



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday, 16 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 10.03 am in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised Members that he had taken part in a number of media interviews this week which primarily related to the impact of COVID-19 within the care home sector.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meetings held on 26 March, 2 April and 9 April 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. COVID-19 Disease Response – Public Health Agency Briefing

Officials from the Public Health Agency joined the meeting via telephone conferencing at 10.05 am.

Ms Olive MacLeod, Chief Executive, Public Health Agency

Professor Hugo Van Woerden, Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency

Mr Rodney Morton, Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency

Ms MacLeod provided an update on the Public Health Agency's activities relating to the COVID-19 testing strategy, the supply and use of PPE and other matters relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Alex Easton joined the meeting at 10.21 am.

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

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted a copy of related correspondence from the British Association of Social Workers NI to the Minister of Health regarding access to PPE for social workers and the inclusion of social workers on the list of priority groups for COVID-19 testing.

The meeting was suspended at 11.17 am.

The meeting resumed at 11.30 am.

6. COVID-19 Disease Response – Royal Colleges Briefing

Representatives from the Royal College of General Practitioners, Royal College of Surgeons and Royal College of Physicians joined the meeting at 11.32 am via video conferencing.

Dr Laurence Dorman, Chairperson, Royal College of General Practitioners, NI

Dr Mark Taylor, NI Director, Royal College of Surgeons

Dr Hamish Courtney, Elected Council Member, Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh

The representatives briefed the Committee on anticipatory care planning and end of life conversations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Dr Dorman, Dr Taylor and Dr Courtney for their attendance.

7. SR 2020/34 The Recovery of Health Services Charges (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/34 The Recovery of Health Services Charges (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which applies an inflationary uplift to the current tariff levels used for the collection of costs incurred by hospitals when treating casualties of road traffic accidents.

Agreed: That the Committee for Health has considered SR 2020/34 The Recovery of Health Services Charges (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and had no objection to the Rule.

8. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health providing a response to information the Committee requested in relation to the Autism Strategy progress reports.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk draft a response to the Minister of Health on matters that remain of concern to the Committee for consideration at next week's meeting.

- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from Motor Neurone Disease Association NI (MNDA NI) regarding the inclusion of people living with motor neurone disease on the list of those to receive a shielding letter and noted the Chairperson's response to MNDA NI on this matter.
- iii. The Committee considered further correspondence from MNDA NI requesting that the organisation be notified when shielding letters have been issued to people living with motor neurone disease.

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

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Clerk of the Committee for Finance regarding the revised arrangements for the 2020-2021 In-Year Monitoring Process.
- v. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the British Pregnancy Advisory Service to the Minister of Health requesting the extension of its telemedical early medical abortion service to women in Northern Ireland.
- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from a number of individuals regarding the implementation of abortion regulations in Northern Ireland and considered a draft response to be issued on the Committee's behalf.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence from the individuals to the Department of Health for information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to revise the wording of the response to be issued to correspondence received in relation to this matter.

- vii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding concerns about delays in ovarian cancer diagnosis.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this matter as part of its forward work programme.

- viii. The Committee noted a briefing paper from the NI Human Rights Commission on the Coronavirus Act 2020.

- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from two individuals regarding COVID-19.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from the British Heart Foundation regarding the launch of its Patients First programme which will provide information and support to people affected by heart and circulatory disease.

- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the National Autistic Society NI requesting clarity on the guidance issued by the UK government relaxing the rules on staying at home for the learning disabled and others with complex needs.

Agreed: The Committee agree to seek clarification from the Minister of Health in relation to this matter.

- xii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the barriers to registered pharmacists in GB from joining the register for practicing in NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Pharmaceutical Society of NI for its consideration.

- xiii. The Committee considered a copy of an open letter from scientists, health professionals and others who work with drug addicts, requesting the Government increase support services to those suffering from drug addiction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider how it could engage with organisations who work with this vulnerable group.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing with the British Association of Social Workers NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request information from the Business Services Organisation on procurement of PPE and stock levels.

The Chairperson advised Members that it may be necessary for the Committee to move to Wednesday meetings from the week commencing 27 April to assist with the arrangements being put in place to minimise physical presence in Parliament Buildings.

10. Any Other Business

Members recorded their appreciation to committee staff for supporting meetings of the Committee during Easter recess.

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 23 April 2020, at 10.00 am in a room within Parliament Buildings to be confirmed.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12:48 pm.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Date: _____