



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday, 2 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

Apologies: None.

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

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

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am in public session.

The Clerk informed members that as the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson would not be attending today's meeting in person, a temporary Chairperson was required. The Clerk invited nominations for a temporary Chairperson.

It was proposed by Mr Colm Gildernew and seconded by Ms Paula Bradshaw that Mr Pat Sheehan be elected temporary Chairperson. No further nominations were proposed; therefore, Pat Sheehan assumed the role of Chairperson for the duration of the meeting.

The meeting was suspended at 10.34 am and resumed at 10.44 am.

The Committee moved to agenda item 5.

1. COVID-19 Disease Response – Briefing by the Minister of Health

The Minister of Health, Mr Robin Swann MLA joined the meeting via telephone conferencing at 10.44 am.

The Minister provided an update on the latest developments relating to COVID-19.

Mr Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 10.49 am.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Alex Easton declared an interest as having a relative who works for South Eastern Trust care in the community.

The Minister 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 Minister for his attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that due to lack of time for further discussion, a number of questions from Mr Colin McGrath would be forwarded to the Minister.

The Committee moved to agenda item 3.

2. Draft Minutes

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would discuss the recording of its consideration and decision in relation to the handling of COVID-19 related subordinate legislation with Ms Órlaithí Flynn.

The Committee moved to agenda item 6.

3. COVID-19 Disease Response – Briefing by the Chief Executive of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Dr Cathy Jack, Chief Executive, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust joined the meeting via telephone conferencing at 11.48 am.

Dr Jack briefed the Committee on Belfast Trust's planning and response in relation to COVID-19.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Dr Jack 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 Dr Jack for her attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The meeting was suspended at 12.54 pm and resumed at 1.00 pm.

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 Colin McGrath MLA
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA

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

4. SR 2020/55 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Mr Nigel McMahon, Chief Environmental Health Officer, Department of Health joined the meeting via telephone conferencing at 1.00 pm.

Mr McMahon briefed the Committee on the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which have been made in response to the public health situation regarding COVID-19 Disease.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Mr McMahon for his attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider only the health-related aspects of the Rule.

The Committee noted that the Regulations provide that the Department of Health must review the need for restrictions and requirements imposed by the Regulations at least once every 21 days, with the first review being carried out by 18 April 2020.

Agreed: That the Committee for Health has considered SR 2020/55 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and is content with the health aspects of the Rule.

5. SL1 The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Mr Canice Ward, Head of Medicines Regulatory Group, Department of Health joined the meeting at 1.29 pm.

Mr Ward briefed the Committee on the Department of Health's proposal to make a Statutory Rule to provide flexibility in an emergency situation, such as a pandemic, to relax rules on possession and supply to allow pharmacists in registered pharmacies to supply controlled drugs to patients without a prescription in specified circumstances.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Ward for his attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed it was content with the proposal for the Statutory Rule.

6. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding departmental budget scrutiny plans.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it still wished to receive oral briefing from departmental officials on the budget at its meeting on 23 April 2020 as scheduled in its Forward Work Programme.

- ii. The Committee noted the March 2020 Investment Strategy NI Investing Activity Report for the Department of Health.

- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from Specsavers regarding COVID-19 contingency measures.

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

- iv. The Committee considered two items of correspondence from the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) regarding the provision of accessible information and guidance on COVID-19 for blind and partially sighted people.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to disseminate this information to the Assembly Clerking and Reporting Directorate and to the Assembly Communications team.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to raise this matter with the Department of Health.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that the Executive Office include a subtitle facility as part of its daily briefing press conference.

- v. The Committee considered correspondence from the Motor Neurone Disease Association NI requesting clarity on whether people living with motor neurone disease are included in the shielding list and information on the benefits for patients being included on that list.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to raise this matter with the Department of Health and express its view that those suffering from MND should be added to the list of those to receive 'shielding' letters.

7. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members should attend future committee meetings remotely where possible so long as the current restrictions on movement are in force.

8. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting will be on Thursday, 23 April 2020, at 10.30 am, room within Parliament Buildings to be confirmed.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.42 pm.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Date: _____