



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

11 September 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

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

Apologies: Alan Chambers MLA

In Attendance:

- Keith McBride, Clerk
- Shannen Lofthouse, Assistant Clerk

Angela McParland, Assistant Clerk

Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor

Noel Gallagher, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2.02pm in public session.

1. Apologies

Alan Chambers MLA provided his apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

Chair advised Members that he attended to Launch of Palliative Care week in MAC Theatre.

The Chair stated he also attended the Chief Nursing Officer Conference this week.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2025.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee held an informal Committee Clinic event on 04 September 2025 and met with the following organisations:

- Alzheimer's Society
- Mental Health Policy Alliance
- Community Transport Association
- British Heart Foundation
- Northern Ireland Alcohol and Drug Alliance
- Auditory Verbal
- Cubbie

- Alliance for Choice

Agreed: The Committee agreed the actions as per the Clerk's memo.

5. Proposed Amendments to the Safeguarding Vulnerable Group (Northern Ireland) Order (SVGO) through the Crime and Policing Bill

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.04pm:

- Martina Moore, Director of Family and Children's Policy;
- Lynsey Armstrong, Head of Child Protection, Domestic and Sexual Abuse Unit; and
- Teresa Mallon, Child Protection, Domestic and Sexual Abuse Unit

Officials briefed the Committee on proposed amendments to the SVGO (Northern Ireland) Order

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a written briefing on the work of the newly established forum, together with an update on progress in addressing the identified gaps.

Agreed: The Committee requested further information regarding the reasons why retrospective background checks by employers will not be undertaken.

6. SL1 The Health and Social Care (Exemptions from Charges, Payments and Remission of Charges) (Amendment and Transitional Provision) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.32pm:

- Raymond Curran, Head of Ophthalmic Services; and
- Noel Griffin, Head of Healthcare and EU Citizens' Rights Branch

The officials provided oral evidence to the Committee on a proposed statutory rule on the Health and Social Care (Exemptions from Charges, Payments and Remission

of Charges) (Amendment and Transitional Provision) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

The Chairperson asked if Members were content with the merits of the policy and that the Statutory Rule is made.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content that the Statutory Rule is made.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request information from the Department on how it is liaising with the Department for Communities on this matter, in particular regarding the processes for notifying individuals who are not passported onto the new system.

Agreed: The Committee agreed write to the Department for Communities regarding the processes for notifying individuals who are not passported onto the new system.

7. Update on redesign of Severe Adverse Incidents Framework

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.07pm:

- Professor Lourda Geoghegan, Deputy Chief Medical Officer; and
- Kieran McAteer, Director of Quality, Safety and Improvement.

Linda Dillon left the meeting at 3.08pm

The officials updated the committee on the Redesign of Serious Adverse Incidents Framework.

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.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive further information on the following:

- Details of the current backlog of SAI cases, including the number of cases, their dates, and the Trusts involved;
- A breakdown of the current average time each Trust takes to process a case;
- Details of the Department's policy for providing timely information to families and loved ones during the process;
- Information on the process for adverse incidents (AIs), particularly those related to Muckamore Abbey; and

8. Transformation and Outcome of Hospital Network Consultation

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.56pm:

- Peter Jakobsen, Director, Regional Health Services Transformation, DoH; and
- Michelle Estler, Head of Transformation Branch, DoH

The officials updated the committee on Transformation and the Outcome of Hospital Network Consultation.

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.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive further information on the following:

- Details of the work undertaken in relation to the creation of an Arms Length Body for Children's Services;
- How the Department can ensure GP services remain sustainable within the NHS and are not driven towards privatisation;
- A timeline for the Minister securing pay settlements in 2024/25;
- A copy of the five-year Budget plan;

- Details of how rural proofing in the Department is achieved;
- An explanation of Emergency Department's reclassification moving to level 3 after being long-term classified as level 2; and
- A breakdown of the 30,000 responses be included in the summary of consultation responses.

9. New Children's Hospital– Written Briefing from the Department of Health

The Committee noted a written briefing from the Department on Winter Preparedness.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from Youth Assembly regarding their Final Committee Reports. They thanked the Committee for their involvement in this year's Youth Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to thank Youth Assembly and ask to be kept updated on its meeting with the Education Minister.

