



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday, 24 September 2020
Room 29, 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 Éilís Haughey (Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Lamont (Clerical Supervisor)

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

The meeting commenced at 10.01 am in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

- i. The Chairperson advised Members that he had taken part in the Sunday Politics programme.
- ii. The Chairperson also advised that he had participated in plenary debates that week on coronavirus-related statutory rules and the Craigavon Area Hospital coronavirus outbreak.

Mr Colin McGrath joined the meeting at 10.03 am.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2020.

4. Matters Arising

- i. The Chairperson advised Members that the safeguarding report of the Independent Review by CPEA into the failings around Dunmurry Manor Care Home had been published on the Department of Health website and that it was no longer necessary to request a copy of the report from the Department.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the publication of the report, pending further consideration of adult safeguarding and care homes.

- ii. The Chairperson confirmed that the draft stakeholder letter inviting views on the care home inquiry had been agreed by the Committee, by email.

5. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health to its correspondence on the Regional Review of Urgent and Emergency Care.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to Mr Chris Hazzard MP, as he had raised a related matter with the Committee.

- ii. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health to information requested by the Committee on the provision of dental services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the Minister's letter pending its scheduled briefing session with the Chief Dental Officer.

- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health and Minister of Justice regarding plans to consult on proposals for a regional care and justice campus for children and young people.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a written summary of the consultation responses.

- iv. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health to its concerns regarding regional disparities in the delivery of maternity services and rules on visiting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further briefing from the Department in relation to this matter and to raise this matter with the Minister at his next briefing session with the Committee.

- v. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health advising of its intention to undertake a consultation on a draft cross-departmental COVID-19 vulnerable children and young people's plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the planned consultation pending its engagement with relevant representative groups.

- vi. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Education to the Public Health Agency regarding COVID-19 testing in schools.
- vii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Education to the Department of Health regarding restart support for vulnerable children.
- viii. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance to its correspondence regarding first year medical student places at Queens University, Belfast following the re-grading of A-level results.
- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health regarding its engagement with the Department of Health on shielding guidance for children and young people.

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

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding mental health crisis support.
- xi. The Committee considered correspondence from Eimear's Wish providing a link to a petition calling for the provision of age appropriate care for teenagers and young adults with life threatening illnesses.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would consider this matter on an individual basis.

- xii. The Committee considered two related items of correspondence from separate individuals regarding the Neurology Recall and Members discussed the difficulties faced by individuals and families affected, in accessing timely information on progress relating to the Neurology Recall.
- xiii. The Committee considered further related correspondence from the Independent Neurology Inquiry providing an update on its current work and seeking to reschedule the postponed briefing with the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to bring forward the planned briefing with representatives of the Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to highlight the communication issue experienced by individuals and their families with the Department of Health.

- xiv. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding communication with the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence about care homes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending further consideration of care homes.

- xv. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the British Association of Social Workers NI to the Minister of Health providing its views on the surge planning strategic framework.
- xvi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee on Procedures inviting views on its review of the temporary provisions within Standing Orders 110 to 116.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to indicate that it did not wish to propose any amendments to the temporary standing orders at present.

- xvii. The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health to the Committee's request for information on his Department's COVID-19 life assurance scheme.
- xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding the provision of extra places for medical students at Queen's University Belfast and welcomed the Minister's approval of up to 80 additional medical undergraduate places.
- xix. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules Twenty-First report of session 2019-2020.

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

Professor Ben Cowling, Head of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Hong Kong University, joined the meeting via video-conference at 10.27 am.

Professor Cowling briefed the Committee on lessons from the management of previous international pandemics.

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

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Professor Cowling for his attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The meeting was suspended at 11.28 am and resumed at 11.39 am

The Committee agreed to move to agenda items 8-10.

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

Department of Health officials, Ms Elaine Colgan, Chief of Staff to the Chief Medical Officer, and Professor Ian Young, Chief Scientific Advisor, joined the meeting via video-conference at 11.39 am.

Ms Colgan briefed the Committee on three statutory rules relating to international travel measures that have been introduced as a result of the coronavirus pandemic (agenda items 9 to 11) and in particular provided detail on risk stratification, trigger points and thresholds in respect of countries added to, or removed from the relevant lists.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee agreed that the meeting move into closed session at 12.12 pm.

The question and answer session with officials continued.

The meeting moved to public session at 12.29 pm.

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

The Chairperson thanked Ms Colgan and Professor Young for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

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.

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

Agreed: The 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.

9. SR 2020/200 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 11) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of SR 2020/200 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 11) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 until the next meeting.

The meeting was suspended at 12.31 pm and resumed at 12.40 pm.

10. UK SI The Human Medicines Regulations 2012 Consultation

The following departmental officials joined the meeting via video conference at 12.40 pm:

Mr Canice Ward, Head of Medicines Regulatory Group, Department of Health
Mr Gerard Collins, Head of Health Protection Policy, Department of Health
Mr Martin Coleman, Head of COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, Department of Health.

Mr Ward briefed the Committee on the proposed amendments to UK Human Medicines Regulation 2012, to support the rapid rollout of a COVID-19 vaccine and influenza vaccine in the UK.

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 during the question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reconsider this matter when it had received further information from officials.

11. SR 2020/195 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Mr Nigel McMahon, Chief Environmental Health Officer joined the meeting via video-conference at 1.16 pm.

Mr McMahon briefed the Committee on two statutory rules relating to coronavirus restrictions (agenda items 11 and 12).

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr McMahon agreed to provide the Committee with further information on a number of issues raised during the question and answer session and to consider communication of Directions made under the SR, directly to the Committee.

The Chairperson thanked Mr McMahon for his attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Ms Paula Bradshaw left the meeting at 1.36 pm.

The Committee considered SR 2020/195 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which removes soft play areas from businesses, services providers and premises subject to closure.

Agreed: The Committee had considered SR 2020/195 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and recommended that it be confirmed by the Assembly.

12. SR 2020/198 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of SR 2020/198 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 until the next meeting.

13. UK SI The Food and Feed Safety and Hygiene (Miscellaneous Amendments) (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 bring forward the UK-wide statutory instrument The Food and Feed Safety and Hygiene (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 through Westminster, under powers contained in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the proposal for the UK-wide statutory instrument, The Food and Feed Safety and Hygiene (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020.

14. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted that its Forward Work Programme would be updated to reflect the inclusion of a briefing session with the Minister of Health on 1 October and rescheduling of its consideration of UK SI Proposed Human Medicines (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek additional international academic briefing to assist with its inquiry on the impact of COVID-19 on care homes.

The Chairperson reminded Members that there would be a further opportunity to discuss its forward work programme and the scheduling of other requests to brief the Committee, at the following week's strategic planning meeting.

15. Any Other Business

- i. A Member requested that correspondence issued on behalf of the Committee to the Commissioner for Standards be circulated to Members for information.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the correspondence be circulated.

- ii. Members discussed an individual case relating to funding and access to cannabis-based medical products and the Chairperson reminded Members of the Committee's previous agreement and action in relation to this matter and of the opportunity to raise issues with the Minister at the next week's meeting.

16. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 1 October 2020 at 9.30 am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 1.47 pm.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Date: _____