



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

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**COMMITTEE FOR  
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**OFFICIAL REPORT  
(Hansard)**

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**Welfare Reform Bill**

3 June 2010

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

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**COMMITTEE FOR  
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**Welfare Reform Bill**

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Simon Hamilton (Chairperson)  
Ms Carál Ní Chuilín (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mrs Mary Bradley  
Mr Mickey Brady  
Mr Alex Easton  
Mr David Hilditch  
Mr Fra McCann

**The Chairperson (Mr Hamilton):**

We shall now discuss the draft report on the Welfare Reform Bill.

**The Committee Clerk:**

The intention is to reflect the copious amounts of evidence that Committee considered and the due consideration that the Bill was given over five or six meetings, which covered evidence sessions and clause-by-clause scrutiny. After debate and a number of Divisions, eventually the Committee decided to seek assurances from the Department but not to propose amendments to the Bill. Do Members wish to comment on the draft report?

**Mr Brady:**

The draft report's executive summary states:

“Following debate and a number of divisions, the majority of Committee Members agreed that owing to parity considerations there was limited opportunity to amend the clauses of the Bill.”

Subsequently, paragraph 41 on clause-by-clause scrutiny states:

“Following a division, the Committee agreed that it was content with Clause 3 as drafted.”

The same form of words is applied to clauses 1 and 2 and to other clauses on which there was a Division. However, the draft report does not include the names of those who objected to a particular clause or why they did so. That information is important, so it should be reflected in the final report. We were not arguing for the sake of arguing; we were trying to argue constructively for particular amendments, but the draft report does not reflect that.

**The Chairperson:**

It is not convention for a report to include a regurgitation of an entire debate.

**Mr Brady:**

I accept that.

**The Chairperson:**

Those discussions are included elsewhere, in the appendices to the report. The minutes of proceedings show the Divisions and how the Committee divided, and the Hansard minutes of proceedings give a flavour of the debate. Committees tend not to go into any more detail than what is in this draft report. The minutes and the Hansard report both record the Divisions, and the Hansard report obviously records the flavour of the debate in much more detail. The report is not drafted in this way in order to try to hide anything.

**Mr Brady:**

I accept that. I am not worried about the minutiae, but the Bill, to reiterate what I said before, contains some of the most important changes to welfare since 1948. The nature of the Welfare Reform Bill, not to mention its implications, means that the report must at least reflect which members were in favour of certain provisions and which were not.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:**

When the Committee’s report is debated in the House, we will then be sure that our position throughout Committee Stage is accurately reflected. We need to know that how we responded to particular clauses is reflected. A change would make that clearer. If it is convention, that is fine. We are not implying anything else.

**The Chairperson:**

The Committee Clerk has pointed out to me that other Bills have come before Committees that prompted Divisions and were reported in the same way. The Committee Stage was not riven by contentious discussion. I understand why for recent historical reasons Sinn Féin wants to make it clear that it disagreed with decisions, and I am happy to verify that there were Divisions and who voted which way. Is that OK?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:**

That is grand.

**The Chairperson:**

I understand the point that you make. It is on the record, and if anyone tries to distort the truth of what took place, as the Committee Chairperson, I will be happy to clarify what happened.

**The Committee Clerk:**

It is just usual practice. Can we just skip through the points remaining and ask whether members wish to comment? The first point of interest is the executive summary. Have members any comments to make or have they spotted any errors?

**The Chairperson:**

I will take silence as meaning assent.

*Members indicated assent.*

**The Committee Clerk:**

We move to the introduction, which covers paragraphs 1 to 11. The introduction sets out what is in the Bill. Are members happy with the introduction?

*Members indicated assent.*

**The Committee Clerk:**

We move to the consideration of the Bill, which covers paragraphs 12 to 22. That section of the draft report deals with the large body of evidence that the Committee considered and the oral evidence that it took. Are members content?

*Members indicated assent.*

**The Committee Clerk:**

We move on to the meat of the report, which is the clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill. Paragraphs 23 to 139 set out the debate that took place in Committee on the various issues considered, and the final decision on each of the clauses.

Mr Chairman, do any issues or questions arise?

**The Chairperson:**

Are members content?

*Members indicated assent.*

**The Chairperson:**

Are members content for the Bill report to be printed as the Committee's third report?

*Members indicated assent.*

**The Chairperson:**

Are members content that the minutes of today's proceedings be included in the report?

*Members indicated assent.*

**The Chairperson:**

A typescript of the Committee's report on the Welfare Reform Bill will be lodged in the Business Office tomorrow. Copies of the report should be distributed next week. The Committee Clerk may circulate an electronic copy of the report to all MLAs shortly, as Consideration Stage is scheduled for 14 June — it is coming up fairly soon. Thank you, members.