



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday, 17 September 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
Mr Alex Easton MLA
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Mr Colin McGrath MLA
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA

In Attendance: Ms Éilis Haughey (Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Lamont (Clerical Supervisor)

**Mr Gildernew (Chairperson) attended the meeting via video-conference.*

The meeting commenced at 10.35 am, in closed session, with the Deputy Chairperson taking the chair.

1. Committee Inquiry: COVID-19 and its impact on Care Homes

The Committee discussed draft terms of reference for its inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on care homes.

The meeting moved into public session at 10.57 am.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the terms of reference for its inquiry and to report to the Assembly its findings and recommendations by 12 November.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its approach to the inquiry and schedule of work.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would seek written evidence from a targeted list of stakeholders to be received by 19 October and would not seek wider public evidence in relation to the inquiry.

2. Apologies

None.

3. Chairperson's Business

- i. The Deputy Chairperson welcomed the Health Minister's recent announcement on additional student places for health care undergraduate courses at Queen's University and Ulster University.
- ii. The Deputy Chairperson referred to the introduction of new localised restriction regulations and advised that this matter would be scheduled for consideration at next week's meeting.
- iii. The Deputy Chairperson advised that it was awareness-raising week for palliative care.
- iv. The Deputy Chairperson advised that the Department of Health's press release regarding the proposed Adult Safeguarding Bill, indicated that the Department has received the first report from the independent review into the failings around Dunmurry Manor Care Home.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department for a copy of the report.

- v. The Deputy Chairperson advised that she and the Chairperson had held an informal meeting with the RCGP and the BMA GP Committee and that Mr Alan Chambers had also attended.
- vi. The Deputy Chairperson advised that the Chairperson had contributed to this week's Assembly plenary debates on mental health crisis support and funding for the Crisis Intervention Centre in Foyle and highlighted the Committee's work in relation to both these matters.

4. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2020.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

The meeting was suspended at 11.02 am and resumed at 11.05 am.

6. Brexit Briefing

The following Department of Health officials joined the meeting at 11.05 am:

Ms Cathy Harrison, Chief Pharmaceutical Officer (attending in person);

Ms Eimear Smyth, Head of Medicines Policy and EU Exit (attending in person);

Ms Patricia Quinn-Duffy, EU Exit Lead on Reciprocal Healthcare and Workforce Issues (via telephone-conference); and

Ms Fiona Taylor, EU Exit Lead on Medicines (via video-conference).

The Chief Pharmaceutical Officer briefed the Committee on health-related Brexit issues.

The Chairperson joined the meeting at 11.15 am.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr McGrath left the meeting at 11.56 am.

Mr Sheehan left the meeting at 12.02 pm.

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

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Mr Chambers left the meeting at 12.12 pm.

7. UK SI The European Qualifications (Health and Social Care Professionals) (EFTA States and Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020

Ms Patricia Quinn-Duffy, EU Exit Lead on Reciprocal Healthcare and Workforce Issues at the Department of Health, remained at the meeting via telephone-conference.

Ms Quinn-Duffy briefed the Committee on Northern Ireland's inclusion in the UK Statutory Instrument, The European Qualifications (Health and Social Care Professionals) (EFTA States and Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Chambers re-joined the meeting at 12.24 pm.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked Ms Quinn-Duffy for her attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the Minister's intention to include Northern Ireland in UK SI The European Qualifications (Health and Social Care Professionals) (EFTA States and Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020, pending receipt of further information on issues raised during the earlier Brexit briefing session.

The meeting was suspended at 12.30 pm and resumed at 12.37 pm.

8. UK SI The Nutrition (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020

The Committee considered a proposal by the UK Department of Health and Social Care, subject to the agreement of the Health Minister, to make a Statutory Instrument extending to Northern Ireland, to amend The Nutrition (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 and to revoke The Nutrition (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the proposal for the UK-wide statutory instrument.

9. SR 2020/193 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 9) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Deputy Chairperson advised Members that officials were not available to attend today's meeting to answer questions on the travel regulations scheduled for consideration and further advised that the requested statistical evidence underpinning the proposed changes had not yet been received from the Department of Health.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of SR 2020/193 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 9) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 until the next meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to express its concern about the availability of officials to assist the Committee in its scrutiny of these and future rules.

10. SR 2020/194 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 10) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of SR 2020/194 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 10) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 until the next meeting.

11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health to concerns highlighted by the Committee regarding the impact of the pandemic on self-employed acupuncture practitioners.
- ii. The Committee welcomed correspondence from the Minister of Health confirming that the terms of reference for the Independent Review of the RQIA Board resignations had been revised in response to the Committee's concerns in relation to this matter.
- iii. The Committee considered the Barnardo's report, 'New Term, New Challenges, New Opportunities: Putting Children's Mental Health at the Heart of Education.'

- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the report pending further scrutiny of mental health issues.
- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the COVID-19 Test, Trace and Protect Strategy.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending a scheduled briefing on the strategy.
- v. The Committee considered correspondence from Mesh Ireland regarding its request to meet the Minister of Health and brief the Committee.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to advise Mesh Ireland of its correspondence with the Department of Health on this issue and to include the wider issues relating to mesh implants and the findings of the report of the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review, to its forward work programme.
- vi. The Committee noted the publication of the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on workforce planning for nurses and midwives.
- vii. The Committee considered a request from the Association for Infant Mental Health NI to brief the Committee.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to add this matter to its forward work programme when considering mental health issues.
- viii. The Committee noted the August 2020 Investing Activity Report for the Department of Health.
- ix. The Committee considered a request from Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment to brief the Committee on future funding for the disability employment services.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it would consider this request at its strategic planning meeting.
- x. The Committee noted SR 2020 No.169 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 (Commencement) Order (Northern Ireland) 2020.
- xi. The Committee considered a request from Transgender NI to brief the Committee on the gender affirming service for transgender and non-binary people in Northern Ireland.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to consider this request as part of its Forward Work Programme.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for an update on the review of gender identity services.