- ii. The Committee noted a response from the Committee for Economy regarding Insolvency (Amendment) Bill.
- iii. The Committee considered a response from the Committee for Finance regarding the Multi-Year Budget Information Gathering Process.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive a DoH oral briefing on 3 year Budget Plan on 4 December.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from British Medical Association NI regarding the Northern Ireland General Practitioner Committee Referendum on collection action for an improved contract offer.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further following a visit to GP Federation on 25 September.

- v. The Committee considered correspondence from the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) regarding its Latest workforce census and how the level of nursing staff has not increased to the required level.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at RCN briefing on 25 September.

- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the Belfast Trust Senior Management Team.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at an oral briefing on 23 October.

- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding Private Family Law.
- viii. The Committee considered correspondence from Breast Cancer Now with regards to their Severity Modifier Report.

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

- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice in relation to Health in Criminal Justice.
- x. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding clarification on departmental responsibilities in the Department for Communities.
- xi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding online sharing of home births on social media.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this Royal College of Midwives for comment and an update on the support midwives are receiving from management on the issue.

- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from Committee for Finance regarding the UK Spending Review outcome.
- xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual following briefing from the Belfast Trust on 12 June 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at oral briefing on 23 October.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Belfast Trust to raise the specific issues identified. The Committee agreed to seek further information in relation to the Review being undertaken, specifically in relation to the timeline and whether the review is being carried out independently of the Trust. The Committee agreed to request that it be provided with a copy of the review once it has been completed.

- xiv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding the extension to the consultation period of the Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to await further written briefing from the Department.

- xv. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding Neurology Deceased Patient Review- Phase Three.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at Inquiries Implementation Board briefing on 18 September.

xvi. The Committee noted correspondence from Paul Frew MLA on the Private Members Bill Consultation on Duty of Candour.

xvii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding Health Reset.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at the Departments oral briefing on 3 Year Budget Plan.

xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from Queens University Belfast regarding access to Palliative Care services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this as written evidence for the Committee Inquiry.

xix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding the RalSE paper on Mental Health Courts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this further at Mental Health Champion oral briefing.

xx. The Committee noted correspondence from Linda Dillon MLA on the Private Members Bill on Breastfeeding.

xxi. The Committee considered correspondence from SOAS regarding a letter of concern regarding WHSCT public consultation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at SWAH briefing on 27 November.

- xxii. The Committee considered a response from the Department on the Cytology Review Screener Sensitivity Data.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at the oral briefing on completion of review reports.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to clarify a timeline for completion of the review.

- xxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the House of Lords regarding the gradual rollout of EUDAMED.

- xxiv. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education in relation to engagement with the Youth Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond thanking the Minister and provide the necessary contact details.

- xxv. The Committee noted correspondence from Criminal Justice Inspection NI regarding the detention of persons in police custody in Northern Ireland.

- xxvi. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a FoI request on Health Committee advice.

- xxvii. The Committee noted a response from the Department to an individual regarding failures in cervical screening within the Southern Trust.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at the oral briefing on completion of review reports.

- xxviii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a complaint on data handling.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at Western Trust briefing on 27 November.

- xxix. The Committee noted correspondence from ISNI regarding the Investing Activity Report - July 2025.
- xxx. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding meeting with SAI Families.
- xxxi. The Committee considered correspondence from BMA NI regarding an update on the GP referendum on collective action.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further following visit to GP Federation on 25 September.

- xxxii. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding the suspension of homecare service packages.

Agreed: Write to the Department and ask for an update and accurate figures.

- xxxiii. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding actual number of patient admissions to the South West Acute Hospital.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at the Western Trust oral briefing on 27 November.

- xxxiv. The Committee considered correspondence from Caleb's Cause NI regarding a request to meet with Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further DoH oral briefing on 18 September.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that in advance of oral briefing an invitation be made to Calebs Cause NI to attend an informal meeting.

- xxxv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding the Autism Strategy 2023-28 Progress Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at Autism Reviewer oral briefing on 23 October.

- xxxvi. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding Northern Ireland's response to domestic abuse.

- xxxvii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding Access to Personal Data in the Southern Trust.

- xxxviii. The Committee noted a response from an individual regarding access to Palliative Care in Foyle Hospice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this as written evidence for the Inquiry.

- xxxix. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding Community Pharmacy NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at next oral briefing with CPNI.

- xl. The Committee considered a response from NI Alcohol and Drug Alliance regarding Minimum Unit Pricing of Alcohol in NI. This was discussed at Committee Clinic held on 4 September.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add NIADA to the list of providers of evidence for legislation.

