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01 June 2015

Dr Kevin Pelan  
Committee Clerk  
Committee for Social Development  
Room 412  
Parliament Buildings  
Belfast  
BT4 3XX

Dear Kevin,

**MINUTE OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT ON 23 APRIL 2015**

I refer to my briefing of the Social Development Committee on 23 April 2015 on the recommendations of Dr Litchfield's fifth review of the Work Capability Assessment.

A copy of the minutes of the proceedings has been issued to me for information. However, having reviewed the minutes I have identified a number of inaccuracies in the recording of the figures I presented to the Committee on the Employment and Support Allowance caseload. The proposed corrections to the minutes (highlighted in red) are attached at Appendix 1.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Geraldine Brereton'.

**Geraldine Brereton**

**Proposed amendments to Minutes of Proceedings of the Committee for Social Development on 23 April 2015**



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Thursday 23 April 2015  
Room 29, Parliament Buildings**

Present:	Mr Alex Maskey MLA (Chairperson) Mr Jim Allister MLA Mr Roy Beggs MLA Ms Paula Bradley MLA Mr Gregory Campbell MLA Mr Stewart Dickson MLA Mr Fra McCann MLA Mr Gary Middleton MLA Mr Sammy Wilson MLA
In Attendance:	Dr Kevin Pelan (Assembly Clerk) Mrs Ashleigh Mitford (Assistant Assembly Clerk) Mr Stewart Kennedy (Assistant Assembly Clerk) Mr Richard Reid (Clerical Officer)
Apologies:	Mr Mickey Brady MLA (Deputy Chairperson) Mrs Dolores Kelly MLA

The Chairperson declared the meeting open at 10:04am.

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were noted as above.

**2. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The draft minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2015 were agreed.

### 3. Chairperson's Business

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed, in order to reduce costs, to phase out refreshments currently provided at its meetings.

### 4. Matters Arising

The Committee noted that the debate on the Report of phase 3 of its Inquiry has been scheduled for 12 May 2015.

### 5. Regeneration Bill – Departmental Briefing

The following Departmental officials joined the meeting at 10:12am:

- Henry McArdle
- Anthony McDaid
- Ian Snowden

The Committee noted a written response from the Department in relation to the staff transfer scheme and a qualified majority voting clause.

*Mr Stewart Dickson MLA left the meeting at 10:44am*

The Committee continued its consideration of the Regeneration Bill and held discussions with the officials on a number of issues. These issues included the definition of 'social need' within the Bill, the role of the Department in monitoring local government once regeneration powers have been devolved and the staff transfer scheme.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek a list of organisations supported by the Community Investment Fund and a list of regional organisations funded by the 1986 Social Need Order.

This session was recorded by Hansard.

The representatives left the meeting at 11:13am.

### 6. Work Capability Assessment – Dr Lichfield's Fifth Review – Briefing by the Social Security Agency

The following officials of the Social Security Agency joined the meeting at 11:13am:

- Geraldine Brereton
- Pauline Collins

The officials provided the Committee with update on the current figures for the Employment and Support Allowance and briefed the Committee on the Department's response to Dr Litchfield's Fifth Review of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA). This was followed by questions from the Committee.

The Committee noted that Atos maintained the contract to provide WCA in Northern Ireland while Maximus provided the same service in GB.

The Committee noted that of the 6380 appeals that were lodged against initial WCA decisions, 36% ruled in favour of the claimant and that the provision of medical evidence on the day of appeals was a major contributing factor to their successful outcome. The Committee also asked what action the SSA had taken to emphasise the need for comprehensive medical evidence to be introduced into the WCA process at an early stage.

Members also noted that around 116,000 people are entitled to Employment and Support Allowance of which 68% had been placed in the Support Group, considerably more than the initial estimate that the caseload would be lower than Incapacity benefit caseload of around 102,000 once the ~~reassessment process had been completed~~ ~~and approximately the same number under the former~~ Incapacity Benefit reassessment process had been completed. Members queried the reasons why the current programme was not achieving the original policy intent. Officials advised that research was being conducted into this and the Committee would be briefed on the findings in the autumn.

*Agreed:* To write to the Department for a breakdown of the reasons why tribunals upheld appeals and, specifically, what percentage of the 36% of appeals that were successful was a result of medical evidence being provided on the day of the appeal.

*Agreed:* To ask the Department what actions it is taking in conjunction with the Department of Education to promote health and wellbeing activities in schools.

The representatives left the meeting at 11:46am.

### **7. SR 216 The Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015**

The Committee had no objections to the Rule.

The Chairperson read the following motion into the record:

*“That the Committee for Social Development has considered the Statutory Rule SR 216 The Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report, has no objections to the Rule.”*

### **8. Correspondence**

- 8.1** The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister and the Executive Summary of a report on the evaluation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing by the Department on the report.

- 8.2** The Committee considered correspondence in relation to a delay in implementing the NIHE Pay increment.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to seek an update on the pay increment and to ask that the Department set out the reasons for the delay.

- 8.3** The Committee considered correspondence in relation to Lagan Search and Rescue’s proposal to obtain a space within the Lagan Lookout.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department in relation to rescue services on the Lagan.

- 8.4** The Committee considered a correspondence memo

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to action the correspondence as outlined on the correspondence memo.

**9. Forward Work Programme**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme as drafted.

**10. AOB**

No items were raised

**11. Date, time and place of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Committee for Social Development will take place on 28 April 2015 at 12.30 pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 11:51am

**Alex Maskey**

**Chairperson, Committee for Social Development**

**30 April 2015**