



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

11 June 2026

Present: Phillip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)
Danny Donnelly (Deputy Chairperson)
Alan Chambers MLA
Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Colin McGrath MLA
Alan Robinson MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Diane Dodds MLA
Nuala McAllister MLA

Apologies: Linda Dillon MLA

In Attendance: Keith McBride (Clerk)
Roisin Donnelly (Senior Assistant Clerk)
Michael Doran (Senior Assistant Clerk)



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Shannen Lofthouse (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Aidan Kennedy (Clerical Supervisor)

Caroline Devlin (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.03 pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Chairperson's Business

Recent Racist Attacks

The Chairperson noted the recent racist attacks and condemned all forms of violence, threats, and abuse. Particular concern was expressed regarding the recent threats made against healthcare workers, and the Chairperson emphasised that such behaviour is unacceptable and has no place in society.

Nurse of the Year Awards

The Chairperson noted that he attended the Royal College of Nursing Nurse of the Year Awards. The Chairperson congratulated all nominees and winners, including Bronagh Scott, recipient of the Kathleen Robb Award for Outstanding Contribution to



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Nursing, and Linda Hamilton, Nurse of the Year, and expressed his thanks for the invitation to attend.

Social Prescribing Conference

The Chairperson noted that he attended the Social Prescribing Conference in Dundalk. The Chairperson noted the positive impact that social prescribing can have on the health service at a relatively low cost to the healthcare system.

SR Hantavirus

The Chairperson noted receipt of an SL1 from the Department of Health relating to Hantavirus, which proposes adding Hantavirus to the list of notifiable diseases under the Public Health Act. Members further noted that a second SL1 on the same matter may follow shortly.

The Committee also noted the Minister's request for expedited consideration and that it is proposed to take oral evidence from the Department and take decisions on both SL1s at next week's meeting. Members were advised that this may result in decisions being taken before the call for views closes, but any later responses would be considered once the subsequent SR is laid.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider both SL1's on an accelerated timeframe at next week's meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to issue the call for views immediately.



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3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2026.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. SR 2026/103 The Jam and Similar Products (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee considered SR 2026/103 The Jam and Similar Products (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026. The purpose of the proposed rule is to provide for updated compositional requirements for jelly and extra jelly.

The Chairperson asked if Members had any objection to the rule.

The Committee divided on the rule. The following votes were recorded:

AYES

Philip McGuigan

Danny Donnelly

Órlaithí Flynn

Colin McGrath

NOES

Alan Chambers

Diane Dodds

Alan Robinson



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Agreed: The Committee has considered SR 2026/103 The Jam and Similar Products (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report had no objection to the Rule.

6. SL1 - The Feed and Food (Miscellaneous Amendments and Revocations) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

The Committee noted that the Food Standards Agency is proposing to make a statutory rule that will amend existing delegated legislation regarding food and animal feed safety and standards to enhance consumer protections and clarity.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the SL1 papers on the Assembly website and to issue a call for views on the proposal.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule consideration of the proposed SR at its meeting on 2 July 2026.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite departmental officials to brief the Committee on the proposal on 2 July 2026.



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7. Oral Briefing from Caleb's Cause

The following representatives from Caleb's cause joined the meeting at 2.12 pm:

- Ms Alma White, Campaigner;
- Mr Alphonse Lonergan, Parent;
- Ms Karen Ryan, Parent; and
- Ms Jaclyn Harron, Parent

The representatives provided an update on the ongoing work of Caleb's Cause, including its campaign to secure appropriate post-19 provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs.

Nuala McAllister MLA joined the meeting at 2.43pm.

A question and answer session followed.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department about Alphonse Lonergan's case, seeking urgent additional support, and to emphasise the need for preparatory work on future care-plan models, including asking whether alternative models or a care-act-style assessment plan have been considered.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek clarification on the absence of adult SEND data and any data-sharing barriers between the Department of Health and the Department of Education.



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- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to commission a research paper from RaiSe on the 2014 English model arising from the Children and Families Act 2014. Research is to include its operation, costings, and comparable approaches elsewhere.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Communities regarding repeated benefits assessments and whether guidance could be amended to better support families.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek clarification on whether a health and care plan covers health and social care and any post-19 education, and whether the new learning disability model includes these elements.

8. Oral Briefing from the Department of Health - Respite Services/Short Breaks

The following officials from the Department of Health, Northern Trust and Western Trust joined the meeting at 3.46 pm:

- Dr Ciara McKillop, Interim Director, Community Care, SPPG, Department of Health;
- Mr Mark McGuicken, Director of Disability and Older People, Department of Health;
- Ms Maura Dargan, Director of Children's Services, Northern Health and Social Care Trust; and
- Dr Tom Cassidy, Director of Children & Families/Executive Director of Social Work, Western Health and Social Care Trust.



