



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

25 March 2021

Meeting Location: virtual meeting

Present:

Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)
Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Paula Bradshaw MLA
Jonathan Buckley MLA
Gerry Carroll MLA
Alan Chambers MLA
Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Cara Hunter MLA
Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

In Attendance:

Keith McBride, Clerk
Roisin Donnelly, Assistant Clerk
Deirdre Farry, Assistant Clerk
Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor
Brendan Miskelly, Clerical Officer



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The meeting commenced at 9.33 am in open session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

- i. The Chairperson provided an update on an informal meeting with representatives of VOYPIC and the Children's Law Centre on the Vulnerable Children and Young People Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health on the importance of a mental health counselling service available to young people in care and to request an increase in such provision. The Committee further agreed to seek an update on the progress of the Vulnerable Children and Young People action plan and the Department's engagement with stakeholders on this.

- ii. The Chairperson provided updates on: a meeting with the Dietitian Association to discuss food poverty; a meeting with Endometriosis sufferers and support organisations; and attendance at a Pharmacy Forum NI equality, diversity and inclusion event.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider scheduling briefing on the impacts of poverty on health in its forward work programme.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2021.



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4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 9.40 am.

5. Briefing on GP Services - Royal College of General Practitioners and BMA GP Committee

The following representatives joined the meeting by video-conference at 9.41 am:

Dr Laurence Dorman, Chairperson of Royal College of General Practitioners; and

Dr Alan Stout, Chairperson GP Committee, British Medical Association NI.

Dr Dorman and Dr Stout briefed the Committee on the provision of GP services.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Dr Dorman and Dr Stout for attending the meeting.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask RCGP and the BMA GP Committee for data on prescribing levels and to ask whether consideration of prescribing levels forms part of the appraisal process for GPs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health on access to GP services and further detail on the roll-out of the multi-disciplinary team model.

The meeting was suspended at 11.06 am and resumed at 11.15 am.



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6. Departmental Briefing - Hyponatraemia Related Deaths Report Recommendations

The following officials joined the meeting by video-conference at 11.15 am:

Donna Ruddy, Acting IHRD Implementation Programme Director, Department of Health;

Karen Jeffrey, Acting IHRD Implementation Programme Manager, Department of Health;

Quintin Oliver, Independent Chair, Duty of Candour work stream; and

David Best, Chair, Death Certification work stream, Department of Health.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Department of Health's progress on the implementation of the recommendations of the Inquiry into Hyponatraemia-related Deaths report.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The officials agreed to provide further information on a number of issues raised.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for attending the meeting.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information from the Department on a number of issues raised and to request that the Senior Responsible Owner of the IHRD Implementation Programme, the Department of Health Permanent Secretary, attend a future meeting to brief the Committee on the outcomes of the inquiry report.

The meeting was suspended at 12.32 pm and resumed at 12.41 pm.



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7. SR 2021/47 The Recovery of Health Services Charges (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/47 The Recovery of Health Service Charges (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 which provides for an inflationary uplift on the tariff levels for the scheme that provides for the collection of costs incurred by hospitals in treating road traffic accident casualties.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/47 The Recovery of Health Service Charges (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, and had no objection to the Rule.

8. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding COVID-19 indemnity arrangements for Spring 2021/ Summer 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department for further information on the COVID-19 indemnity arrangements and for information on insurance uplifts relating to cyber security being incurred by community and voluntary sector organisations.

- ii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Minister of Health to Jim Shannon MP regarding the availability of sapropterin (Kuvan) for treating phenylketonuria (PKU) in Northern Ireland.
- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing a response to information requested on the COVID-19 vaccination programme.
- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health providing the consultation analysis report on the temporary changes to the Health and Social Care framework for the period June 2020 to May 2022.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending further engagement with the Department on rebuilding services.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health providing information relating to coronavirus restriction regulations.
- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the neurology recall.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this correspondence pending the next Ministerial briefing session.

- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the mental health support available for those affected by the neurology recall.
- viii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual seeking updated advice for the clinically extremely vulnerable.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department of Health for comment.

- ix. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Education to the Minister of Health requesting information on the vaccination programme in special schools.
- x. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Education regarding its communication with the Education Authority about conversion therapy and a social media post on the topic by a Member of the Board of the Education Authority.
- xi. The Committee considered correspondence from Shieldus NI regarding the concerns of families with clinically extremely vulnerable children and the reopening of schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department of Health for comment.



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- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the COVID-19 vaccination programme.
- xiii. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules' Examiner Thirty-first and Thirty-second Reports of Session 2020-2021.
- xiv. The Committee noted a request from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists to provide briefing to assist the Committee's consideration of the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill and noted that that Royal College had been advised of the Committee's call for evidence on this Bill.
- xv. The Committee considered correspondence from Sólás and Kids Together regarding the ring-fencing of community and voluntary sector funding for organisations with pre-existing contracts with the Department of Health.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department of Health for comment.

- xvi. The Committee considered correspondence from Alan Chambers MLA relating to the commissioning of abortion services in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Minister of Health what advice he has received on the commissioning of abortion services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Attorney General what advice she has provided to the Minister of Health and/or the Executive on the commissioning of abortion services.

- xvii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health responding to the Committee's request for further information relating to the recent publication of the Analysis of Responses Report on the consultation on Continuing Healthcare in NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask to be kept informed of the stakeholder group being established to consider and produce guidance to support implementation of the new policy and to ask



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that service users and representatives and families are included in the continuing healthcare work.

- xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing an update on COVID-19 testing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for further information on the staffing complement involved in the test, trace and protect programme.

- xix. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding delay in the restart of fertility treatments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department for an update on this matter.

- xx. The Committee noted correspondence from Fra McCann MLA advising that the consultation period for his Private Members Bill on the abolition of hospital car parking charges has finished and of his intention to introduce the Bill as soon as practicable.

- xxi. The Committee noted correspondence from Robbie Butler MLA advising of his intention to bring forward a Private Members Bill to increase protections to address mental ill-health for emergency responders and prison officers.

- xxii. The Committee considered correspondence from the All Party Group on terminal illness requesting the Committee's support in advocating for greater focus on end of life and bereavement care in the Programme for Government Outcomes Framework.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to indicate its broad support for a greater focus on support end of life and bereavement care to the Department of Health.

- xxiii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from Rosa NI to the First Minister, deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice on gender violence and the right to protest.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health, Department of Justice and the Policing Board on concerns that there has been an inconsistent application of the COVID-19 restriction regulations in the policing of demonstrations/ protests.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson advised that an informal meeting with a number of the cancer charities on the impact of COVID-19 on cancer services has been scheduled for 14 April.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Health was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 15 April 2021 at 9.30 am.

The meeting moved into closed session at 12.58 pm.

12. Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill

The Committee considered a draft timetable for the committee stage of the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed it was content with the Bill timetable.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would seek an extension to the committee stage of the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill until 19 November 2021.

13. Health and Social Care Bill

The Committee considered a draft timetable for the committee stage of the Health and Social Care Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed it was content with the Bill timetable.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would seek an extension to the committee stage of the Health and Social Care Bill until 1 October 2021.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.18 pm.

Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Health