



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Thursday, 3 September 2020  
Senate Chamber, 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  
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA  
Mr Colin McGrath MLA  
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA

**Apologies:** Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson)

**In Attendance:** Ms Éilis Haughey (Clerk)  
Mr Brendan Miskelly (Clerical Officer)

*\*Ms Bradshaw attended the meeting via video-conference.*

*The meeting commenced at 2.01 pm in public session with the Deputy Chairperson taking the chair.*

**1. Apologies**

As above.

*The Committee agreed to move to agenda item 5.*

**2. COVID-19 Disease Response – Update from the Minister of Health**

The Minister of Health, Mr Robin Swann MLA, Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride and Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor Ian Young joined the meeting at 2.03 pm.

The Minister provided an update on the Department of Health's response and planning in relation to COVID-19.

*The Deputy Chairperson declared an interest as having a relative who is a nurse.*

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Minister agreed to provide the Committee with further information on an issue raised during the question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister, Dr McBride and Professor Young for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding the attendance of the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health at future meetings of the Strategic Health and Social Care Partnership Forum.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health providing the project terms of reference for the development of a framework to enhance clinical care in care homes and separate correspondence providing the Report of the Task and Finish Group on the Rapid Learning Initiative into the transmission of covid-19 into and within care homes in Northern Ireland.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and report pending future scrutiny of care home issues.

*The meeting was suspended at 3.23 pm and resumed at 3.32 pm.*

*The Committee returned to agenda item 2.*

### **3. Chairperson's Business**

The Deputy Chairperson advised Members that she and the Chairperson had met informally with the Minister of Health the previous week.

### **4. Draft Minutes**

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

### **5. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **6. SR 2020/139 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 11) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Deputy Chairperson advised Members that the provisions in this statutory rule had been revoked by a subsequent statutory rule, SR 2020/150 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which had been scheduled for consideration at the next meeting.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of SR 2020/139 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 11) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 pending the Committee's consideration of SR 2020/150 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

## 7. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered three items of correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding RQIA: a response to concerns raised by the Committee in relation to the review of RQIA resignations; an update on the planned recruitment process for membership of the Board of the RQIA; and confirmation of the appointment of Dr Tony Stevens as the new interim Chief Executive of the RQIA and the temporary appointment of two departmental senior officials to the RQIA Board as Non-Executive Members.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health regarding the temporary appointment of departmental senior officials to the RQIA Board; and to request further information on the appointments and the appointments process.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to invite the Interim Chief Executive to brief the Committee on the ongoing work of the RQIA to support the care home sector.

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health on his Department's response in relation to the impact of COVID-19 on the General Dental Service.

*Mr Gerry Carroll declared an interest as having a relative who is a dentist.*

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to invite the Chief Dental Officer and Director of General Health Policy to provide an updated briefing on the impact of COVID-19 on the provision of dental services and plans for the restoration of services.

- iii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from an individual dentist to General Dental Services at the HSCB, expressing concerns that her practice will have to de-register a large number of patients due to financial strain and issues relating to the GDS financial support scheme.

- iv. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health to the Committee's correspondence highlighting the difficulties faced by carers and families that have been exacerbated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the Minister's response to Families Involved NI who had raised this matter with the Committee.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing information the Committee had requested on the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health advising of the cessation of the diabetes telephone support helpline service which provided advice relating to COVID-19.

- vii. The Committee considered a reply from the Minister of Health to the Committee's enquiry about his planned response to the recommendations of the report of the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to seek an update in relation to this matter and, in particular, to request further details on the working group being established to consider the recommendations of the review and response to the report.

- viii. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health, and a separate response from the Department of Finance, to concerns raised by the Committee in relation to HSC staff and other public sector employees who are carers and unable to work as a result of the pandemic.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to all Departments concerned to urge them to work together to fund restoration of care services in full; and in the meantime, to provide adequate financial support for those prevented from working due to the absence of care services.

- ix. The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health to its request for information on the provision of Vitamin B12 injections.
- x. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health confirming details of responsibility for providing advice to the Department on issues relating to COVID-19 and the BAME community.
- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health advising that the latest information on current travel requirements is published on the NIDirect website.
- xii. The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health to the Committee's request for information on the Department's engagement with the Refractory Epilepsy Specialist Clinical Advisory Service (RESCAS) and communication of the establishment of this new body to medical colleagues.
- xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health advising of a UK-wide consultation on proposed changes to the Human Medicines Regulations 2012 to support the rapid rollout of a COVID-19 vaccine and influenza vaccine in the UK.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request written briefing from the Department of Health on this matter.

- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing information requested by the Committee on dental charges for school leavers.
- xv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health, providing information requested by the Committee further to the June Monitoring briefing by officials, on 18 June.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note this correspondence pending the upcoming briefing session on October monitoring.

- xvi. The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health to the Committee's request for consideration of the manufacture and procurement of PPE locally.
- xvii. The Committee considered responses received from each of the HSC Trusts to the Committee's request for information on the timelines for addressing complaints and investigations which were suspended due to COVID-19.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the responses from the Trusts pending future consideration of accountability and governance issues.

- xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Workers' Party providing its proposals for exiting lockdown.
- xix. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules' seventeenth and eighteenth reports of session 2019-2020.
- xx. The Committee noted that the Chairperson had accepted an invitation to speak at a roundtable event hosted by AbbVie and Blood Cancer Alliance.
- xxi. The Committee noted a report from Angel Eyes NI entitled, 'Covid-19: Widening Inequalities for Children and Young People with Visual Impairment in Education.'
- xxii. The Committee noted the July 2020 Investment Strategy NI activity report for the Department of Health.
- xxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Western Health and Social Care Trust confirming the resumption of the Asha Centre addiction services on 3 August 2020.
- xxiv. The Committee noted the June monitoring report, July monitoring report, and revised June monitoring report on the application of the provisions of the Children's Social Care (Coronavirus) (Temporary Modification of Children's Social Care) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.
- xxv. The Committee noted a report published by SANOFI entitled, 'State of the Nation: Non-Melanoma Skin Cancer'.
- xxvi. The Committee considered a request from an individual to brief the Committee on the issues relating to the former Mother and Baby and Magdalen institutions.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Chair of the Inter-Departmental Working Group to enquire about publication of the research commissioned by the Group; to invite the Chair to brief the Committee on the work of the Group to date, and to inform the individual of the Committee's actions.

xxvii. The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health to its request for information on the publication of coded death statistics.

xxviii. The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health to its request for further information on contact-tracing.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to invite the Public Health Agency to brief the Committee on contact-tracing and to include detail on self-isolation advice and numbers of people that are being asked to self-isolate.

xxix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing an update on the review of the NI infected blood payment scheme and confirming an uplift in payments.

## **8. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee noted its Forward Work Programme.

## **9. Any Other Business**

A Member advised that organ donation week would take place during the week of 7 - 13 September.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to promote organ donation week by sharing information about events relating to this.

## **10. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 10 September 2020 at 10.00 am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

*The Deputy Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 4.02 pm.*

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Chairperson*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_