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The representatives briefed the Committee on Respite/Short Breaks and updated the Committee on and the work being undertaken by the Department of Health in relation to this area.

A question and answer session followed.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Nuala McAllister MLA left the meeting at 4.58 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek detailed clarification on the reduction of approximately 178 unallocated cases between August and November 2025, including how cases were resolved, allocated or aged out, and to request an explanation of vacancy rates rising from 14% to 61.4% over the same period.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request delayed-discharge information, including the longest waiting periods for young people with complex learning disabilities across Trusts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek clarification on whether Redwood will be ready by the end of June, and to request further information on parental contact arrangements in residential homes.



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Agreed: The Committee also agreed to seek further detail on how the £13.1m will be spent this year and whether it will be ring-fenced.

9. Written Briefing from the Department of Health – Violence and Aggression Towards Staff

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department of Health on Violence and Aggression Towards Staff.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information on what new initiatives are being taken forward, along with additional detail on the rollout of body-worn cameras.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request whether it is possible to break down how many incidents of violence and aggression are linked to racism, including how many reported incidents involve a racial motivation.



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10. Written Briefing from the Department of Health – Review of Emergency General Surgery South Western Acute Hospital.

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department of Health on Review of Emergency General Surgery at South West Acute Hospital.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an update on the new vision plan for SWAH including further detail on what the future model for the hospital is expected to look like.

11. Written Briefing from the Department of Health – Substance Use Strategy

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department of Health on Substance Use Strategy.

12. Written Briefing from the Department of Health – Mental Health Strategy

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department of Health on Mental Health Strategy.



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13. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a copy of a response from the Department of Health to the Executive Office regarding further information on the Regional Trauma Network.
- ii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health to an individual regarding overdue Assembly questions to the Minister of Health on diabetes technology.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the individual for information.

- iii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding the Committee's concern in relation to the waiting list for Neurology patients.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to Neurology Justice Collective for information.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the NICCY presentation by Elodie Bloomer and the NSPCC Voice of Online Youth Manifesto following the Commissioner for Children and Young People's attendance at Committee on 7 May 2026.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to NICCY for information.

- v. The Committee noted a copy of a response from the Department of Health to the Committee for Education regarding changes to the minimum standards for childminders.
- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding a paper on Workforce Strategy 2026.
- vii. The Committee noted a copy of a response from the Department of Health to the Committee for the Executive Office regarding access to adoption records.
- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the Atherton Report and the Department of Health's decision not to commission a statutory public inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to Ladies With Letters for information.

- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding a legislation timeline for the Data Processing Amendment Bill.
- x. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding a legislation timeline for the Safe and Effective Staffing Bill.



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- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding a legislation timeline for the Duty Candor Bill.
 - xii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health with a copy email from the Department of the Economy regarding the Sporting Events Bill.
 - xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding a consultation on options for increasing pharmacy premises fees in Northern Ireland.
 - xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities enclosing a copy of a letter to the Department of Health regarding an oral briefing from Housing Rights in relation to their discussion paper to support homelessness prevention in Northern Ireland.
 - xv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Finance Committee regarding the HM Treasury Open Book Review of the Northern Ireland Executive's Budget.
 - xvi. The Committee considered correspondence from NICMA regarding a request to present to the Committee for Health.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to discuss further at next week's meeting regarding the Forward Work Programme.



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xvii. The Committee noted correspondence from Neurology Justice Collective regarding letters to and from the Minister of Health ahead of its informal meeting on 22 September 2026.

xviii. The Committee considered correspondence from The Gaitway Organisation regarding a request to present to the Committee for Health.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss further at next week's meeting regarding the Forward Work Programme.

xix. The Committee considered a response correspondence from the Royal College of Nursing regarding the Committee's request for further information on the impacts of nursing staff in relation to issues raised by NI Covid Bereaved Families for Justice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department for comment.

xx. The Committee considered correspondence from Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry regarding an invite to Members to watch the inquiry report lunch online on 18 June 2026.

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



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xxi. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the promotion of external organisations within schools, the role of public funding and the impact this is having on children.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department of Health for comment once authority to do so is given by the individual.

xxii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a follow up complaint.

xxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding allergen labelling on food products.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Food Standards Agency for comment.

xxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from Newington Day Centre regarding a request for a support for funding from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department for comment and to make a general enquiry about funding for day centres and how they are supported.



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xxv. The Committee noted correspondence from Children in NI regarding an invite to an all – party group on children and young people on 16 June.

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

14. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed its draft Forward Work Programme.

15. Any Other Business

Danny Donnelly MLA advised that he had attended a recent roundtable event with representatives of the Infected Blood Compensation Authority (IBCA).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the possibility of the organisation attending a future clinic session, and to add this to the FWP discussion next week.

16. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting was scheduled to take place at 11 June at 2.00 pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.



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The meeting was adjourned at 5.26 pm.

Phillip McGuigan MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Health

18 June 2026