



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday, 23 April 2020
Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings**

Present: Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson)
Ms Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)*
Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA
Mr Gerry Carroll MLA
Mr Alan Chambers MLA
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA*
Mr Alex Easton MLA
Mr Colin McGrath MLA*
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA*

In Attendance: Ms Éilis Haughey (Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Lamont (Clerical Supervisor)

**These Members attended the meeting via telephone conferencing.*

The meeting commenced at 10.07 am in closed session.

1. Briefing from Assembly Research and Information Services – Budget 2020-2021

An Assembly Research Officer briefed the Committee on budget scrutiny.

The Committee noted a RaISe briefing paper on Assembly Committees Coordinated Budget Scrutiny.

The meeting moved into public session at 10.32 am.

2. Apologies

None.

The Committee moved to agenda item 6.

3. COVID-19 Disease Response – Briefing from the Minister of Health and Chief Medical Officer

The Minister of Health, Mr Robin Swann MLA and the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride joined the meeting at 10.32 am.

The Minister provided an update on his Department's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Minister and Chief Medical Officer agreed to provide the Committee with further information on a number of issues raised during the question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and the Chief Medical Officer and requested they attend the Committee's next meeting to answer questions that Members did not have the opportunity to ask during the limited time in which the Minister was available.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted the following correspondence relevant to the briefing session:

- A copy of correspondence from the Minister of Health to the Royal College of Nursing regarding PPE guidance;
- A copy of correspondence from the Minister of Justice to the Minister of Health regarding the UK-wide guidance on the use of PPE; and
- Correspondence from the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry on the work that the Association and its members have been carrying out in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The meeting was suspended at 11.56 am.

The meeting resumed at 12.10 am.

4. Budget 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 – Department of Health Briefing

Department of Health officials joined the meeting via telephone conferencing at 12.10 pm.

Ms Neelia Lloyd, Director of Finance, Department of Health

Ms Brigitte Worth, Investment Director, Department of Health

Ms Ciara Dolan, Director of Transformation, Department of Health

The officials briefed the Committee on the Department of Health budget.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The officials agreed to provide the Committee with further information on a number of issues raised during the question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance and advised that, due to the late receipt of budget information papers from the Department and the limited time in which Members had to consider these, the Committee would return to its consideration of the budget at its next meeting and would require departmental officials to attend to answer Members' questions.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted the following correspondence relevant to the briefing session:

- Correspondence from the Minister of Health providing information requested by the Committee following a departmental briefing on HSC budgetary pressures on 13 February;
- Completed budget information templates from the Department of Health; and
- A copy of correspondence from the Department of Finance to the Committee for Finance on the financial impact of COVID-19.

Mr Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 1.02 pm.

The meeting was suspended at 1.02 pm.

The meeting resumed at 1.11 pm.

Present:	Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson)
	Ms Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)*
	Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA
	Mr Gerry Carroll MLA
	Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA*
	Mr Alex Easton MLA
	Mr Colin McGrath MLA*

**These Members attended the meeting via telephone conferencing.*

5. SL1 The Draft Children's Social Care (Coronavirus) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Department of Health officials joined the meeting via telephone conferencing at 1.11 pm.

Ms Eilís McDaniel, Director of Family and Children's Policy, Department of Health
Ms Julie Stephenson, Head of Adoption and Children Bill Team, Department of Health

Ms McDaniel briefed the Committee on the Department of Health's intention to make a Statutory Rule to provide HSC Trusts and independent providers of children's social care services with flexibility to continue to provide essential services to looked after children, children in need and care leavers during the surge period of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Chairperson declared an interest as formerly being employed as a Social Worker and currently taking a career break.

Mr Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 1.23 pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Ms McDaniel agreed to provide the Committee with further information on a number of issues raised by Members during the question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek the views of relevant stakeholders on the proposed regulations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposal for the Statutory Rule but would consider the matter in further detail when it had received the information it requested from the departmental officials and heard the views of relevant stakeholders.

The Committee returned to agenda item 3.

6. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson highlighted the important messages from GPs, the Safeguarding Board and others, to encourage the public to seek medical help when needed and to make child protection calls when concerned.

The Chairperson advised Members that a one-minute silence to remember workers who have died as a result of COVID-19 or other work-related causes, would take place during International Workers' Memorial Day, on Tuesday, 28 April at 11.00 am.

7. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2020.

8. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

The Committee moved to agenda item 9.

9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted, pending future scrutiny, correspondence from the Minister of Health providing information requested by the Committee on accountability and clinical governance in Health and Social Care.
- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health providing a copy of the 'shielding letter' which will be issued by GPs to all patients with motor neurone disease in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to MNDA NI for information.

- iii. The Committee considered the wording of a draft letter to be issued on its behalf to correspondents who have written to the Committee in relation to the provision of abortion services in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to amend the text of the draft letter to acknowledge the fact that Committee Members held differing views on this issue.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the British Association of Social Workers NI regarding guidance on the use of PPE by social workers.
- v. The Committee noted correspondence received from an individual regarding the Westminster Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- vi. The Committee noted a number of offers of assistance from individuals and organisations in relation to the COVID-19 response and further noted that this correspondence had been forwarded to the Department of Health.
- vii. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules' seventh report of Session 2019 – 2020.
- viii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding access to health care support during the COVID-19 crisis for people who are deaf.

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

- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding COVID-19 emergency shortages and the wording of a draft response to be issued on the Committee's behalf.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the text of the draft response and for it to be issued.

- x. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Education to the Department of Health requesting further information on the package of childcare measures the Department of Education is delivering in partnership with the Department of Health as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- xi. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding COVID-19.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to refer the individual to the Public Health Agency website for more information.

- xii. The Committee considered correspondence from Stratagem requesting information on planned Committee Inquiries.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to advise Stratagem that it had no inquiry plans at present.

xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from Ms Rachel Woods MLA regarding personal assistants and PPE access.

Agreed: The Committee agreed follow this matter up with the Department of Health.

xiv. The Committee considered the wording of a draft letter to be issued on its behalf to the Minister of Health regarding the Autism Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the text of the draft letter and for the letter to be issued the Minister of Health.

xv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Justice regarding a proposal for a Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) for the Private International Law (Implementation of Agreements) Bill and noted a copy of the LCM that had been laid in the Assembly by the Minister of Justice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek written briefing from the Department of Health on the provisions of the Bill that may impact on its responsibilities.

xvi. The Committee considered correspondence from Hourglass raising concerns about funding and support for its work.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Health and the Department for Communities for their consideration.

xvii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual expressing concerns about delays in breast-screening services for at risk patients.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Health for its consideration.

xviii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the impact of the closure of parks in the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council area, on children with autism.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond to the individual to confirm it was aware that these parks have since opened and advise of the Committee's ongoing engagement with the Department of Health on the challenges faced by people with autism as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to provide the individual with guidance it had requested from the Department of Health on exercise outdoors for people with autism when this has been received.

xix. The Committee considered correspondence from a dentist regarding financial payments to dentists which do not account for some individual circumstances.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Health for a response.

- xx. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the financial pressures the COVID-19 pandemic is placing on care homes and noted that a Committee Member had responded to the individual on this issue.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson confirmed that the Committee will continue to meet on Thursdays as usual.

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include in its Forward Work Programme: a further briefing from the Minister of Health and the Chief Medical Officer; a further briefing from Department of Health officials on the budget; a briefing from the Department of Health and relevant stakeholders on care and support for children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a written briefing from the Department of Health on plans relating to the development of a medical school at the Ulster University Magee campus.

11. Any Other Business

Members discussed concerns on a range of difficulties in relation to the management of committee business within the current challenging circumstances and the conduct of Members at meetings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request responses from the Department of Health on issues previously raised by the Committee to assist with its scrutiny of COVID-19 related matters.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 30 April 2020, at 10.00 am in a room within Parliament Buildings to be confirmed.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 2.22 pm.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Date: _____