



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday, 15 October 2020

The 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
Mr Alex Easton MLA
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA*
Mr Colin McGrath MLA*
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA*

In Attendance: Ms Éilis Haughey (Clerk)
Ms Jean Barkley (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Brendan Miskelly (Clerical Officer)

**These Members attended the meeting via video-conference.*

The meeting commenced at 9.32 am in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

- i. The Chairperson referred to the increasing COVID-19 infection rates and pressure on the health and social care system and urged the public to continue to adhere to public health advice regarding regular hand washing, wearing face coverings, maintaining social distancing and reducing social contacts.
- ii. The Chairperson advised Members that he, the Deputy Chairperson and Ms Paula Bradshaw had taken part in an informal meeting with the relatives of care homes residents as part of the Committee's inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on care homes and thanked the individuals who took part in the meeting and the Assembly Engagement Team who had facilitated the meeting.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

The Committee agreed to move to agenda items 9 to 11.

The meeting was suspended at 9.40 am and resumed at 9:47 am.

5. SR 2020/202 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 5) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Mr Nigel McMahon, Chief Environmental Health Officer, Department of Health, joined the meeting by video-conference at 9.47 am.

A question and answer session took place on three statutory rules relating to the reopening of venues where alcohol may be consumed. Members sought clarity on whether these rules would continue to be progressed given the imminent introduction of further restrictions on such venues.

Mr Colin McGrath joined the meeting at 10.17 am.

The Chairperson thanked Mr McMahon for his attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The meeting was suspended at 10.26 am due to technical difficulties experienced by the Members who were attending the meeting via video-conference.

The meeting resumed at 10.34 am in public session and the Committee agreed to move into closed session to continue its deliberations.

The meeting moved into public session at 10.45 am.

The Committee considered SR 2020/202 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 5) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which makes provision for the reopening of venues where intoxicating liquor may be consumed and makes requirements regarding music, dancing, seating and consumption of food and drink at such venues. It also makes requirements for the conduct of risk assessments; the collection and sharing of visitor information; and creates an offence in respect of an organiser's non-compliance with the restrictions on gatherings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would not take a position on SR 2020/202 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 5) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

6. SR 2020/204 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 6) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/204 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 6) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which makes changes to the places where restrictions will apply. Restrictions relating to venues where intoxicating liquor may be consumed will be applicable both in indoor and outdoor spaces associated with the venue. Places of worship are excluded.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would not take a position on SR 2020/204 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 6) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

7. SR 2020/210 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 7) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/210 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 7) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which inserts a definition of ‘intoxicating liquor’; amends the restrictions on movement within a venue at which intoxicating liquor may be consumed; and adds restrictions on the opening hours of certain venues at which intoxicating liquor and food and drink may be obtained or consumed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would not take a position on SR 2020/210 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 7) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

The Committee moved to agenda item 5.

8. COVID-19 Disease Response: Briefing from the Public Health Agency and Chief Digital Information Officer on Testing and Contact Tracing

Officials from the Public Health Agency and the Department of Health joined the meeting by video-conference at 10.49 am:

Ms Olive MacLeod, Interim Chief Executive, PHA

Professor Hugo van Woerden, Director of Public Health, PHA

Dr Brid Farrell, Assistant Director of Service Development, PHA

Dr Gerry Waldron, Head of Health Protection, PHA

Dr Joanne McClean, Public Health Consultant, PHA

Mr Dan West, Chief Digital Information Officer, Department of Health.

The officials briefed the Committee on testing and contact tracing.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask for further information from the Public Health Agency and Department of Health in relation to a number of issues raised during the question and answer session and for further information relating to the StopCOVID NI Proximity App.

The meeting was suspended at 12.21 pm and resumed at 12.25 pm.

9. Departmental Briefing on October Monitoring and Main Estimates

The following Department of Health officials joined the meeting by video conference at 12.26 pm:

Mr Andrew Dawson, Director of Infrastructure Investment

Ms Ciara Dolan, Director of Transformation

Ms Fiona White, Head of Financial Development

Ms Annette Palmer, Head of COVID-19 Finance.

The officials briefed the Committee on the October monitoring round and Main Estimates.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

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

Mr Colin McGrath left the meeting at 12.59 pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further briefing on the allocation and monitoring of funding to address health inequalities.

The meeting was suspended at 1.10 pm and resumed at 1.12 pm.

The Committee agreed to move to agenda items 12 to 16.

