



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Health

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 7 May 2026

**Meeting Location:** Room 29, Parliament Buildings

**Present:** Phillip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)  
Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Alan Chambers MLA  
Diane Dodds MLA  
Colin McGrath MLA  
Alan Robinson MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

**Apologies:** Linda Dillon MLA  
Nuala McAllister MLA

**In Attendance:** Keith McBride (Clerk)  
Roisin Donnelly (Senior Assistant Clerk)



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Michael Doran (Senior Assistant Clerk)

Shannen Lofthouse (Assistant Clerk)

Caroline Devlin (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm in public session.

**1. Apologies**

As above.

**2. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson noted the visit with the Permanent Secretary to St Francis' Hospice in Dublin on 6 May 2026.

**3. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 30 April 2026.

**4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## 5. Oral Briefing from the Permanent Secretary - Neighbourhood Model

The Permanent Secretary, Mike Farrar, joined the meeting at 2.01 pm along with the following officials from the Department of Health:

- Prof Cathy Harrison, Neighbourhood Senior Responsible Owner and Chief Pharmaceutical Officer; and
- Mr Gearóid Cassidy, Director of Primary Care

The officials briefed the Committee on the Neighbourhood Model.

A question and answer session followed.

*Alan Chambers MLA joined the meeting at 2.25 pm.*

*Colin McGrath MLA joined the meeting at 2.32 pm.*

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing on progress of the Integrated Neighbourhood Teams in early Autumn.

## 6. Oral Briefing from the Department of Health - Formal Response to Access to Palliative Care Inquiry

The following officials from the Department of Health joined the meeting at 3.11 pm.

- Mr Jim Wilkinson, Deputy Secretary, Healthcare & Policy Group; and
- Mr Gearóid Cassidy, Director of Primary Care; and
- Mr Roger Kennedy, Programme Director Community Care Directorate; and
- Mr Ryan Wilson, Director of Secondary Care, Department of Health

The officials briefed the Committee on the Access to Palliative Care Inquiry.

A question and answer session followed.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek a detailed breakdown of in-patient palliative care costings – including:

- If costings are calculated per bed only;
- Costs include nursing costs and medicines;
- Whether figures vary across Trusts and wards; and
- If corridor care affects the data.

**Agreed:** To request further detail on the status of Advanced Care Planning, the implementation and use of ReSPECT across Trusts and to obtain the dates for the rollout of 'just in case' boxes.

*Diane Dodds MLA left at 4.34pm*

The Committee considered a draft statement responding to the Department of Health's reply to its inquiry on Access to Palliative Care Services.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to issue the statement outlining its disappointment in the Department's response.

*Diane Dodds MLA returned at 4.46pm*

### **7. Written Briefing from the Department of Health - Homecare Services**

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department of Health regarding Homecare Services.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward letter from Independent Health Care Providers to the Department of Health for information and to request an update on the Department's engagement with the Care Sector to ensure services are being protected.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**8. Written Briefing from the Department of Health - Mental Health Strategy**

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department of Health regarding the Mental Health Strategy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request information on accountability within the strategy and to seek details on the targets, including the specific work completed against each.

**9. Written Briefing from the Department of Health - Inquiries Implementation Programme Management Board**

The Committee noted a written briefing from the Department of Health regarding the Inquiries Implementation Programme Management Board.

*Órlaithí Flynn MLA left the meeting at 4.51 pm.*

**10. Written Briefing from the Department of Health - Winter Preparedness Plan 2026**

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department of Health regarding the Winter Preparedness Plan 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing on Winter Preparedness Plan.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

### **11. Correspondence**

#### **11.1 Correspondence Index**

The Committee noted the correspondence index.

#### **11.2 Children's Social Care Services Review**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding Children's Social Care Services Review.

#### **11.3 ADHD Services for Adults and Children Overview**

The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding ADHD Services for Adults and Children Overview.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to clarify the number of shared care arrangements that have been requested and the number that have been granted.

#### **11.4 Resources for health visitors**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health to the Committee for Education regarding resources for health visitors.

#### **11. Royal College of Psychiatrists**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health to Royal College of Psychiatrists regarding psychiatric services in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward to the Royal College of Psychiatrists for comment.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

### **11.6 Management of violence and aggression in the workplace**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding the management of violence and aggression in the workplace framework.