- xli. The Committee considered correspondence from Diabetes UK regarding a request to meet with the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add this to January's Committee Clinic.

- xl. The Committee considered correspondence from the Pharmaceutical Society NI with regards to the consultation on Chief Pharmacist Standards in NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to await a summary of responses to the consultation.

- xl. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding the Draft Learning Disability Service Model.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to await a summary of responses.

- xli. The Committee noted correspondence from the Windsor Framework Scrutiny Committee regarding regulation on labelling and packaging.

- xli. The Committee noted an invitation to Members to attend the Chief Nursing Officer Conference.

- xli. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual requesting an update following SAI families informal meeting.

- xli. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Proposals to Extend Medicines Responsibilities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to await a summary of responses.

- xli. The Committee considered correspondence from The Survivor Council of Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note as a stakeholder.

- xlix. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding Autism Strategy Year 2 Progress Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at Autism Reviewer oral briefing on 23 October.

- I. The Committee considered correspondence from Farmers for Action regarding Review of Surgery.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at DoH oral briefing on 25 September.

- li. The Committee noted correspondence from PatientsCann UK with regards to cross-border travel with prescribed Schedule 1 medicines.
- lii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Palliative Care.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this as written evidence for the Committee Inquiry.

- liii. The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department on Respite Services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at oral briefing on Respite Services on 9 October.

- liv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department on Hospital Reconfiguration. This was then further considered and in this session's oral briefing on Transformation.

Iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding the Disability Act.

Ivi. The Committee noted a response from the Department on the Establishment of a Mother and Baby Unit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request to be informed with the outcome of the business case and for a timetable for the Unit.

Ivii. The Committee noted a response from the Department with regards to an invitation to attend Shankill Women's Centre.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to accept the invitation and organise a date for 2026.

Iviii. The Committee noted correspondence from Protective Mothers NI regarding their communication with the Department.

lix. The Committee noted correspondence from Cancer Research UK regarding the Prevention Policy Research Report.

lx. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding an NI Social Care Council referral.

lxi. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a complaint against a Social Worker.

lxii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding the Review of Part 1 of the Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) ACT (Northern Ireland) 2016.

lxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from Cancer Research UK regarding the impact of immigration on research.

- lxiv. The Committee noted a copy of a reply from the Department to the Committee for Justice in relation to Improving Health within the Criminal Justice Strategy.
- lxv. The Committee noted correspondence from ISNI regarding their Investing Activity Report - August 2025.
- lxvi. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the Cervical Cytology Review.
- lxvii. **Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider further at oral briefing on completion of review reports.
- lxviii. The Committee noted correspondence from Voices from Young People In Care. An invite was made to members to their 'Show Us You Care' Launch Event in Parliament Buildings on 2 October.

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

- lxix. The Committee considered correspondence from Diane Doods MLA and Alan Robinson MLA regarding Transgender Healthcare Services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed write to the Department and organise a briefing on the funding and the parameters of service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed write to the Department and seek a timeline of the review recently announced by the Minister.

- lxx. The Committee considered correspondence from Belfast Telegraph regarding an Energy Drink Ban for Under 16's.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department request whether any work has taken place on this issue and if there are any plans to take forward work on this issue.

Agreed: The Committee has agreed to write to the Department of Health to ask how much revenue the Sugar Tax generates and how the money is used.

- lxxi. The Committee considered correspondence from SOAS requesting a copy of a reply to the Department.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the reply once received.

- lxxii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding a UK-wide consultation on extending the range of medicines available to optometrists and contact lens opticians.

- lxxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding the Trusts' Financial Position.

- lxxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from Pulmonary Fibrosis NI regarding oxygen supplies in NI.

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

- lxxv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Professional Standards Authority regarding the Monitoring Report of the General Chiropractic Council 2024-25.

Órlaithí Flynn MLA left at 5.02pm

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee agreed to consider the Forward Work Programme and Strategic Priorities at next week's meeting.

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place at in Room 29 at 2.00pm on 18 September 2025.

The Committee moved to a closed session at 5.33pm

14. Access to Palliative Care Inquiry

The Clerk gave Members an overview of the Committee's draft Report and recommendations. There was discussion in relation to the timeline and the launch of the Report.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.52pm.

Phillip McGuigan MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

18 September 2025