



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Thursday, 3 December 2020  
Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings**

**Present:** Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson)  
Ms Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA  
Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA  
Mr Gerry Carroll MLA  
Mr Alan Chambers 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 8.46 am in public session.*

**1. Apologies**

None.

*The Committee agreed to move to agenda item 5.*

**2. COVID-19 Disease Response - Ministerial update**

The Minister of Health, Mr Robin Swann MLA, and the following Department of Health officials joined the meeting via video-conference at 8.46 am:

Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer; and

Ms Patricia Donnelly, Head of COVID-19 Vaccination Programme.

The Minister provided an update on the Department of Health's response and planning in relation to COVID-19 and Ms Donnelly provided an update on the vaccination programme.

*Mr Pat Sheehan joined the meeting at 8.58 am.*

*Mr Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 9.07 am.*

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health, providing a copy of a presentation on the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme provided to the Executive at its meeting on Thursday, 26 November.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health, providing information requested by the Committee relating to the establishment of the Whiteabbey Nightingale Facility.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that Members should advise the Clerk of any questions they did not have the opportunity to ask the Minister at the briefing session due to time constraints, and that these would be forwarded to the Minister for a written response.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request a further briefing session with the Minister of Health before Christmas recess.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request a further briefing with the Head of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme before Christmas recess.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request a briefing from the Royal College of Nursing to discuss the issues affecting ICU nurses.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to explore the option of moving the Committee's weekly meeting from its regular Thursday morning slot, to take place on a Wednesday.

*The meeting was suspended at 10.20 and resumed at 10.32 am.*

### **3. COVID-19 Disease Response - Briefing from international academics**

The following experts in the field of epidemiology and global public health joined the meeting via video-conference at 10.33 am:

Ralf Reintjes, Professor for Epidemiology and Public Health Surveillance, Hamburg University of Applied Science;

Azeem Majeed, Professor of Primary Care and Public Health, Imperial College London; and

Devi Sridhar, Professor of Global Public Health, University of Edinburgh.

The panel members briefed the Committee on international COVID-19 response measures including examples of best practice.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the panel members for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

*The meeting was suspended at 11.49 and resumed at 12.00 pm.*

*The Committee returned to agenda item 2.*

#### **4. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson referred to letters that the Níamh Louise Foundation had forwarded to the Committee from children and young people describing their experience of lock-down.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to thank the young people and the Níamh Louise Foundation for assisting the Committee in its understanding of the difficulties young people have faced this year, and to advise, that the Committee intends to look at mental health issues, including young people's mental health, in the new year.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that Members would respond individually to the invitation from the Níamh Louise Foundation to attend a virtual meeting to discuss ways to assist families bereaved by suicide and in the prevention of suicide.

#### **5. Draft Minutes**

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2020.

#### **6. Matters Arising**

The Committee noted speaking notes and a briefing paper, relating to the briefing session at the meeting on 26 November with the Independent Chair of the Inter-departmental Working Group on Mother and Baby Homes, Magdalene Laundries and Historical Clerical Child Abuse.

*The Committee agreed to move to agenda item 11.*

## 7. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding the regulations that will give effect to the two-week ‘circuit-breaker’ decision made by the Executive.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request briefing on the regulations from the Department of Health.

- ii. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the Minister of Health to the Committee for Finance, responding to a request for a summary of his Department’s COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 bids submitted during the pandemic to date.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the correspondence, pending future engagement with the Department of Health on budget matters.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from Carers NI regarding its latest briefing, ‘Unseen and Undervalued: The value of unpaid care provided to date during the COVID-19 pandemic,’ which had been launched for Carers’ Rights Day.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the College of Podiatry drawing to the attention of the Committee the correct professional terms to be used when referring to podiatry services and those who work as podiatrists.

- v. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules’ Thirty-first, Thirty-second and Thirty-third Reports of session 2019-2020.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Food Standards Agency, providing information the Committee had requested on the Nutrition Labelling, Composition and Standards Common Framework.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the correspondence, pending further engagement on Brexit issues.

- vii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the closure of golf courses as part of the COVID-19 response measures.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to advise the individual that the information requested, relating to COVID-19 response measures, may be available from the Department of Health.

- viii. The Committee considered correspondence from a GP regarding waiting list times.

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

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to advise the GP that the Committee shared her concerns regarding waiting list times, and had

scheduled a briefing with the Department of Health on this matter in the new year.

- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure, regarding the benefits the Department of Health receives from the services provided by the Community Transport Association, and asking the Committee whether pressure can be added in respect of assistance from the Community Transport Sector.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the Committee for Infrastructure's correspondence pending a response from the Department of Health.

- x. The Committee noted a statement from the Nursing and Midwifery Council and Chief Nursing Officers, on principles for nursing and midwifery students during the next phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- xi. The Committee considered an invitation from the School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences, Queen's University Belfast, for Members to attend a question and answer session with undergraduate students.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that Members would respond to the invitation directly.

- xii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Society of St Vincent de Paul regarding an increase in the number of referrals requesting the Society's assistance.

