of activities at Warrenpoint

Harbour. The Committee also notes that Belfast Harbour's master plan, referred to during the debate, includes proposals for housing. The Bill does not, however, confer any housing or community function on harbour authorities. The matters raised in respect of Warrenpoint concern environmental regulation, planning and the governance of the ports, and the Committee is content that they fall properly to be considered by the Committee for Infrastructure at Committee Stage.

5. The Committee for Communities trusts that this Nil Return, and the reasoning supporting it, is of assistance to the Committee for Infrastructure in its scrutiny of the Bill. If further engagement at official level would be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

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