



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Health

## Minutes of Proceedings

**29 May 2025**

**Meeting Location:** Room 29, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

- Philip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)
- Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Alan Chambers MLA
- Linda Dillon MLA
- Diane Dodds MLA
- Órlaithí Flynn MLA
- Nuala McAllister MLA
- Alan Robinson MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Colin McGrath MLA

**Apologies:** None

**In Attendance:** Keith McBride, Clerk  
Angela McParland, Assistant Clerk  
Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm in public session.

## **1. Apologies**

None.

## **2. Ministerial Oral Briefing – June Monitoring, Budget Priorities, Legislation Programme**

The Minister of Health, Mike Nesbitt MLA, and the following officials from the Department of Health (DoH) joined the meeting at 2.00pm:

- Mike Farrar, Interim Permanent Secretary, DoH; and
- David Keenan, Acting Finance Director, DoH.

The Minister of Health briefed the Committee on June Monitoring, Budget Priorities and Legislation Programme.

*Alan Robinson joined the meeting at 2.04pm*

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and the officials.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an urgent briefing by the Chair of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) on a recent inspection report on a Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) cardiac unit.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive as a matter of urgency:

- I. A copy of the report. If unable to do so due to legal advice, arrange for Members to view the report in a confidential setting;
- II. The date the Minister first learned of the issues with the cardiac unit;
- III. A written debrief by the Minister following his urgent meeting with the BHSCT Chair. To include information on action taken by the Board to safeguard the working conditions of staff from when concerns were raised and whilst the Board awaited completion of the report, and candour from the Chair on whether there would have been a review had staff not refused to work with an individual;
- IV. Confirmation of an earlier report on management in the Belfast Trust, a copy of the report and the date presented to the Trust. If unable to do so due to legal advice, arrange for Members to view the report in a confidential setting; and
- V. A copy of DoH governance structure for accountability mechanisms that shows the five structure levels.

The Committee agreed to also receive an update from the Minister, when available, on his commitment to the Committee to gain an understanding of surgical management culture across the Health and Social Care (HSC) system, by taking a proactive approach and engaging with staff and Unions on the matter.

**Agreed:** The Committee expressed concern that a decision to progress completion on the Maternity Hospital new build is now overdue. The Committee agreed to follow up on confirmation of the decision and receive information of the current cost projection and timeline for completion of the Hospital.

The Committee considered that the written briefing stated £17m is returned under flagship projects of the Maternity and Children's Hospitals. The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive confirmation on who is to pay for the work at the Maternity Hospital.

The Committee considered expenditure on domiciliary and social care and agreed to write to the Department to receive an update on the Financial Management Board's agreed plans for expenditure on domiciliary and social care, to include: detail of 13 workstreams, breakdown of actions, outcomes aimed for, estimated timelines; and plans to engage with GPs, Community Pharmacy, and the voluntary and community sector.

The Committee considered that the written briefing stated £1.6bn in backlog of maintenance projects and agreed to write to the Department to receive a breakdown of the work needing to be carried out.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive detail of respite beds across all Trusts and detail of the number of additional beds made available directly as a result of the recent funding allocation for respite beds.

**Agreed:** The Minister agreed to provide confirmation of his decision on the future of the Causeway Hospital without delay, whether in correspondence to the Committee or in a Written Ministerial Statement.

### **3. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson thanked the Pharmaceutical Society for attending an informal meeting with the Committee on Tuesday 27 May 2025. Members had the opportunity to meet with the Society's Chair and the new CEO and received an update on the proposed rise in annual retention fees. A statutory rule will be considered by the Committee in the coming weeks.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee will hear oral evidence on Thursday 12 June 2025 from those with lived experience for the Committee's Inquiry on Access to Palliative Care Services. The Clerk is working with Voices4Care and the Macmillan Cancer Experience Panel on arrangements for the forum in the Long Gallery in the morning and two witnesses who are in active cancer treatment and have palliative care teams to attend the Committee meeting in the afternoon.

#### **4. Draft Minutes**

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2025.

#### **5. Matters Arising**

None.

#### **6. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services – Oral Briefing by Research and Information Services (RalSe)**

The Committee considered two RalSe papers:

- The Economics of Palliative and End of Life Care; and
- Future Needs and Emerging Trends in Palliative and End of Life Care

The Committee will be briefed by RalSe on the papers in the coming weeks.

