



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

4 December 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Phillip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)

Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Alan Chambers MLA

Linda Dillon MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Nuala McAllister MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Alan Robinson MLA.

Apologies:

Diane Dodds MLA

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

Diane Dodds MLA.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chair noted that the Palliative Care Report Launch Event, held on 2 December in the Long Gallery, was a great success. Thanks were extended to all those who attended and showed their support.

The Chair further noted that the Committee will consider its Forward Work Programme next week as part of setting its strategic priorities. This will include workstreams focused on Palliative Care.

Following the Committee's recent visit to SWAH, the Chair advised Members that the Minister is scheduled to brief the Committee on 26 February. The briefing will address Trusts' governance and accountability.

Following the Committee's visit to the Mater Hospital last week, the Chair reiterated the importance of receiving the flu vaccine ahead of the winter period, noting the latest statistics on uptake and the growing public health threat posed by seasonal flu.

The Chair stressed that vaccination remains a vital measure in reducing the burden on health services during the colder months.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting the latest figures for flu vaccine uptake among HSC staff and details of the work currently being undertaken to increase uptake.

The Chair welcomed the Public Accounts Committee report on General Practice and underlined its significance within the health system. The Committee discussed the importance of the report and maintaining engagement with the Department to ensure progress is monitored.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request that it be kept informed on the engagement with PAC on the report findings and recommendations.

The Chair expressed concern about the lack of response from the Department regarding Independent Carers and the real living wage. Members discussed the need for clarity on the implementation of pay changes and whether backdated pay and the new minimum wage effective from 1 April 2026 will be taken into account.

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

- An immediate response to the Committee's request for further clarity in relation to the figures used by the Minister.
- A firm timeframe for when the pay increase will be implemented.
- Confirmation of how far back any increase will be backdated to.
- Clarity on how the figure of 70 per cent was calculated, including details of the impact assessment and what consideration was given to an invest-to-save approach.
- Confirmation of when the decision was taken not to increase pay for this section of the workforce, i.e. when previous commitments by the Minister were reversed.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2025.

4. Matters Arising

There were no Matters Arising.

5. Adult Protection Bill - Oral Briefing from Belfast Trust, Southern Trust and British Association for Social Workers.

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.13pm:

- Ms Rhoda McBride, Interim Deputy Executive Director of Social Worker, BHSCT; and
- Mr Colm McCafferty, Director of Children's Services, SHSCT; and
- Ms Deborah Hanlon, Head of Service Adult Safeguarding, SHSCT; and
- Professor Lorna Montgomery, Professor of Social Work, British Association of Social Workers; and
- Dr Jane Shears, National Director for Northern Ireland, British Association of Social Workers.

The representatives briefed the Committee on the Adult Protection Bill.

Alan Chambers MLA joined the meeting at 2.20pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their briefing.

6. Adult Protection Bill- Oral Briefing from Royal College of GP's and British Medical Association.

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.58pm:

- Dr Ursula Mason, Chairperson, Royal College of General Practitioners NI; and
- Dr Andy Green, Chair of the BMA's Medical Ethics Committee, British Medical Association

The representatives briefed the Committee on the Adult Protection Bill.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked representatives for the briefing.

7. December Monitoring - Oral Briefing from the Department.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.37pm:

- Mr David Keenan, Interim Finance Director, DoH; and
- Ms Danielle Mallen, Head of Financial Management, DoH; and
- Mr Paul Montgomery, Investment Director, DoH; and
- Ms Catherine Fitzpatrick, Head of Capital Resources, DoH; and
- Ms Nicola Shields, Interim Head of Financial Planning.

The officials briefed the Committee on December Monitoring.

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 to request the following:

- A breakdown of the savings in relation to Trusts and SPPG.
- A breakdown of the 20% unacceptable compliance within the estate.
- An update on the installation of the MRI scanner at Downe Hospital.

- Details of upkeep costs to the public purse for all unused sites and buildings, including both capital and resource expenditure.

Nuala McCallister MLA left the meeting at 4.37pm.

8. Substance Use Strategy - Written Briefing from the Department.

The Committee noted a written briefing from the Department regarding the Substance Use Strategy.

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

- A full breakdown of the funding attached to the action points that the Department has been able to progress.
- A full breakdown of bullet point two, including clarification of what, when actioned, this will mean for those receiving the service.
- Full details of the €8 million PEACE Plus investment in community and alcohol detoxification services within the Southern and Western Trusts.

9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the Cytology Screening Review.
- ii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the Winter Preparedness Plan 2025.
- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding Tobacco Pack Inserts.
- iv. The Committee noted a correspondence from the Department regarding the publication of 'Healthy Futures' Obesity Strategic Framework for Northern Ireland

- v. The Committee considered a response from the Department following a briefing from Independent Autism Reviewer.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to the Independent Autism Reviewer

- vi. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding free period products.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information on why products have not been rolled out to all premises and to receive confirmation that the Department is fully meeting its statutory requirements under the legislation.

- vii. The Committee noted a correspondence from the Department regarding the new Royal Maternity Hospital.

- viii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding a request for CHKS (Healthcare Intelligence and Benchmarking) data for Emergency General Surgery at the South West Acute Hospital.

- ix. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the Hospital Network Consultation.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice regarding Lasting Power of Attorney.

- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities regarding Universal credit claimants help with health costs.

- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from Committee for Education regarding private tutoring.

- xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from Sodium Valproate Redress NI regarding a letter to the Prime Minister.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the matter to the Department to receive confirmation of engagement with the UK Government and an update on work to meet the needs of victims in Northern Ireland.

- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from IVF NI regarding a request for an All Party Group.

- xv. The Committee considered correspondence from Neurology Action regarding a response to Minister's letter.

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

- xvi. The Committee considered correspondence from Macmillan regarding a request for a copy of Cancer Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Cancer Strategy to Macmillan for information.

- xvii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding Midwives in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further at oral briefing with the Southern Trust on 12 February 2026.

- xviii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding continuing healthcare assessments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department for a response.

- xix. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding Curraghinalt Gold Mine

- xx. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding IVF Treatment in Ireland.
- xxi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding uncommissioned theatres in South West Acute Hospital.

10. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed to the draft forward work plan.

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 2pm on 11 December.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.44pm.

Phillip McGuigan MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

11 December 2025