



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday, 28 January 2021
Meeting held via video conference***

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)
Ms Jean Barkley (Assistant Clerk)
Ms Roisin Donnelly (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Deirdre Farry (Assistant Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Lamont (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Brendan Miskelly (Clerical Officer)

**Committee Members, Committee staff and witnesses attended the meeting by video-conference. Live coverage of the meeting was available through the Assembly website.*

The meeting commenced at 9.44 am in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Chairperson's Business

- i. The Chairperson provided the Committee with an update on an informal meeting that he had held with representatives of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.
- ii. The Chairperson referred to the publication of the research report on historical Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries between 1922 and 1990. The Chairperson reminded Members that a briefing on the report has been

requested and that an informal meeting with the Inter-Departmental Working Group's Reference Group was being arranged.

- iii. The Chairperson welcomed the accelerated roll-out of the vaccine programme and the announcement of the special recognition payment to be made to health care workers and qualifying health care students.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2021.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Departmental briefing – Looked After Children Strategy

The following officials joined the meeting by video-conference at 9.48 am:

Ms Eilís McDaniel, Director of Childcare & Family Policy, Department of Health;

Ms Elaine Lawson, Head of Looked After Children & Adoption Policy, Department of Health;

Mr Ricky Irwin, Director, Inclusion and Wellbeing, Department of Education; and

Mr Colin Reid, Head of Safeguarding, Welfare and Inclusion, Education Authority.

Ms McDaniel briefed the Committee on the new strategy for looked after children and care-experienced children and young people.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson declared an interest as formerly being employed as a social worker and having worked with looked after children and young people.

Mr Jonathan Buckley joined the meeting at 10.30 am.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The meeting was suspended at 11.07 am and resumed at 11.21 am.

6. SR 2021/8 The Mental Health (1986 Order) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2021

Mr Tomas Adell, Head of Mental Health and Capacity Unit, Department of Health joined the meeting by video-conference at 11.22 am.

Mr Adell briefed the Committee on temporary amendments to Mental Health legislation and guidance in response to COVID-19 pressures, including SR 2021/8 The Mental Health (1986 Order) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2021, which varies the period of time which must elapse for a second opinion to be required for the continued administration of medicine to detained patients from three months to six months.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

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

Mr Adell also agreed that the Department would give further consideration to the inclusion of a sunset clause within the Rule.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Adell for his attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of SR 2021/8 The Mental Health (1986 Order) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2021.

The Committee discussed a social media post shared by a Member of the Board of the Education Authority.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Committee for Education what engagement it has undertaken with the Department of Education in relation to its 2017 Report which identified the issues that affect young LGBT people in post-primary education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to record its support for the LGBT community.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to its consideration of the social media post at its next meeting.

7. SR 2021/3 The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The following Department of Health officials joined the meeting by video-conference at 12.11 pm:

Ms Liz Redmond, Director of Population Health; and

Mr Richard Duffin, Health Protection Branch.

Ms Redmond briefed the Committee on the provisions of SR 2021/3 The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, which makes adjustments to current restrictions.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Redmond for her attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee had considered SR 2021/3 The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

8. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health to the Committee's request for further information on the enforcement of coronavirus restrictions.
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing an update on the 24-hour community pharmacy prescribing model pilot scheme.
- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health on concerns raised by a GP in relation to the impact of COVID-19 on waiting times.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the Minister's correspondence pending departmental briefing on waiting times.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing an update on concerns raised by the British Association of Private Dentists.
- v. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health responding to the Committee's request for further information on the consultation undertaken to inform the interim Autism Strategy 2021-2028.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending departmental briefing on the interim strategy.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the publication of the Mental Health Strategy Equality Impact Assessment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending scrutiny of the Mental Health Strategy.

- vii. The Committee noted the Department of Health’s December Monitoring Report on the application and usage of the Children’s Social Care (Coronavirus) (Temporary Modification of Children’s Social Care) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.
- viii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Finance to the Minister of Infrastructure regarding committee scrutiny of January Monitoring.
- ix. The Committee considered an invitation from Addiction NI to attend a presentation on the evaluation and key findings of its ‘Drink Wise Age Well’ programme to take place on 11 February 2021.