xii. The Committee noted correspondence from Ulster University advising that the consultation on the future location of its School of Health Sciences has reopened.

xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding dental training.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence, pending the planned briefing with the Chief Dental Officer.

xiv. The Committee considered a request from an individual to brief the Committee on the former Mother and Baby Units at the Magdalen Institutions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request written briefing from the individual.

xv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health advising that it will be carrying out a targeted consultation on its COVID-19 Vulnerable Children and Young People's Plan.

xvi. The Committee considered a request from the National Autistic Society to brief the Committee on its report, 'Left Stranded', which outlines the experiences of autistic people, their families and carers during COVID-19.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold an informal virtual meeting with the National Autistic Society on their report.

xvii. The Committee considered correspondence from NI Evangelical Alliance regarding support and services for children with SEN during the pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold an informal virtual meeting with NI Evangelical Alliance on the issues raised.

xviii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding HPV testing in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Department of Health on this matter.

xix. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the neurology recall.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Chair and Co-Chair of the Independent Neurology Inquiry to brief the Committee on its work.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for a date for the release of the cohort 2 report relating to this matter.

- xx. The Committee noted the publication of the Pivotal paper, ‘Priorities for recovery – a briefing paper for the Northern Ireland Executive’s return from recess.’
- xxi. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the impact of positive COVID-19 tests on school attendance.
 - Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department of Health to enquire if the StopCOVID app for children would minimise the number of post primary children being asked to stay home from school.
- xxii. The Committee noted correspondence from a dental practice regarding the General Dental Services Financial Support Scheme.
 - Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending the planned briefing session with the Chief Dental Officer.
- xxiii. The Committee considered a briefing note from the All Party Group on Reducing Harm Related to Gambling.
 - Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the briefing paper, pending further scrutiny of mental health issues.
 - Agreed:* The Committee agreed to ask for an update on the discussion between the Minister for Communities and Minister for Health on a joint approach to addressing gambling-related harm.
- xxiv. The Committee noted information provided by the Committee for Finance, on COVID-19 funding allocations.
- xxv. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules’ Twentieth Report of Session 2019-2020.
- xxvi. The Committee noted an invitation from Cancer Fund for Children to host a committee meeting at its therapeutic centre in Newcastle.
- xxvii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee advising of its intention to hold an inquiry into the NIAO report on Addiction Services.
 - Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request that the Public Accounts Committee provide updates on its progress on this inquiry; and to forward to PAC, the Official Report of the Health Committee’s session with the Northern Ireland Alcohol and Drug Alliance, on 21 May 2020.
- xxviii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health, regarding temporary changes to the Health and Social Care Framework designed to underpin the Minister’s approach to rebuilding services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the launch of the consultation and request a further session with the Minister on rebuilding services.

The Committee noted the following correspondence and actions it had agreed by email following last week's meeting:

xxix. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Public Information Disclosure Statement and HR practices within the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

xxx. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office regarding the Priority Common Frameworks.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending the scheduled departmental briefing session on Brexit.

xxxi. The Committee noted correspondence from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust regarding the number of COVID-19 cases in mental health units.

xxxii. The Committee noted correspondence from Belfast Health and Social Care Trust regarding the resumption of Regional Fertility Centre services.

xxxiii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding a report by the Health Foundation, 'How might COVID-19 affect the number of GPs available to see patients in England?'

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the report to the Department of Health.

xxxiv. The Committee considered a request from the British Psychological Society to brief the Committee on mental health challenges.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this briefing to its forward work programme, when considering mental health issues.

xxxv. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding healthcare law and regulation under COVID-19.

xxxvi. The Committee considered correspondence from Stirling University regarding a proposed COVID-19 research project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to indicate its interest in the proposed research.

xxxvii. The Committee considered a draft agenda for the NICON conference on 8 October 2020 and an invitation for Members to participate in a 'meet the Health Committee' session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to accept the invitation to take part in the conference.

- xxxviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding PPE in Northern Ireland.
- xxxix. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding COVID-19 urgent allocations.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending the planned October Monitoring Round briefing.
- xl. The Committee noted the correspondence from the All Party Group on UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace and Security regarding gender equality in future policy and COVID-19 response.
- xli. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding COVID-19 and dental support.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to refer the individual to the Department of Health.
- xlii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health Ireland regarding Midwife led Units.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to BirthWise, the organisation that had raised this matter with the Committee.
- xliii. The Committee considered correspondence from a care home regarding COVID-19 testing in nursing homes.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending consideration of its inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 in care homes.
- xliv. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding COVID-19 testing for children under five.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health to review the approach used in relation to testing of children.
- xlvi. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding World Duchenne Day.
- xlv. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding RESCAS.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department of Health.
- xlvi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Committee regarding COVID-19 guidance.

- xlvi. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules' nineteenth report of session 2019-2020.
- xlix. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health on the consultation on amendments to Human Medicines Regulations, to facilitate the roll-out of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request an urgent briefing from the Department on this matter.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its Forward Work Programme.

13. Any Other Business

Members discussed the rules on accompanying women during hospital antenatal scans and appointments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek clarity from departmental officials when briefing the Committee on the local restriction regulations.

14. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 24 September 2020 at 10.00 am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The Deputy Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.01 pm.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Date: _____