



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Thursday, 7 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 10.00 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 relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**3. Draft Minutes**

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 30 April 2020.

**4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

*The meeting was suspended at 10.03 am.*

*The meeting resumed at 10.05 am.*

*Mr Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 10.05 am.*

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

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

Ms Olive MacLeod, Interim Chief Executive, Public Health Agency

Dr Jackie Hyland, Health Protection Consultant, Public Health Agency

Professor Dr Hugo van Woerden, Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency

Ms Brid Farrell, Assistant Director of Service Development, Safety and Quality, Public Health Agency

The officials briefed the Committee on the latest developments in responding to COVID-19, including testing, contact tracing, PPE guidance and engagement with care homes.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

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

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted the following papers relevant to the briefing session:

- Public Health Agency project initiation document for the set up of the COVID-19 Contact Management Programme; and
- NI Assembly RaISe briefing paper on COVID-19 Testing for Sars-CoV-2 in the UK and the use of testing and contact tracing in selected countries.

*The meeting was suspended at 11.32 am.*

*The meeting resumed at 11.46 am.*

**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 – British Association of Social Workers NI Briefing

Representatives from the British Association of Social Workers NI joined the meeting via telephone conferencing at 11.46 am.

Carolyn Ewart, National Director, British Association of Social Workers NI

Andy McClenaghan, Communications and Public Affairs Officer, British Association of Social Workers NI

The BASW representatives briefed the Committee on issues affecting the provision of social work services during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Ewart and Mr McClenaghan for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

## 7. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Department of Health to Hourglass requesting a meeting to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 lock-down and incidences of domestic abuse.
- ii. The Committee noted, pending further scrutiny, correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding his intention to carry out a short, targeted consultation on proposed amendments to the Pharmaceutical Services Regulations (NI) 1997 as part of COVID-19 preparations.
- iii. The Committee considered correspondence and briefing papers from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) raising concerns about access to PPE for therapists carrying out dysphagia assessments and noted that the Chairperson had met informally with RCSLT in relation to this matter.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health regarding the concerns raised by RCSLT and to request that the Committee is provided with a copy of the Department's response to RCSLT clarifying its position on this matter.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Children's Law Centre offering to provide assistance to the Committee in its consideration of issues relating to COVID-19 and its impact on children and young people.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to consider this offer as part of the arrangements for the scheduled briefing in the Forward Work Programme on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people.

- v. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the suspension of access to health care provision and treatment usually provided by a hospital in GB to a child who resides in Northern Ireland as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to enquire about urgent treatment for children who live in Northern Ireland and are usually treated under UK-wide arrangements.

- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from independent physiotherapy practitioners highlighting the difficulties being experienced by practices during the COVID-19 pandemic and noted that the Deputy Chairperson had written to the Minister of Health on this matter.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending a reply from the Department of Health to the Deputy Chairperson.

- vii. The Committee considered correspondence from CO3 highlighting the financial impact of COVID-19 on charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises and noted that the Chairperson and other Committee Members had met informally with CO3 in relation to this matter.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health to provide greater certainty for charities with which it has service-level agreements in place.

- viii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for the Economy to the Minister of Health regarding the graduate medical school at Magee College.

- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the availability of urgent use sanitary products for NHS shift workers.

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

- x. The Committee considered correspondence from Macmillan Cancer Support regarding end of life guidance.

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

- xi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Multiple Sclerosis Society highlighting issues MS sufferers are experiencing during the pandemic.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to request a response to the issues raised by the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

- xii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health responding to its request for further information on the Private International Law (Implementation of Agreements) Bill.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request that the Department of Health consult the Committee on any related regulations.
- xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health responding to correspondence forwarded by the Committee from individuals regarding abortion services.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to ask the Minister of Health for further clarification regarding the provision of abortion services to women in Northern Ireland.
- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health outlining the action his department is taking in respect of the calculation of payments from the General Dental Service Financial Support Scheme to address concerns that have been raised.
- xv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Education regarding support measures for the childcare sector during the pandemic and proposing a concurrent meeting is held with the Health Committee to hear briefing from departmental officials.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Committee for Education on its consideration of this matter.
- xvi. The Committee noted, pending further scrutiny of mental health issues, a copy of correspondence from an individual to the Minister of Health regarding the independence and powers of the proposed mental health champion.
- xvii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual concerned about sick pay provision for care workers in the independent sector.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to advise the individual of its ongoing engagement with the Department of Health on the reform of adult social care, including conditions for staff, and that it would continue to raise this matter with the Department.

## **8. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson advised Members that as the Executive now planned to meet on Thursday mornings, the Minister of Health would not be available to brief the Committee at its usual meeting time, however alternative arrangements to accommodate briefings from the Minister were being explored.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from the Chief Nursing Officer on the provision of care for COVID-19 patients.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request a briefing session with the RQIA for next week.

**9. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

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

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 14 May 2020 at 10.00 am, in a room within Parliament Buildings to be confirmed.

*The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12.50 pm.*

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

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