



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 15 April 2021

Meeting Location: virtual meeting

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)

Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Jonathan Buckley MLA

Gerry Carroll MLA

Alan Chambers MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Cara Hunter MLA

Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Keith McBride, Clerk

Roisin Donnelly, Assistant Clerk

Deirdre Farry, Assistant Clerk

Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor

Brendan Miskelly, Clerical Officer



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The meeting commenced at 9.33 am in open session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson provided an update on the committee stakeholder event on the impact of COVID-19 on cancer services which was held on 14 April and thanked the committee staff and Assembly engagement team for their support in arranging the event.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to highlight the key issues of concern raised at the event.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2021.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.



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5. Departmental Briefing: Brexit

The following officials from the Department of Health joined the meeting by video-conference at 9.36 am:

Cathy Harrison, Chief Pharmaceutical Officer;

Patricia Quinn-Duffy, EU Exit Lead - Reciprocal Healthcare/Workforce Issues; and

Eimear Smyth, Senior Principal Officer EU Exit Transition Unit.

The officials briefed the Committee on Brexit issues.

Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 9.45 am.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 9.52 am.

Pam Cameron joined the meeting at 9.58 am.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The officials agreed to provide the Committee with further information on a number of issues raised.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for attending the meeting.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to: schedule a further departmental briefing on Brexit issues; request further information from the Department of Health on consideration of the Health and Social Care Common Frameworks; and ask for further information on the work being undertaken to address waiting lists.

The meeting was suspended at 11.17 am and resumed at 11.31 am.

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)



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Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Gerry Carroll MLA

Alan Chambers MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Cara Hunter MLA

Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

6. Health and Social Care Bill – Departmental Briefing

The following officials from the Department of Health joined the meeting by video-conference at 11.33 am:

John Millar, Health and Social Care Bill Team Manager;

Gareth McKeown, Migration to Closure Project Team Manager; and

Allan Chapman, Future Planning Model, Planning Team Lead.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Health and Social Care Bill.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The officials agreed to provide the Committee with further information on a number of issues raised.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for attending the meeting.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.



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7. SL1 Public Health Notifiable Diseases Order (Northern Ireland) 2020 - inclusion of Hepatitis C

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Health to make a statutory rule to make Hepatitis C a notifiable disease so that medical practitioners will be required to share patient information with the Public Health Agency if they become aware, or have reasonable grounds for suspecting, that a person they are attending has Hepatitis C.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further detail on the consultation undertaken in relation to this proposal and an explanation for the delay in bringing forward this change.

8. SR 2021/54 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 8) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The following officials from the Department of Health joined the meeting by video-conference at 12.34 pm:

Elaine Colgan, Chief of Staff to Chief Medical Officer; and

Debra Sharpe, International Travel Lead.

The officials briefed the Committee on four statutory rules which make provisions relating to international travel restrictions (agenda items 8 to 11).

The officials agreed to provide the Committee with further information on a number of issues raised.

The briefing was reported by Hansard.

The Committee considered SR 2021/54 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 8) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 which expands the definition of aircraft crew exempt from complying with the requirement to self-isolate; removes a related redundant testing exemption; and updates the list of specified competitions relating to exemptions for sportspersons.



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Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/54 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 8) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and had no objection to the Rule.

9. SR 2021/69 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No.9) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/69 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No.9) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 which amends the travel history period for countries deemed to be high risk and subject to additional measures, and makes amendments to the list of countries subject to additional measures.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/69 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No.9) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and had no objection to the Rule.

10. SR 2021/84 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 10) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/84 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No.10) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 which introduces an exemption from the requirement to self-isolate for persons engaged in film and high end TV production in Northern Ireland when carrying out relevant work/activity.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/84 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No.10) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, had no objection to the Rule.



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**11. SR 2021/95 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel)
(Amendment No. 11) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021**

The Committee considered SR 2021/95 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No.11) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 which further amendments to the list of countries subject to additional measures.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/95 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No.11) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, had no objection to the Rule.

The meeting was suspended at 1.02 pm and resumed at 1.10 pm.

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)

Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

12. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Minister of Health to Karen Mullan MLA regarding a public petition calling for the urgent provision of a detox and centre of excellence for addiction in the Derry City and Strabane District Council Area.
- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health providing an update on the use of powers in the Coronavirus Act 2020 pertaining to the Department of Health.