#### **7. SR 2025/83 The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) (Independent Guardian) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025**

The Committee considered SR 2025/83 the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) (Independent Guardian) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025.

The Statutory Rule will remove requirement for five years' post qualifying social work experience in order for a person to be eligible for appointment as an Independent Guardian and introduce a new eligibility requirement that the person must have completed their post-qualification period of assessed employment, which is one year.

The Examiner of Statutory Rules had no issues to report.

**Agreed:** The Committee has considered SR 2025/83 the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) (Independent Guardian) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 and has no objection to the Rule.

## **8. Department of Health Written Briefing the Substance Use Strategy 'Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery' 2024-2028**

The Committee noted the written briefing which provided an update on the Substance Use Strategy 'Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery' 2024-2028.

## **9. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted the correspondence from DoH regarding the draft Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework consultation launch.
- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the British Dental Association Northern Ireland (BDA NI) to the Minister regarding financial arrangements for: General Dental Services 25/26 Investment Proposals; National Insurance Mitigations; Cost of Service Review; and Doctors' and Dentists' Pay Review Body (DDRB) 25/26.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to be copied in to the Minister's reply to BDA NI.

- iii. The Committee noted a reply from Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland reaffirming the position outlined by it at the briefing on 6 March 2025 following the Committee sharing correspondence from Department.
- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from Age NI on research that the Frailty Network has commissioned Age NI to undertake in regards to the experiences of older people during and after an unplanned stay in hospital.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to respond to Age NI to welcome the Study and agree to support its launch with a photograph at Parliament Buildings.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Education to DoH seeking a written briefing on the refreshed Healthy Child, Healthy Future Framework.
- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from Eimear's Wish regarding the Department's support for Trusts to distribute promotional material.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department and ask that it support Eimear's Wish in providing the Trusts with the promotional material.

- vii. The Committee considered correspondence from SOS Daisyhill Hospital Campaign Group requesting to meet with the Chairperson.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an informal meeting.

- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from Committee for Finance regarding 2025-2026 June Monitoring Commissioning.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from Committee for Finance regarding Budget Sustainability and five-year Departmental Business Plans.
- x. The Committee noted correspondence from a GP detailing how general practice is in crisis.
- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister to a request by Linda Dillon MLA in Plenary that the Committee be provided with information on ten projects awarded funding under the PEACE PLUS Programme and a copy of the Child Protection work programme agreed by the North South Ministerial Programme.
- xii. The Committee noted a response from the Department following the oral briefing by the British Medical Association (BMA NI) on 22 May 2025.

- xiii. The Committee noted a copy of a letter from the BDA NI to the First Minister and deputy First Minister.
- xiv. The Committee noted the Fortieth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.
- xv. The Committee noted the Investing Activity Report for May 2025.

## **10. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

## **11. Committee Inquiry on Access to Palliative Care Services - Oral Evidence from the Royal College of General Practitioners Northern Ireland**

The following representatives joined the meeting at 3.57pm:

- Dr Ursula Mason, Chairperson, Royal College of General Practitioners Northern Ireland (RCGPNI); and
- Dr Emma Murtagh, Vice Chair of Policy, RCGPNI.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Inquiry.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

*Colin McGrath left the meeting at 4.20pm*

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

**Agreed:** The Committee considered that the RCGPNI had not received any communications from the Department in relation to a scoping exercise on palliative care services. The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive detail of which organisations and individuals have been contacted in relation to the Department's scoping exercise and why the RCGPNI has not been contacted.



## **12. SL1 Human Medicines (Amendments to Hub and Spoke Dispensing etc.) Regulations 2025**

The following officials joined the meeting at 4.33pm

- Karen Simpson, Head of Medicines Legislation Unit, DoH; and
- Chris Garland, Senior Principal Pharmaceutical Officer, DoH.

The officials briefed the Committee on the SL1.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing was reported by Hansard.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it is content with the merits of the policy and that the Department makes the Statutory Rule.

## **13. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

## **14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place at 2pm on Thursday 05 June 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.45pm.

**Philip McGuigan MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Health**

**05 June 2025**