



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 Litchfield'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 an 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 had been placed in the Support Group, considerably more than the initial estimate of lower than 102,000; and approximately the same number under the former Incapacity Benefit assessment process. 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