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- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Health for further information.
- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding SR 2021/8 The Mental Health (1986 Order) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2021 and the provision of mental health services.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for an update on its engagement with the RQIA to increase the number of available second opinion doctors.
- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health responding to concerns raised by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy NI about waiting times and access to rehabilitation services.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the Minister's letter to the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy NI for information.
- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing information requested by the Committee arising from the departmental briefing on waiting times.
- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding COVID-19 indemnity arrangements for Spring/Summer 2021.
- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding a one-off award to HSC charitable trust funds to be used to provide support to staff across the five main Trusts.
- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding the launch of the consultation on policy proposals for a statutory Duty of Candour and Being Open.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from British Heart Foundation NI requesting to brief the Committee on the soft opt-out organ donation system.
- x. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office providing correspondence it had received from the Welsh Parliament's



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External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee in relation to the Food and Feed Safety and Hygiene Provisional Framework.

- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding Budget 2021-2022 scrutiny by statutory committees.
- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Education providing a response it had received from the Education Authority regarding a social media post by a Member of the Education Authority Board on conversion therapy.
- xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Food Standards Agency providing an update on the Food Compositional Standards and Labelling Common Framework.
- xiv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Justice regarding the Damages (Return on Investment) Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that the Department of Health provide the Committee with a copy of its submission to the Justice Committee on this Bill.

- xv. The Committee noted the Investment Strategy NI March 2021 Investing Activity Report for the Department of Health.
- xvi. The Committee noted the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care Nursing and Midwifery Council Performance Review Report for 2019/20.
- xvii. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from an individual to the Minister of Health regarding recognition for the work of dental care staff during the pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for a response to the issues raised in this correspondence.

- xviii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Attorney General of Northern Ireland regarding the commissioning abortion services.



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- xix. The Committee considered correspondence from a wig specialist company regarding the closure of its business as a result of COVID-19 restrictions and the impact on cancer patients accessing their services.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department for the Economy, Department of Finance, the Executive Office and Land and Property Service for a response to the issues raised.
- xx. The Committee noted the launch of the BMA report, 'Rest, recover, restore: Getting UK health services back on track'.
- xxi. The Committee considered the Department of Health's February monitoring report on the use of the Children's Social Care (Coronavirus) (Temporary Modification of Children's Social Care) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and the Department's consultation on extending the period of time in which the modifications will be allowed to continue.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for an update on the outcome of its consultation and to request that it is provided with an SL1 on the anticipated related statutory rule.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request the views of the Children's Law Centre on the proposed extension.
- xxii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the side effects of COVID-19 vaccinations.
- xxiii. The Committee noted joint correspondence from the Chairpersons of the BMA NI GP Committee and RCGP NI providing information requested by the Committee relating to antidepressant medication prescription levels in areas of socio-economic deprivation.
- xxiv. The Committee considered correspondence from Fairness (IN) Fertility regarding delay in the resumption of fertility services at the Regional Fertility Centre.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to advise Fairness (IN) Fertility that the Committee is awaiting a response from the Department of Health on this matter.

xxv. The Committee considered correspondence from ShieldUs NI regarding issues affecting people who are shielding.

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

xxvi. The Committee noted correspondence from Parkinson's UK regarding events to promote awareness of Parkinson's Disease.

xxvii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the 10-day isolation guidance for those arriving in Northern Ireland from Great Britain.

xxviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Stroke Association and NI Chest, Heart and Stroke requesting to brief the Committee on the impact of COVID-19 on their service users.

xxix. The Committee considered correspondence from the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland requesting to brief the Committee on a UK Government white paper setting out legislative proposals for a Health and Social Care Bill which has implications for the regulation of health care workers in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson would meet informally with representatives of the Pharmaceutical Society.

xxx. The Committee noted a submission from an individual on the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill.

xxxi. The Committee noted a submission from an individual on the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill.



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xxxii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health Ireland regarding the Sever Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill.

xxxiii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health advising that the management of further changes to the COVID-19 restriction regulations will have a reduced role for the Department of Health and an increased role for the Executive Office COVID Strategy Group.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask for further explanation in relation to this matter and to express its ongoing concerns regarding the scrutiny of regulations.

xxxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing information requested in relation to international travel restriction regulations.

The Committee agreed to move to agenda item 14.

13. Any Other Business

A Member raised the matter of the investigations relating to the work of the consultant Dr Michael Watts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek copies of the reports commissioned by the Belfast Trust relating to this matter.

The meeting moved into closed session at 1.32 pm.

14. Forward Work Programme

The Committee discussed its draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule briefing from the Department of Health on health inequalities.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an informal meeting with ShieldUs NI.

15. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Health was scheduled to take place on 22 April 2021 at 9.30 am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.47 pm.

Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Health