10. UK SI: The Reciprocal and Cross-Border Healthcare (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020

The Committee considered a UK Statutory Instrument ‘The Reciprocal and Cross-Border Healthcare (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020’ which will remove redundant ‘no deal’ provisions designed to apply if no transition period had been agreed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of UK SI: The Reciprocal and Cross-Border Healthcare (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020.

11. UK SI: Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020

The Committee considered a UK Statutory Instrument ‘The Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020’ which will ensure that Northern Ireland continues to comply with the EU Tobacco Products Directive in compliance with the Ireland /NI Protocol.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of UK SI: The Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020.

12. UK SI: Electronic Commerce Directive (Adoption and Children) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020

The Committee considered a UK Statutory Instrument ‘The Electronic Commerce Directive (Adoption and Children) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020’ which is designed to remove EU-wide arrangements so that companies based in the UK which breach advertising rules in an EEA country, in relation to adoption, will no longer be treated as if they committed the offences in the UK. Persons who are not registered adoption agencies will continue to be prohibited from advertising in relation to adoption.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of UK SI: The Electronic Commerce Directive (Adoption and Children) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020.

13. UK SI: The Human Medicines (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020

The Committee considered a UK Statutory Instrument ‘The Human Medicines (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020’ which ensures compliance with the Ireland /NI Protocol; it includes transparency requirements to ensure unfettered access to GB markets for medicines coming from NI and also includes automatic recognition of EU licences for medicines. It also provides for the continuing supply of medicines into the UK and for regulatory oversight within the UK.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Health Minister advising that having received clarity on a number of issues he had raised in relation to this statutory instrument, he had now given his consent on this.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of UK SI: The Human Medicines (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020, pending further written briefing from the Department of Health.

14. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered the Department of Health's analysis of responses to its consultation on proposals for Continuing Healthcare.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this correspondence pending future scrutiny and to schedule a briefing session in the New Year to discuss this with stakeholders and the Department.

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health outlining progression in relation to the development of an Autism Strategy and plans for the publication of an interim strategy in early 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department for further detail on the consultation responses and plans to ensure the implementation of the strategy.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the British Association of Private Dentistry on issues affecting the provision of dental services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending a response from the Chief Dental Officer to related issues previously raised by the Committee.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from a senior specialist in special care dentistry, highlighting the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the provision of special care dentistry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department for a response to the issues raised; and to note the correspondence pending further scrutiny of the impact of COVID-19 on the provision of dental services.

The Chairperson advised that time pressures would prevent the Committee from considering the remainder of correspondence listed for today's meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that actions relating to the remaining items of correspondence would be agreed by email.

Ms Paula Bradshaw left the meeting at 1.20 pm.

The meeting was suspended at 1.20 pm and resumed at 1.29 pm.

The Committee moved to agenda items 7 and 8.

15. SR 2020/203 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 12) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Chairperson advised that it had not been possible to have a departmental official attend the meeting to brief the Committee on the travel restriction regulations because of technical difficulties.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health on a number of questions raised by Members during its consideration of the travel regulations and draw the attention of the Department to a number of drafting errors.

The Chairperson advised that the Examiner of Statutory Rules intended to report on the Rule the following day and would draw attention to breach of the 21-day rule as well as a drafting error but would confirm that she was content with the Department's reason for the breach and commitment to addressing the drafting error.

The Committee considered SR 2020/203 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 12) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which broadens exemptions from self-isolation rules in relation to various categories of person connected to elite sports, film production and those having travelled as part of the 4th National Lottery Licence Competition. In addition, Curaçao, Denmark, Iceland and Slovakia are omitted from the list of countries and territories in respect of which travellers arriving into the UK are exempt from post-travel self-isolation.

Agreed: The Committee had considered SR 2020/203 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 12) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and had no objection to the Rule.

16. SR 2020/212 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 13) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/212 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 13) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which omits Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, Poland and Turkey, from the list of countries and territories exempt from post-travel self-isolation requirements.

The Chairperson advised that the Examiner of Statutory Rules intended to report on the Rule the following day and would draw attention to breach of the 21-day rule but confirm that she was content with the Department's reason for the breach.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/212 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 13) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and had no objection to the Rule.

17. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its Forward Work Programme.

18. Any Other Business

- i. Members discussed concerns regarding access to evidence and advice to support the Committee's consideration of coronavirus related regulations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Chief Medical Officer to brief the Committee.

- ii. A Member advised that the early mid-term school closure would affect the administration of flu vaccines in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health what plans were in place to ensure children could be offered the flu vaccine at the earliest opportunity.

19. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 20 October 2020 at 1.00 pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.43 pm.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Date: _____