



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Thursday, 21 January 2021  
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\*  
Ms Cara Hunter MLA\*  
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA\*

**In Attendance:** Ms Éilis Haughey (Clerk)  
Mr Keith McBride (Clerk)  
Mr Brendan Miskelly (Clerical Officer)

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

*The meeting commenced at 9.35 am in public session.*

**1. Apologies**

None.

**2. Chairperson's Business**

- i. The Chairperson reflected on the ongoing situation regarding COVID-19 and the very serious pressures on the Health and Social Care system at this time.
- ii. The Chairperson advised Members that there would be a change of clerk for the Committee and welcomed Mr Keith McBride, in attendance at the meeting, who would assume the role in February. The Chairperson also thanked the outgoing Clerk, Ms Éilis Haughey, for her significant contribution to the work of the Committee and for the support that she had shown to him and all the Members of the Committee and wished Ms Haughey well in her new role.
- iii. The Chairperson advised Members that it was now possible to hold fully virtual meetings.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to hold its next meeting as a fully virtual meeting.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2020.

### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **5. COVID-19 Disease Response - Update from the Health and Social Care Trusts**

The following Health and Social Care Trust Chief Executives joined the meeting by video-conference at 9.38 am:

Mr Shane Devlin, Chief Executive, Southern Health and Social Care Trust;

Dr Cathy Jack, Chief Executive, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust; and

Ms Jennifer Welsh, Chief Executive, Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

The Chief Executives briefed the Committee on the impact of COVID-19 on the work of the Health and Social Care Trusts.

*The meeting was suspended at 9.45 am and resumed at 9.49 am.*

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson requested that the Trusts provide the Committee with a copy of the forecasting model information they are using for planning purposes.

The Chairperson thanked the Chief Executives for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

*The meeting was suspended at 11.06 am and resumed at 11.15 am.*

### **6. COVID-19 Disease Response - Update on the COVID-19 vaccination programme**

Ms Patricia Donnelly, Head of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, Department of Health, joined the meeting by video-conference at 11.15 am.

Ms Donnelly briefed the Committee on the vaccination programme.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Donnelly for her attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request that the Department of Health provide the Committee with the daily summary of vaccination programme data.

The Committee noted correspondence from the British Association for Private Dentists regarding COVID-19 vaccinations for dental teams.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Education regarding prioritisation of staff in schools and special schools for COVID-19 vaccination.

*Mr Alan Chambers left the meeting at 12.15 pm*

**7. SR 2020/325 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Advice for Persons Travelling to Northern Ireland) (No.2) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/325 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Advice for Persons Travelling to Northern Ireland) (No.2) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which amends the information to be provided by operators to passengers to advise that the self-isolation period is reduced from 14 to 10 days. The Rule also adds a reasonable defence clause for operators relating to any amended information to be provided to passengers if it was not reasonably practicable to do so.

The Committee noted a British Medical Journal article, ‘Incubation period of COVID-19: a rapid systemic review and meta-analysis of observational research’ forwarded by the Department of Health.

*Agreed:* The Committee had considered SR 2020/325 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Advice for Persons Travelling to Northern Ireland) (No.2) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and had no objection to the Rule.

**8. SR 2020/326 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 25) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/326 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 25) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which amends the self-isolation period from 14 days to 10 days, adds additional exemptions for certain workers and elite sportspersons; gives effect to the enforcement of fixed penalty notices; adds Botswana and Saudi Arabia to the list of countries and territories in respect of which travellers are exempt from the requirement to self-isolate for 10 days after arrival in Northern Ireland; and removes the Canary Islands from that list.

*Agreed:* The Committee had considered SR 2020/326 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 25) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and had no objection to the Rule.

*Mr Alan Chambers re-joined the meeting at 12.19 pm.*

**9. SR 2020/310 The Addition of Vitamins, Minerals and Other Substances (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/310 The Addition of Vitamins, Minerals and Other Substances (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which allows for the enforcement in Northern Ireland of Article 8 and Annex III of Regulation (EC) No. 1925/2006, relating to substances whose use in foods is prohibited, restricted or under Community scrutiny and specifies conditions to ensure dietary intakes of trans fatty acids are as low as possible.

The Chairperson advised Members that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has since laid a Statutory Rule to revoke this Rule due to drafting errors and that a replacement Rule would be laid by the FSA for the Committee's consideration shortly.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note SR 2020/310 The Addition of Vitamins, Minerals and Other Substances (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

**10. SR 2020/341 The Addition of Vitamins, Minerals & Other Substances (Amendment) (Revocation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/341 The Addition of Vitamins, Minerals & Other Substances (Amendment) (Revocation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which revokes the Addition of Vitamins, Minerals and Other Substances (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee had considered SR 2020/341 The Addition of Vitamins, Minerals & Other Substances (Amendment) (Revocation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and had no objection to the Rule.

**11. SR 2020/356 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 24) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The following officials from the Department of Health joined the meeting by video-conference at 12.22 pm:

Ms Liz Redmond, Director of Population Health; and

Ms Marian McKeever, Health Protection Branch.

Ms Redmond briefed the Committee on two Coronavirus restriction regulations (agenda items 11 and 12).

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.