### **11.7 Safe and Effective Staffing Bill**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding Safe and Effective Staffing Bill.

### **11.8 Special Educational Needs Summer Schemes**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding Special Educational Needs Summer Schemes.

### **11.9 Improving Health Within Criminal Justice Strategy**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the closure of the Improving Health Within Criminal Justice Strategy.

### **11.10 Ernst and Young Immersive Experience**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding a Ernst and Young immersive experience for officials and government.

### **11.11 Speaker's Event**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Office of the Speaker regarding a Mental Health Foundation event in Parliament Buildings.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that Members would RSVP individually.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

### **11.12 Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Education with a copy of a letter to the Minister of Health regarding the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework.

### **11.13 Help with Health Costs Scheme**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities with a copy of a letter to the Department of Health regarding the Help with Health Costs Scheme.

### **11.14 Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Education regarding the Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill.

### **11.15 Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Education regarding the and the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.

### **11.16 Nursing and Midwifery Council**

The Committee noted correspondence from Nursing and Midwifery Council regarding the practice learning consultation launch.

### **11.17 Nursing and Midwifery Council**

The Committee noted correspondence from Nursing and Midwifery Council regarding registration fees increase and change Fitness to Practice rules.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**11.18 Action for Children and Barnardo's**

The Committee considered correspondence from Action for Children and Barnardo's with a request for informal meeting on fostering services.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to add Action for Children and Barnardo's to the Committee Clinic list.

**11.19 Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland with a request to meet with the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an informal briefing with the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland.

**11.20 Chartered Society of Physiotherapy Northern Ireland**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy in Northern Ireland regarding a band 5 physiotherapist recruitment exercise.

**11.21 Auditory Verbal UK**

The Committee noted correspondence from Auditory Verbal UK with an update.

**11.22 Individual**

The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding funding issue for lock and pin sockets for amputees.

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



## Northern Ireland Assembly

### **11.23 Individual**

The Committee noted correspondence from an individual with a request for assistance to an outstanding ADHD assessment.

### **11.24 Individual**

The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a PANS and PANDAS event in Brussels on 13 May 2026.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that Members would RSVP individually.

### **11.25 Psychiatric Assessment and Treatment Hub**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding the Psychiatric Assessment and Treatment Hub in the Belfast Trust.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to encourage it to consider the value that Health Economists could add, including in the prioritisation of spending and outcomes, as part of its ongoing work.

### **11.26 Liaison Care**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding liaison care.

### **11.27 Alzheimer's Society**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding the Alzheimer's Society's Launch of 'The Hidden Training Gap' Report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward to the Alzheimer's Society for information.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**11.28 Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse (COSICA)**

The Committee noted a response from the Department of Health regarding the Minister of Health's meeting with the Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse.

**11.29 Safeguarding data and practice**

The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding concerns in safeguarding data and practice across trust.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward to the individual for information.

**11.30 Category 1 ambulance response times**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health regarding Category 1 ambulance response times.

**11.31 Access to Records**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office with a copy of a letter to the Minister of Health regarding access to records.

**11.32 Childcare Pre- Employment Vetting**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy with a copy of a letter to the Department of Health regarding childcare pre- employment vetting.

**11.33 Petroleum and Licensing (Repeal) Bill**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy regarding the Petroleum and Licensing (Repeal) Bill.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

### **11.34 Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy regarding the Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill.

### **11.35 Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI)**

The Committee considered correspondence from Children in Northern Ireland with an invitation to the launch the '*Left Out: Disabled Children's Rights and Experiences in Northern Ireland*' research report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that Members would RSVP individually.

### **11.36 Extern**

The Committee noted correspondence from Extern regarding the relocation of services from Royal Avenue.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward Extern's correspondence to the Department, Belfast City Council and the Belfast Trust to express its desire for urgent engagement with the service in order to resolve the situation

## **12. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed a draft Forward Work Programme.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

### **13. Any Other Business**

Danny Donnelly MLA referred to the Release to Rescue model, including its impact on ambulance wait times and the practice of moving patients directly from ambulances into wards.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request further information on the implementation of the 'Release to Rescue' model across hospitals and to seek an update from the Minister on the effectiveness of these measures and its impact on other areas of the system.

### **14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting was scheduled to take place at 21 May at 2.00 pm in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.59 pm.

**Phillip McGuigan MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Health**  
**21 May 2026**