



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

7 March 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

Present by Video or Teleconference:

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 2:04 pm in public session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

- i. The Chairperson informed Members that she had visited the Children's Hospice to gain a better understanding of the service it provided and the funding pressures it was experiencing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for information on funding for hospice services and to ask what consideration is being given to a 50/50 funding model.

- ii. The Chairperson raised the recent industrial action by Junior Doctors.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the representatives of Junior Doctors to brief the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Health, Minister of Finance and the First and Deputy First Ministers regarding their planned response to the industrial action.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 29 February 2024.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

The Committee agreed to move to agenda items 8 to 10.

5. Draft SR The Human Medicines (Amendments Relating to Coronavirus and Influenza) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered Draft SR The Human Medicines (Amendments Relating to Coronavirus and Influenza) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 which provides for a continued flexibility in the supply, distribution and administration of the COVID-19 and influenza vaccines.

Agreed: The Committee considered Draft SR The Human Medicines (Amendments Relating to Coronavirus and Influenza) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

6. SR 2023/139 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Powers to Act for the Protection of Public Health) (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023

The Committee considered SR 2023/139 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Powers to Act for the Protection of Public Health) (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 which alters the expiry date of Section 48 and Schedule 18 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 from 24 September 2023 to 24 March 2024.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health providing further detail on the rationale for the SR.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note SR 2023/139 The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Powers to Act for the Protection of Public Health) (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023.

7. SL1 The Health and Social Care Pension Schemes (Amendment) Regulations

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Health to make a statutory rule to introduce changes to the employer contribution rate to Health and Social Care Pension Schemes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed it was content with the proposal for the statutory rule.

8. Health and Social Care Transformation - briefing from Department of Health

The following officials from the Department of Health joined the meeting at 2:19 pm:

Peter Jakobsen, Director of Regional Health Services Transformation; and

Michelle Esler, Head of Transformation Secretariat Unit.

Peter Jakobsen briefed the Committee on the Department of Health's Transformation agenda and provided an update on the Acute Hospital Reconfiguration Blueprint.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The officials agreed to provide further information on a number of issues.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule briefing on the latest Delivering Together Progress Report when this is available.

9. Community Pharmacy – briefing from Community Pharmacy NI

The following representatives from the Community Pharmacy NI joined the meeting at 3:20 pm:

Peter Rice, Chairman;

Marie Smith, Vice-Chair;

Gerard Greene, Chief Executive;

Dr Turlough Hamill, Director; and

Laurence O’Kane, Independent Pharmacy Owner.

The Community Pharmacy representatives NI briefed the Committee on challenges within the delivery of community pharmacy services.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Community Pharmacy representatives for their attendance.

Linda Dillon left the meeting at 3:40 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health what action it is taking and how it is engaging with community pharmacy representatives, to address the current funding and operational difficulties in order to stabilise the service and maintain medicines supplies and to also ask for an update on the Community Pharmacy Strategic Plan.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding issues raised by the All-Party Group on Reducing Harm Related to Gambling.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Department’s response to the All-Party Group.

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from Boots Pharmacy requesting to brief the Committee on the current challenges within community pharmacy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to advise Boots that it has received briefing from Community Pharmacy NI and was writing to the Department of Health on the issues raised.

- iii. The Committee noted the second and third reports of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from Royal College of Occupational Therapists introducing its new Policy Lead for Northern Ireland.

- v. The Committee considered a request from Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority to brief the Committee on its role and current priorities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson would consider this request.

- vi. The Committee noted the correspondence from NSPCC NI regarding its work and key priorities.

- vii. The Committee noted the correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee advising that it has agreed to hold an inquiry into the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on 'Mental Health' Services in Northern Ireland.

- viii. The Committee considered a request from Menopause Together to brief the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson would consider this request.

- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding how Serious Adverse Incidents are reviewed in the Health Service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to raise the issues highlighted with Department of Health officials at a briefing on the SIA Framework scheduled for June.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority's regulatory role in relation to

community mental health services and the provision of service by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

- xi. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the RQIA review of the deceased patients of Michael Watts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to advise the individual that the Committee has already written to RQIA to ask for an update on the deceased patient review and will provide them with an update once the response from RQIA has been received.

- xii. The Committee considered two items of correspondence from the Department of Health confirming Executive agreement to progress a Legislative Consent Motion to allow Northern Ireland to be included in the Westminster Tobacco and Vapes Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule briefing from the Department of Health on the anticipated LCM.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a research paper on the Tobacco and Vapes Bill and for information on the Westminster Bills process.

- xiii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health providing information on how the eligibility date of 1 October 2022 was chosen for the recently announced increase to one full cycle of IVF treatment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Department's response to the individual who had raised this issue with the Committee and to raise this issue with the Minister when he attends the meeting on 14 March 2024.

- xiv. The Committee noted the Minister of Health's written statement to the Assembly on the publication of the Independent Neurology Action Plan.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme and noted that arrangements were being made to reschedule the informal briefing session on the Encompass system.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

12. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed the need to ensure that future oral briefings keep to the time allocated and that the maximum amount of time possible is given to Members' questions.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Health was scheduled to take place at 2:00 pm on Thursday, 14 March 2024.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:54 pm.

Liz Kimmins MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

14 March 2024