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

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to request an update on the Executive's Anti-Poverty Strategy.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to advise St Vincent de Paul that this is an area of concern for the Committee, and that the Committee planned to consider the issue of health inequalities in the new year.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to invite the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health to brief the Committee on issues relating to poverty and health inequalities.

- xiii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Department of Health, regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the local charity sector and requesting information on HSC contracts with third sector organisations for health-related service provision.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the correspondence, pending a response from the Department of Health.

- xiv. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, to the Minister of Health regarding the provision of abortion services.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to advise the College of the Committee's previous correspondence with the Department of Health in relation to this matter and of its intention to return to the subject.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to Department of Health and the Executive Office for urgent consideration.

- xv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Justice's Gillen Review Implementation Team, regarding the Gillen Review recommendations relating to education and awareness.

- xvi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice seeking views on any aspects of the Criminal Justice (Committal Reform) Bill relevant to the Health Committee's remit and responsibilities.

- xvii. The Committee considered a proposed joint letter from the Chairs of the Committees for the Economy, Communities, the Executive Office and Health, to the First and deputy First Ministers, in relation to the mental health and welfare of students in higher education.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the letter, and for it to be signed by the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee.

*The Committee agreed to move to agenda item 13 and 14.*

## **8. Any Other Business**

- i. A Member raised the subject of the Oireachtas, Dying with Dignity Bill.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health what, if any, engagement the Department has had, or is planning to have, on the Bill, given that Clause 7 of the Bill as drafted, seeks to extend provision to residents on the 'island of Ireland'.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to explore what options the Health Committee and Assembly Members have in relation to engagement on this Bill.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Justice to make them aware of this matter.

- ii. A Member raised the subject of the prioritisation of population groups to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to ask the Minister of Health to include carers and care partners to the priority list of those who should receive the vaccine.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to ask for further information on engagement with the the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, in respect of the prioritisation of population groups.

## **9. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to seek written briefing from the Department of Health on January monitoring, instead of the planned oral briefing session, in order to facilitate the requested briefing with the Health and Social Care Trust Chief Executives on 17 December.

*The Committee returned to agenda item 7.*

## **10. SR 2020/254 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 21) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The following Department of Health officials joined the meeting at 12.28 pm via video-conference:

Ms Elaine Colgan, Chief of Staff to the Chief Medical Officer; and  
Mr Bryan Dooley, Health Improvement Policy Branch.

Mr Dooley briefed the Committee on four Statutory Rules relating to Coronavirus travel restrictions.

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.

Members discussed concerns regarding information sharing and engagement between officials in the Department of Health and their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland in relation to COVID-19 response measures.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to make further enquiries regarding its request for a joint briefing session from the Chief Medical Officers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to explore opportunities to meet with the Oireachtas Health Committee to consider issues of co-operation and mutual interest regarding the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Committee considered SR 2020/254 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 21) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which adds Bahrain, Cambodia, Chile, Iceland, Laos, Qatar, Turks and Caicos Islands and the United Arab Emirates to the list of countries and territories exempt from the requirement to self-isolate for 14 days after arrival in NI. The Rule also removes Greece, except for the islands of Corfu, Cos, Crete, Rhodes and Zakynthos, and the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia in the Island of Cyprus from the list.

*Agreed:* The Committee had considered SR 2020/254 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 21) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and had no objection to the Rule.

#### **11. SR 2020/275 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 22) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/275 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 22) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which adds Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, Israel, Jerusalem, Namibia, the Northern Mariana Islands, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Uruguay and the US Virgin Islands to the list of countries and territories exempt from the 14-day self-isolation requirements. The Rule also amends the list of specified competitions relevant to the exemption from the requirement to self-isolate for elite sportspersons.

*Agreed:* The Committee had considered SR 2020/275 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 22) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and had no objection to the Rule.

#### **12. SR 2020/278 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 23) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/278 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 23) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which amends the list of specified persons who are exempt from the requirement to self-isolate, to include those conducting essential state business.



*Agreed:* The Committee had considered SR 2020/275 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 22) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and had no objection to the Rule.

**13. SR 2020/261 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Travel from Denmark) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/261 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Travel from Denmark) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which sets the maximum fine on summary conviction at £10,000, for breaches of regulations which prohibit the arrival in Northern Ireland of vessels and aircraft travelling directly from Denmark.

*Agreed:* The Committee had considered The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Travel from Denmark) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and had no objection to the Rule.

*The Committee considered an additional agenda item.*

**14. SR 2020/274 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 16) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/274 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 16) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which limits the number of persons at a table in unlicensed premises selling food and drink, to six people from no more than two households.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that a question previously raised with the Department, in respect of contact tracing information to be collected by the hospitality sector, would be reflected in the Chairperson's contribution in the plenary debate on this Rule.

*Agreed:* The Committee had considered The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 16) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

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

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 10 December 2020, at 9.30 am, in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

*Mr Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 1.16 pm.*

*Mr Colin McGrath left the meeting at 1.16 pm.*

*The meeting moved into closed session at 1.16 pm.*

**16. Committee Inquiry: Impact of COVID-19 on Care Homes: consideration of draft report**

The Committee considered sections of its draft report on its Inquiry on the impact of COVID-19 on care homes.

*The meeting was adjourned at 1.28 pm.*

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

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