



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

11 April 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Liz Kimmins 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, Assistant Clerk

Jonathan Lamont, Assistant Clerk

Katie Egan, Clerical Supervisor

Noel Gallagher, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2.04pm in public session.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2024.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson thanked the staff at the Marie Curie Hospice for hosting the Committee visit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for an update on Living Matters, Dying Matters Strategy and whether end of life will be included in the Programme for Government.

5. Hospital Parking Charges (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 – proposed amendments

The following officials from the Department of Health and Health and Social Care Trusts joined the meeting at 2.10pm:

Preeta Miller, Investment Director, Department of Health;

Anne-Marie Smyth, Management Services Unit, Department of Health;

Jeff Thompson, Assistant Director of Facilities and Support Services, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust; and

Brenda Creaney, Executive Director of Nursing and User Experience, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Minister of Health's intention to introduce a Bill that will defer the operational date of the Hospital Parking Charges (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 and his intention to seek Accelerated Passage for the Bill.

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 seek further information from the Department of Health on the timeline of implementation.

The Committee agreed to the Accelerated Passage process.

The Committee noted Colin McGrath's opposition to Accelerated Passage for this Bill.

6. LCM Tobacco and Vapes Bill – briefing from the Institute of Public Health

The following officials from the Institute of Public Health joined the meeting at 2.53pm:

Dr Helen McAvoy, Director of Policy;

Dr Helen Joanna Purdy, Development Officer; and

Dr Ciara Reynolds, Development Officer.

The Institute of Public Health representatives briefed the Committee on the inclusion of Northern Ireland in the UK Government's Tobacco and Vaping Bill.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Institute of Public Health representatives for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

7. Victims and Prisoner Bill – Infected Blood Compensation Scheme

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health advising that he has written to the Executive to seek agreement, in principle, to the Westminster Victim and Prisoner Bill being amended to extend the provisions for an infected blood compensation scheme to Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from the Department if the Executive approves the Minister's request and to seek clarity on the interim funding payments to families.

8. Primary Care - briefing from BMA NI GP Committee and RCGP NI

The following representatives from the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Medical Association GP Committee joined the meeting at 3.14pm:

Dr Alan Stout, Chairperson, British Medical Association NI General Practitioners Committee;

Dr Frances O'Hagan, Deputy Chairperson of British Medical Association NI General Practitioners Committee;

Dr Ursula Mason, Chairperson, Royal College of General Practitioners NI; and
Dr Emma Murtagh, Policy Lead, Royal College of General Practitioners NI.

The representatives briefed the Committee on some of the key challenges currently facing general practice.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the BMA and RCGP representatives for their attendance.

The meeting was suspended at 4:35 pm and resumed at 4:41 pm.

9. Department of Health briefing on Primary Care

The following officials from the Department of Health joined the meeting at 4.41pm:

Gearóid Cassidy, Director of Primary Care; and
Dr Margaret O'Brien – Assistant Director, Head of General Medical Services.

The officials briefed the Committee on Primary Care.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Alan Robinson left the meeting at 5.05pm.

Órlaithí Flynn left the meeting at 5.08pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed it would seek further information from the Department of Health in relation to funding and investment in Primary Care, and to invite the Minister of Health to brief the Committee following agreement of the Budget.

10. SR 2024/37 The Misuse of Drugs (Designation) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered SR 2024/37 The Misuse of Drugs (Designation) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024 which makes additions to the list of designated controlled substances which have no legitimate medicinal use in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2024/37 The Misuse of Drugs (Designation) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024 and had no objection to the Rule.

11. SR 2024/36 The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered SR 2024/36 The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 which makes additions to Schedule 1 to the Misuse of Drugs Regulations.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2024/36 The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and had no objection to the Rule.

12. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted SR 2024/68 The Human Medicines (Amendments Relating to Coronavirus and Influenza) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health providing an update on action plans and strategies currently being implemented by the Department.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that the Department provide regular 6 monthly written updates on these strategies.

- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the financial pressures being experienced by the Children's Hospice and wider hospice sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request an update from the Department on its recent meeting with the Children's Hospice.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health providing information on the funding of, and services provided at Rainbow Lodge.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information from the Department on the funding for Rainbow Lodge.

- v. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health providing an overview of projected impacts that the proposed Regulation (EU) 2017/852 on Mercury would have within Dentistry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this issue at its meeting on 18 April 2024.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health advising that the Department of Health and Social Care has recently launched a UK-wide consultation on proposals to amend the Branded Health Service Medicines (Costs) Regulations 2018.

- vii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee providing evidence from the World Alliance for Mercury-Free Dentistry relating to proposed Regulation (EU) 2017/852 on Mercury.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss this matter at a scheduled briefing session with the Chief Dental Officer and British Dental Association.

- viii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the House of Lords European Affairs Sub-Committee on The Windsor Framework to the Minister for Public Health, Start for Life and Primary Care on Commission Regulation

(EU) / amending Annex II to Regulation (EC) No 1333/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council and the Annex to Commission Regulation (EU) No 231/2012 as regards food additives nitrites (E 249-250) and nitrates (E 251-252).

- ix. The Committee noted the Fifth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.
- x. The Committee noted the Strategic Investment Board March 2024 Investing Activity Report for the Department of Health.
- xi. The Committee noted the launch of the General Medical Council's consultation on the regulation of physician associates and anaesthesia associates.
- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Nursing and Midwifery Council regarding its recommendations for regulation of advanced nursing and midwifery practice and its draft plan to invest in fitness to practise.
- xiii. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from Royal College of Nursing (RCN) to the Minister of Health regarding pay negotiations.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss this matter at its scheduled briefing session with RCN.
- xiv. The Committee considered correspondence from Maurice Bradley MLA requesting a meeting on behalf of Farmers for Action and SOS Causeway Hospital.
Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson would consider this request.
- xv. The Committee considered a request from NI Council for Voluntary Action to brief the Committee.
Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson would consider this request.

- xvi. The Committee considered a request from NI Childminding Association to brief the Committee on issues the childminding sector is facing.
Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson would consider this request.
- xvii. The Committee considered an invitation from NI Abortion and Contraception Taskgroup to attend a conference, *'From Covid to Commissioning: a review of sexual and reproductive health in Northern Ireland'* taking place in April 2024.
Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would respond directly to invitation.
- xviii. The Committee noted a report, Benchmarking Northern Ireland Healthcare Performance – 25 March 2024 by Professor A Smyth, S McKay, and A Orme.
- xix. The Committee noted a copy of New Script for Mental Health's response to the Department of Health review of the Protect Life 2 Strategy.
- xx. The Committee considered a request to meet with the SOS Health Committees from Fermanagh, Causeway Coast and Newry Mourne and Down District Council.
Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson would consider this request.
- xxi. The Committee considered a request from SpecSavers to brief the Committee on issues relating to optometry and audiology services.
Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson would consider this request.
- xxii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the regulation of community mental health services.
- xxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the pay and conditions of GP based pharmacists.

- xxiv. The Committee noted the written statement from Minister of Health regarding vasectomy services.

13. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

14. Any Other Business

The Chairperson advised that all Members have been invited to the Heart Failure Warriors NI event in Room 115 in Stormont on Thursday 6th June 9.30am-2pm.

15. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Health was scheduled to take place at 2.00pm on 18 April 2024.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.39pm.

Liz Kimmins MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

18 April 2024