



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday, 21 May 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 10.35 am in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised that today's briefing session on addiction services had been scheduled to take place during Mental Health Awareness Week. The Chairperson extended his best wishes to staff working in the mental health field and to those dealing with mental health problems.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. COVID-19 Disease Response – Briefing on addiction services

Representatives from NI Alcohol and Drug Alliance (NIADA) joined the meeting via telephone conferencing at 10.38 am.

Mrs Anne-Marie McClure, Chief Executive, Start360 and Chairperson of NIADA

Mr Eoin Ryan, Head of Harm Reduction Services, Simon Community NI

Mr Alex Bunting, Director, Addiction NI

Mr Mal Byrne, Assistant Director of Addictions and Mental Health, Extern

Mr Iain Cameron, Harm Reduction Manager, Extern

The representatives briefed the Committee on the challenges facing those with drug and alcohol dependencies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

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

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The meeting was suspended at 12.01 pm.

The meeting resumed at 12.16 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.*

6. COVID-19 Disease Response – Update from Independent Health and Care Providers

Ms Pauline Shepherd, Chief Executive, Independent Health and Care Providers, joined the meeting via telephone conferencing at 12.16 pm.

Ms Shepherd briefed the Committee on the impact of COVID-19 on the independent care sector.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Ms Paula Bradshaw declared an interest as having a relative who works in a care home.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Shepherd for her attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

7. SR 2020/82 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Chairperson advised that the Department of Health had made a statutory rule under the emergency procedure of the Public Health Act 1967, which will amend the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 to provide for the first steps in the easing of lockdown restrictions.

The Chairperson further advised that as consideration of the statutory rule had been added to the agenda at short notice there had not been sufficient time to coordinate a departmental official to brief the Committee on the rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the statutory rule until a briefing with a departmental official could be scheduled.

8. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health to the Committee's request for information on local patient care under UK-wide arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Minister's response to the individual who had raised this matter with the Committee.

- ii. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health to the Committee's request for information on cancer screening and treatment for high-risk patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Minister's response to the individual who had raised this matter with the Committee.

- iii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Minister of Health to the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists regarding the provision of PPE for dysphagia assessments.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists regarding the response it received from the Minister of Health (referred to above) and further noted that the Chief Medical Officer had provided assurances to the Committee at its meeting on 20 May, that the Department would come to a view on this matter within a week.

- v. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules' Tenth Report of Session 2019-2020 and that the Examiner had no comments to make in relation to SR 2020/71 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment)

Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which the Committee considered at its meeting on 30 April.

- vi. The Committee noted a copy of a written submission from Solace NI to the Committee for Communities on the financial impact of COVID-19 on local government.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health supporting calls for the development of a cross-departmental strategic approach to support councils.

- vii. The Committee considered correspondence from Ms Martina Anderson MLA regarding payments to those affected by contaminated blood.

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

- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding safeguarding in care homes.

- ix. The Committee noted, pending further scrutiny of mental health policy, correspondence from an individual regarding the role of the Mental Health Champion.

- x. The Committee considered further correspondence from an individual regarding COVID-19 support for self-employed health care professionals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reply, advising that it could not provide any additional information on this matter.

- xi. The Committee noted an update from the Independent Neurology Inquiry on the progress of its work.

- xii. The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health to the Committee's call for longer-term financial support for the community and voluntary sector.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee discussed its Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to provide the Clerk with the names of experts who could potentially be invited to attend a future COVID-19 expert panel session.

Mr Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 1.16 pm.

Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA left the meeting at 1.17 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request briefing from representatives of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Trade Unions to provide their views on the Safe at Home project proposal as part of the briefing session scheduled for 11 June.

10. Any Other Business

Members discussed the earlier briefing session on addiction services with NIADA.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health for a response on the issues raised during the addiction services briefing.

A Member raised the issue of COVID-19 testing in care homes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the RQIA and the NI Human Rights Commission for information on consent in relation to COVID-19 testing of residents within care homes.

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday 28 May 2020, at 10.00 am in the Senate, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.28 pm.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Date: _____