



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday, 26 March 2020
Room 29, Parliament Buildings**

Present: Ms Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA
Mr Gerry Carroll MLA
Mr Alan Chambers MLA
Mr Alex Easton MLA
Mr Colin McGrath MLA

Apologies: Mr Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)*
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA*

In Attendance: Ms Éilis Haughey (Clerk)
Ms Roisin Donnelly (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Lamont (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Brendan Miskelly (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 10.35 am in public session with the Deputy Chairperson taking the chair.

**The Chairperson and Ms Órlaithí Flynn engaged with the meeting via the live online streaming service and by email.*

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Deputy Chairperson expressed her sympathy, on behalf of the Members of the Committee, to the friends and families of those who have died as a result of the coronavirus and reiterated the Executive's message for the public to stay at home to save lives.

The Deputy Chairperson welcomed Mr Colin McGrath MLA to his first Health Committee meeting and recorded the Committee's appreciation of the contribution of Ms Sinead Bradley MLA to the work of the Committee.

The Deputy Chairperson conveyed the Committee's appreciation of the Minister of Health's recent statement confirming that additional payments are to be made to people in Northern Ireland affected by contaminated blood.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

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

The Minister of Health and the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride joined the meeting via video conferencing at 10.39 am.

The Minister briefed the Committee on COVID-19 surge planning and further developments in dealing with the pandemic.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the Minister and Chief Medical Officer for their attendance.

The Minister agreed to provide further information on a number of issues raised and to attend the next Committee meeting to take further questions from Members.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Community Pharmacy NI regarding the impact of Covid-19 on community pharmacy provision and a RaISe briefing note on Covid-19 Testing of Patients and PPE for Healthcare Staff.

The meeting was suspended at 11.38 am.

The meeting resumed at 11.55 am.

Present: Ms Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Gerry Carroll MLA
Mr Alan Chambers MLA
Mr Alex Easton MLA
Mr Colin McGrath MLA

6. Draft Minutes (continued)

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2020.

The Committee agreed to proceed with its consideration of the other agenda items while a video conferencing connection was established for the next briefing session.

7. SL1 Mental Capacity (Deprivation of Liberty) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Health to make a Statutory Rule to make temporary modifications to the principal Mental Capacity (Deprivation of Liberty) Regulations, in the case of the widespread unavailability of the health and social care workforce due to a pandemic emergency.

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

8. SL1 The Establishment and Agencies (Fitness of Workers) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Health to make a Statutory Rule to give effect to temporary changes to pre-employment vetting policy for health and social care roles.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add consideration of COVID-19 related subordinate legislation to its Forward Work Programme for review.

9. SR 2020/46 The Mental Health (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Order 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/46 The Mental Health (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Order 2020, which will vary the length of the period which must elapse for a second opinion to be required for the continued administration of medicine to detained patients from three months to six months.

The Committee noted that the Department of Health had laid the Statutory Rule before the Committee had the opportunity to consider the matter at policy proposal stage.

Agreed: That the Committee for Health has considered SR 2020/46 The Mental Health (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Order 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' Report, had no objection to the Rule.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted, pending future scrutiny, a response from the Minister of Health to the Committee's request for further information on the Transformation of the Health and Social Care system.
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health advising of a delay in the approval and issue of the Commissioning Plan Direction for 2020/21 as a result of the current public health crisis.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the School of Law, Queens University, Belfast regarding changes being introduced by the Coronavirus Bill relating to funerals.
- iv. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Department of Education to the Committee for Education regarding menstrual wellbeing education in schools.
- v. The Committee considered correspondence from the Clerk of the Committee for Finance regarding the timetable for Executive Budget Scrutiny for 2020-2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request the Department of Health complete a budget information template designed to assist a standardised approach to budget scrutiny across all statutory Committees.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the completed template, once received, to the Committee for Finance and RaISe.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its Forward Work Programme.

12. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed the Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020, which were laid in the UK Parliament on 25 March 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would seek information on the options open to the Assembly to amend or develop the abortion framework established by the Regulations.

The Committee agreed to move to the second briefing relating to COVID-19 Disease Response.

13. COVID-19 Disease Response – Briefing from the British Medical Association NI GP Committee and the Royal College of General Practitioners NI

Dr Alan Stout, Chairperson, GP Committee, British Medical Association NI joined the meeting at 12.19 pm via video conferencing.

The briefing with Dr Stout was deferred until a future date because of the poor video conferencing connection.

The meeting was suspended at 12.27 pm.

The meeting resumed at 12.28 pm.

Dr Laurence Dorman, Chairperson, Royal College of General Practitioners NI joined the meeting at 12.28 pm via video conferencing.

Dr Dorman briefed the Committee on the issues affecting general practice as a result of COVID-19 and the role of general practice in relation to the Covid-19 Centres.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked Dr Dorman for his attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

14. Any Other Business (continued)

A Member highlighted the ‘clap for carers’ tribute to take place at 8.00 pm on 26 March as a way for the general public to show their appreciation for the work of health and social care staff dealing with the coronavirus pandemic.

15. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting will be on Thursday, 2 April 2020, at 10.30 am, room within Parliament Buildings to be confirmed.

The Deputy Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.55 pm.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Date: _____