The Committee considered SR 2020/356 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 24) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which requires businesses selling food, drink and intoxicating liquor for consumption on the premises to cease to do business except for sale of food for consumption off the premises; requires non-essential retail businesses to close; places a limit on gatherings and sporting events; requires close contact services to close, with some exceptions; and put a curfew in place between the hours of 8.00 pm and 6.00 am from 26 December 2020 to 2 January 2021.

*Agreed:* The Committee had considered SR 2020/356 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 24) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly

## **12. SR 2020/358 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 25) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/358 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 25) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which permits taxi businesses to operate after 8.00 pm in the period up to 2 January 2021; limits the operating hours of businesses selling food and drink; provides that the power to require people to return home operates only up to 2 January 2021; and corrects errors in previous regulations.

*Agreed:* The Committee had considered SR 2020/358 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 25) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

*The Committee moved into closed session at 12.40 pm.*

## **13. Committee Inquiry on the Impact of COVID-19 in Care Homes - Consideration of Draft Report**

The Committee considered the final draft report on its Inquiry on the Impact of COVID-19 in Care Homes.

### **Title Page, Committee Membership and Powers, Table of Contents and List of Abbreviations**

The Committee considered the Title page, Committee Membership and Powers, Table of Contents and List of Abbreviations as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Title page, Committee Membership and Powers, Table of Contents and List of Abbreviations.

## **Introduction**

The Committee considered the Introduction of the report (paragraphs 64-77) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Introduction of the Report.

## **Context for the Inquiry**

The Committee considered the Context for the Inquiry section of the report (paragraphs 78-88) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Context for the Inquiry section of the report.

## **Consideration of Evidence**

The Committee considered the Consideration of Evidence section of the report (paragraphs 89-401) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Consideration of Evidence section of the Report.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

The Committee considered the Findings and Recommendations section of the report (paragraphs 402-451), including Recommendations 1 to 54, as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Findings and Recommendations section of the report, including Recommendations 1 to 54.

## **Executive Summary**

The Committee considered the Executive Summary of the report (paragraphs 1 to 63) as drafted.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content with the Executive Summary.

## **Appendices**

The Committee considered the Report Appendices.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content that the Appendices be included in the Report.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that the Report be the Third Report of the Committee for Health to the Assembly.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content for the Chairperson to approve an extract of the Minutes of Proceedings from the meeting, covering the consideration and approval of the Committee report.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that it was content for the Report on its Inquiry on the Impact of COVID-19 in Care Homes, to be published on the Committee webpage.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the report to the Department of Health and request its response to the recommendations.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the following motion for the plenary debate on the report:

*“That this Assembly approves the Report of the Committee for Health on its Inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 in care homes; and calls on the Minister of Health to implement the recommendations contained in the Report as part of the ongoing response to protect care home residents during future surges of the pandemic.”*

*The Committee moved into public session at 12.49 pm.*

#### **14. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health responding to the Committee’s request for information relating to the O’Hara Report.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to seek clarity in relation to recent media reports relating to this matter.

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health relating to the October Monitoring Round.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending the next briefing session on the budget in February.

- iii. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP to the Committee for the Executive Office regarding governance of the Withdrawal Agreement.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending further Brexit and Common Frameworks scrutiny.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office regarding scrutiny of Common Frameworks.

- v. The Committee noted the Investing Strategy December 2020 Activity Report for the Department of Health.

- vi. The Committee noted the PIVOTAL report ‘New Decade, New Approach – one year on.’

- vii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from an individual to the Executive regarding COVID-19 lockdown and vaccination concerns.

- viii. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from an individual to Mr Jeffrey Donaldson MP, in relation to Mesh and the Cumberlege report and a

separate item of correspondence from another individual regarding Sodium Valporate and the Cumberlege report.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to meet informally with representatives of the affected groups.

- ix. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules' Eighteenth and Nineteenth Reports of Session 2020-2021.
- x. The Committee considered a request from Alliance for Choice to brief the Committee.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to consider this request as part of its forward work programme planning.

- xi. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding post COVID-19 support.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to advise the individual about the Committee's correspondence to the Minister of Health in relation to this matter.

- xii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding COVID-19 and various other issues.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to advise the individual regarding resources of COVID-19 related information.

- xiii. The Committee considered correspondence regarding the closure of Valley Nursing Home in Clogher.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed it was content that individual MLAs would continue to work with the families affected by this issue.

## **15. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee noted its forward work programme and that the Minister of Health's next briefing session with the Committee has been scheduled for 11 February.

## **16. Any Other Business**

Members discussed a Unison social media post in relation to the use of medically-trained military personnel to assist medical staff as part of the COVID-19 response measures.

The question was put, That the Committee would write to Unison to seek clarification on their position and confirmation regarding the sanctioning of the social media post.

The Committee divided: Ayes 5; Noes; 4; Abstain 0.

**AYES**

Ms Pam Cameron  
Ms Paula Bradshaw  
Mr Jonathan Buckley  
Mr Alan Chambers  
Ms Cara Hunter

**NOES**

Mr Colm Gildernew  
Mr Gerry Carroll  
Ms Órlaithí Flynn  
Mr Pat Sheehan

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to Unison to seek clarification on their position and confirmation regarding the sanctioning of the social media post.

*Agreed:* The Committee further agreed to write to trade unions to request an update on the workforce pressures faced by their members working in the health and social care system.

*Agreed:* The Committee further agreed to request briefing from the Chief Nursing Officer on workforce pressures at present.

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

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 28 January 2021, at 9.30 am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.26 pm.

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

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