



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

23 October 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.

Apologies: Colin McGrath 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 2.01pm in public session.

1. Apologies

Colin McGrath MLA

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chair noted Friday 24th October is 'Wear It Pink Day' in support of Breast Cancer Awareness. The Chair reminded Members of correspondence received related to this initiative this week, and that each member has been provided with a badge to wear tomorrow in recognition of the cause.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meetings held on 9 and 16 October 2025.

4. Matters Arising

The Chair noted that the Committee has received correspondence from BMA in relation to the Winter Preparedness Plan. The Chair expressed concern in relation to the role of General Practice in the Plan and specifically, what engagement there has been and what ongoing discussions are happening with GPs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to requesting the following:

- Details of the Department's engagement with General Practitioners in the development of the Plan, along with a response to the issues raised by the BMA.
- Given existing workforce pressures, clarification on how the Plan addresses staffing for the 250+ additional emergency beds, including what specific measures are in place to ensure adequate cover.
- Clarification on the funding allocated to support the extra GP sessions referenced in the Plan. This includes the level of additional funding allocated for GP services this winter, whether it constitutes new investment or a reallocation of existing resources, and how it differs from previous years.

5. Oral Briefing - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Departmental Intervention.

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.05pm:

- Peter McBride, External Expert, Departmental Intervention Team; and
- Jennifer Hill, External Expert, Departmental Intervention Team

The representatives briefed the Committee in relation to the McBride Hill Report on the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

Alan Chambers MLA joined the meeting at 2.08pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their briefing.

6. Oral Briefing - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Departmental Intervention.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.42pm.

- Jennifer Welsh, Chief Executive of Belfast Trust; and
- Tracy McCaig, Chief Operating Officer, Strategic Planning and Performance Group.

The Chairperson congratulated Jennifer on her appointment as Chief Executive of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

Officials briefed the Committee in relation to the McBride Hill Report.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting confirmation of BHSC's commitment to implement the review recommendations, clarity on governance and accountability roles of SPPG, Trust CEOs, and Boards, and detail on tracking mechanisms in place.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting a written update on the perceived increase in legal claims related to the MHPS, including:

- The number of claims lodged to date;
- How many have proceeded to court;
- How many remain at the industrial tribunal stage;
- Total expenditure on claim settlements;
- Pending costs across Trusts;
- The source of funding used to pay legal claims; and
- The number of cases currently under negotiation with an estimated six-figure or seven-figure payout.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting an update on the handling of professional standards cases, specifically seeking clarification on the rationale behind using a sample or random selection of cases to identify problems, and an assessment of how effective this approach has been.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting that it revisit the information provided by the predecessor of the Belfast Trust Chief Executive, in light of concerns that the Committee may have been misled

during the briefing held on 12 June 2025. Officials have committed to reviewing the matter and providing a written response to the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting a written briefing that provides detail and clarity on the governance structures in place for accountability mechanisms, specifically outlining the respective roles of the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG), Trust Chief Executives, and Trust Boards in relation to the Serious Adverse Incident (SAI) complaint processes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification on key issues relating to the new Royal Maternity Hospital:

- Whether the BHSCT Board had all necessary information to make an informed decision on the handover in January 2024, noting that the Department has confirmed the Water Usage Group had not recommended handover at that time.
- For Option 2, as agreed by the Minister and BHSCT, confirmation of the estimated cost and expected start and completion date, including information on how long the design stage is estimated to be.
- An update on liability, given the Trust and its legal representatives have been working with independent experts on this matter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting an update on the progress of work at the inpatient mental health unit at Belfast City Hospital, along with information on the impact of the ongoing works on patients.

Alan Robinson MLA left the meeting at 5.18pm.

7. Written Briefing from the Department- Maternity Review Report Implementation.

The Committee noted a written briefing from the Department regarding the Maternity Review Report Implementation.

8. Adult Protection Bill – Draft Schedule of Oral Evidence.

The Committee agreed the schedule of oral evidence sessions in relation to the Adult Protection Bill. The Chair informed Members that these briefings will commence at the next meeting on 6 November.

9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a copy of a response from the Department to the Committee for Communities in relation to the Disability and Work Strategy.
- ii. The Committee noted a copy of a response from the Department to the Committee for Justice in relation to Mental Health Courts, roll-out of the Multi-Agency Triage Team and Right Care, Right Person.
- iii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding a Review of Children's Social Care Services.
- iv. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the cost of IT supplies.
- v. The Committee noted a response from the Department with a Copy of Letter and Supporting Information to RalSe regarding the Adult Protection Bill.
- vi. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the reclassification of Emergency Departments.

vii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Inquiries Implementation Project Board.

viii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding their Dementia Policy.

ix. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding Continuing Healthcare Assessments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting to be kept updated on ongoing engagement between the Department of Health and the Trusts on this matter.

x. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department for Communities regarding an SL1 on Health and Social Care Exemptions from Charges Regulations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department that it be kept updated by DoH on its engagement with DfC.

xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding Aligning Budget to Programme for Government.

xii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office regarding Mother and Baby Institutions.

xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities regarding Support and Care for Deaf People.

xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice regarding a copy of the letter to Department of Health on Reasonable Chastisement/Equal Protection.

xv. The Committee noted correspondence from Calebs Cause regarding an invitation to an event.

xvi. The Committee considered correspondence from NISCA regarding Department of Health commissioned places at universities.

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

xvii. The Committee considered correspondence from NI Audit Office regarding the performance of restricted procedures by health trusts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department for comment and request that the Committee be kept updated on the implementation of the recommendations.

xviii. The Committee considered correspondence from Neurology Action regarding Neurology Recall Patients.

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

xix. The Committee noted correspondence from SOS Daisy Hill with a request to meet with the Committee for Health.

xx. The Committee noted correspondence from Inspire Wellbeing regarding public resources.

- xxi. The Committee noted correspondence from Breast Cancer now regarding key statistics.
- xxii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Simon Community with key findings on Childhood Adversity and Homelessness in NI.
- xxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from Newry, Mourne and Down District Council regarding availability of CAR-T Cell Therapy.
- xxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from Calebs Cause regarding a briefing paper to the Committee for Health.
- xxv. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a copy of an email to Doug Beattie MLA - Violence Against Women and Girls.
- xxvi. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a copy of an email to Mike Nesbitt MLA.
- xxvii. The Committee noted correspondence from Breast Cancer now regarding a severity monitor update.
- xxviii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a request for an investigation into Long Term Surgical Waiting Periods in Northern Ireland.
- xxix. The Committee noted correspondence from Calebs Cause regarding the Learning Disability Service Model in relation to complex needs and lifelong support.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

11. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place in Room 29 at 2.00pm on 6 November.

The Committee moved into closed session at 5.12pm

13. Closed session- Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services- Consideration of Report.

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.

14. Closed Session- End of Session Report.

The Clerk briefed Members on the End of Session Report for 2024-2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the End of Session Report.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.18pm.

Phillip McGuigan MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

6 November 2025