



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

9 October 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Philip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)

Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Alan Chambers MLA

Linda Dillon MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Alan Robinson MLA

Apologies:

Diane Dodds MLA

Nuala McAllister 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

Diane Dodds MLA and Nuala McAllister MLA.

2. Chairperson's Business

None.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2025.

4. Matters Arising

None.

5. Oral Briefing from the Department- Review of Deliverability of the Mental Health Strategy.

The following Departmental officials joined the meeting at 2.03pm:

- Heather Stevens, Director of Mental Health;
- Fiona McCausland, Head of Adult Mental Health Unit;
- Helen Dougan, Social Care Lead for Mental Health;
- Lorna Conn, Programme Manager for Mental Health; and
- Dr Ciara McKillop, Interim Director, Community Care Directorate.

The officials briefed the Committee with a review on the deliverability of its Mental Health Strategy.

Alan Chambers MLA joined the meeting at 2.12pm

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

The Committee discussed the economic cost to Northern Ireland of not investing adequately in mental health services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request from the Department:

- Details of its understanding of the HSC services affected by mental health disorders;
- Information on the potential costs saved through early intervention and sustained investment; and
- Details of the Department's understanding of systems across other Executive departments that are impacted by a lack of investment in early intervention or adequate treatment.

The Committee discussed the PHA 'Minding Your Head' website and noted the importance of accessible, regional information to support mental health services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that the Department provide details of the 'Minding Your Head' website. Members also noted that the Committee will review, as part of its strategic priorities on "shift left," the availability of a regional one-stop point for information supporting mental health services.

The Committee discussed the need for improved support and early intervention for people with eating disorders and considered the potential economic cost to the HSC system of not providing timely support.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that the Department provide information on:

- The work being undertaken to support people with eating disorders; and
- The estimated economic costs to the HSC system of not investing in early intervention and support for individuals affected.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the briefing from the Department to the Mental Health Champion.

The Committee adjourned at 3.30pm.

The Committee resumed at 3.36pm.

Alan Robinson MLA returned at 3.39pm

Órlaithí Flynn MLA returned at 3.39pm

6. Oral Briefing from the Department- Respite Services/Short Breaks

The following Departmental officials joined the meeting at 3.36pm:

- Nigel Chambers, Head of Learning Disability & Autism;
- Mark McGuicken, Director of Disability and Older People;
- Oisín Martin, Co-Director, Older People & Children's Emotional Wellbeing;
- Lyn Preece, Director of Children Services SEHSCT; and
- Colm McCafferty, Director of Children Services SHSCT.

The representatives briefed the Committee on Respite Services and Short Breaks.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

The Committee discussed the funding provided by the Minister following the BBC NI programme 'I Am Not OK', noting the importance of understanding how the monies were allocated and the impact of this funding on respite services and families.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request details from the Department on how the funding was spent on additional bed nights and short breaks, its impact on families, and the effect on the respite services system.

The Committee discussed ongoing issues with direct payments and the distribution of the summer grant scheme across Trusts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a detailed timeline from the Department on how and when issues with direct payments will be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a breakdown from the Department of expenditure by each Trust on the summer grant scheme.

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

The Committee noted the written briefing had not been received from the Department.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request that the written briefing be provided in advance of the next Committee meeting scheduled for 23 October.

8. Adult Protection Bill- Call for Evidence Respondents List.

The Committee noted the respondents list from the call for evidence on the Adult Protection Bill.

9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a correspondence from the Speaker regarding a public petition to stop funding the Lifespan Gender Identity Service.
- ii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding an update following the briefing on the redesign of the SAI Framework.
- iii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding liaison with DfC to assist with health costs.
- iv. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding Auditory Verbal Services for children.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to Auditory Verbal UK.

- v. The Committee noted a response from the Department of Finance regarding the Public Office (Accountability) Bill.
- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Infrastructure regarding Community Transport Licensing.
- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department for Communities regarding a letter sent to Department of Health regarding Disability and Work Strategy.
- viii. The Committee noted a response from the Joint Committee on Health regarding a letter to the Health Committee.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from NCD Alliance NI regarding the introduction of Minimum Unit Pricing to reduce alcohol- related harm.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from NMC and GMC regarding New Resources for Registrants working in Maternity Care.
- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from CCNI regarding Young Adults' Food Experiences.
- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from Protective Mothers NI regarding Evidence of a Safeguarding Breach.

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

- xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from NICON- Marie Curie regarding and Invitation to the Marie Curie Neighbourhood Palliative Care Event.

10. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed concerns about patients missing hospital appointments due to not regularly accessing their My Care accounts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request details on safeguards to prevent missed appointments and the process for notifying patients of appointments.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place at the NICON Conference in La Mon Hotel at 2.30pm on 16 October 2025.

The Committee entered closed session at 4.47pm

12. Forward Work Plan

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.50pm.

Phillip McGuigan MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

23 October 2025