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

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry requesting to brief the Committee on matters relating to the UK Rare Diseases Framework published by the Department of Health and Social Care.
- xi. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure to the Department of Health requesting information on COVID-19 testing arrangements for haulage drivers.
- xii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from an individual to the Minister of Health and Chief Medical Officer regarding the vaccination programme.
- xiii. The Committee noted the Men’s Health Forum in Ireland report, Men’s Health in Numbers; Trends on the Island of Ireland.
- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Association of Infant Mental Health in NI regarding the Working for Babies: Lockdown lessons from local systems report, published by First 1001 Days Movement and Parent Infant Foundation.
- xv. The Committee considered correspondence from Amnesty International regarding the Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further detail from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the independent investigation into mother and baby homes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to advise Amnesty International that an informal meeting is being arranged with the Inter-Departmental Working Group’s Reference Group, and that an oral briefing on the research has been requested.

- xvi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance to all Committees regarding the impact of the draft Budget 2021-22 on their respective Departments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending scheduled budget scrutiny at the meeting on 11 February.

- xvii. The Committee considered a request from TransgenderNI to brief the Committee on issues relating to the provision of trans healthcare.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this request as part of its Strategic Planning session.

- xviii. The Committee considered a request from the College of Paramedics to brief the Committee on how the paramedic profession can impact on the reform of the health service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this request as part of its Strategic Planning session.

- xix. The Committee considered the Department of Finance's Draft Budget 2021 – 2022.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending scheduled budget scrutiny at the meeting on 11 February.

- xx. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding COVID-19 self-isolation support grants.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health whether any assessment of the impact of financial hardship on compliance with self-isolation and the adequacy of financial support available has been undertaken.

- xxi. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual providing further information on the closure of Valley Nursing Home.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to provide the individual with clarification on the role of the Committee in relation to this matter and provide information on options for progressing the concerns raised.

- xxii. The Committee considered an invitation from the British Heart Foundation to a virtual discussion on the soft opt-out system for organ donation to take place on 28 January.

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

The meeting was suspended at 12.48 pm and resumed at 12.58 pm.

- xxiii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the Minister of Health's reply to an Assembly question on mesothelioma.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation and the NI Assembly All Party Group on Cancer to seek their views on this issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to request information on levels and incidence of mesothelioma in Northern Ireland.

xxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists further to its informal meeting with the Chairperson.

xxv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health on the priority list for vaccination.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the scheduling of further briefings on the COVID-19 vaccine programme as part of its strategic planning.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information from the Department of Health on the introduction of weekly COVID-19 testing of pupils and staff in special schools.

xxvi. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules' Twenty-first Report of Session 2020-2021.

9. SR 2020/355 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 27) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Mr Brian Dooley, Head of Health Improvement Policy Branch, Department of Health, joined the meeting by video-conference at 1.10 pm.

Mr Dooley briefed the Committee on the provisions of SR 2020/355 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 27) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which removes exemptions from the requirement to self-isolate for those travelling from South Africa.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

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

The Chairperson thanked Mr Dooley for his attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee had considered SR 2020/355 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 27) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and had no objection to the Rule.

10. Any Other Business

- i. Members discussed a number of Department of Health budgetary matters.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek clarity from the Department of Health on the eligibility and criteria to be used in relation to the special recognition payment to be made to health care workers and qualifying health care students.

- ii. The Chairperson thanked Mr Pat Sheehan on his contribution to the work of the Health Committee and wished him well in his move to the Education Committee.

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 4 February 2021, at 9.30 am.

The meeting moved into closed session at 1.29 pm.

Mr Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 1.29 pm.

Ms Paula Bradshaw left the meeting at 1.29 pm.

12. Strategic Planning

The Committee discussed its forward work programme and strategic priorities for the forthcoming 12-week period.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme for the forthcoming 12 week period.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hold a number of informal stakeholder discussion sessions. The Clerk is to come back to the Committee with proposed dates.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.57 pm.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Date: _____

