



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

29 February 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Liz Kimmins MLA (Chairperson)

Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Alan Chambers MLA

Linda Dillon MLA

Diane Dodds MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Nuala McAllister MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Alan Robinson MLA

In Attendance:

Keith McBride, Committee Clerk

Roisin Donnelly, Assistant Committee Clerk

Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor

Noel Gallagher, Clerical Supervisor

The meeting commenced at 2:01 pm in closed session.

The Chairperson introduced and welcomed a new committee staff member, Noel Gallagher to the team.

1. Research and Information Service and Budget Briefing

Assembly Research Officer, Sinead McMurry joined the meeting at 2:01 pm.

The Research Officer briefed the Committee on the role of the Research and Information Service and the Department of Health budget position and answered questions from Members.

The Chairperson thanked the Research Officer for her attendance.

The meeting moved into public session at 2.40 pm.

2. Apologies

There were no apologies.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised Members that she had met with representatives of Community Pharmacy NI to discuss pressures within community pharmacy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing with Community Pharmacy NI.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2024.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Department of Health Budget Briefing

The following officials from the Department of Health joined the meeting at 2:41 pm:

Brigitte Worth, Director of Finance;

Preetta Miller, Investment Director;

David Keenan, Head of Financial Planning;

Danielle Mallen, Grade 7 Accountant; and

Linda Carter, Head of Capital Resources.

The Director of Finance and Investment Director briefed the Committee on the Department of Health budget.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer question.

Alan Robinson left the meeting at 3:20 pm.

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

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Órlaithí Flynn left the meeting at 4:03 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to outline its support for the additional funding needed to deal with the outstanding pay settlement and to address waiting lists. The Committee also agreed to

request further detail on the Minister's planned allocation of additional funds and on the health outcomes to be achieved.

Órlaithí Flynn rejoined the meeting at 4:08 pm.

7. 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 noted correspondence from the Minister of Health advising that he was minded to seek a further extension to the powers in the Coronavirus Act 2020 beyond 24 March 2024 whilst continuing to work to bring forward a permanent solution through a Public Health (Health Protection) Bill.

Alan Robinson rejoined the meeting at 4:09 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further urgent clarification from the Department of Health on: the public health rationale for the continued extension; legislative alternatives to the proposed extension; and timescales relating to the planned Public Health (Health Protection) Bill.

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

8. SL1 The Human Medicines (Amendments Relating to Coronavirus and Influenza) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The following officials from the Department of Health joined the meeting at 4:32 pm:

Canice Ward, Head of Medicines Regulatory Group;

Chris Garland, Senior Principal Pharmaceutical Officer;

Karen Simpson, Head of Medicines Legislation Unit;

Martin Coleman, Head of Vaccination and Screening Policy Branch; and

Gary Maxwell, Head of Health Development Policy.

The officials briefed the Committee on three proposed statutory rules relating to amendments to the Misuse of Drugs Regulations and the Human Medicines Regulations.

Colin McGrath left the meeting at 4:39 pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The Committee considered the proposal by the Department of Health to make a statutory rule to support the continuing supply, distribution and administration of COVID-19 and influenza vaccines.

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

9. SL1 The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered the proposal by the Department of Health to make a Statutory Rule to place Cumyl-PeGaClone, Diphenidine, Ephedrine and Methoxyphenidine in the Misuse of Drugs Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002 to give effect to the advice of Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs and ensure that the legislative arrangements in Northern Ireland will be in line with GB.

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

10. SL1 The Misuse of Drugs (Designation) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered the proposal by the Department of Health to make a Statutory Rule to place Cumyl-PeGaClone, Diphenidine, Ephendine and Methoxyphenidine in the Misuse of Drugs (Designation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001 to give effect to the advice of Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs and ensure that the legislative arrangements in Northern Ireland will be in line with GB.

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

11. SL1 The Health and Social Care Pensions Schemes (Partial Retirement etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered the proposal by the Department of Health to make a Statutory Rule to introduce a package of new retirement flexibilities that are designed to offer staff increased options at the end of their careers, enabling them to return to work and continue to build pension after retirement, if they wish to do so.

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

12. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from Barnardo's NI setting out the issues affecting children and families.
- ii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee to the Minister of Health outlining the function of the committee and providing information on how it will carry out its business.
- iii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee to the Minister of Health regarding the House of Lords, European Affairs Sub-Committee on the Windsor Framework's ongoing inquiry into veterinary medicines.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from Pivotal, a public policy think tank, offering to discuss its work and recent briefing papers with the Chairperson.

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

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance enclosing a copy of the Report on the 2022 Review of the Effects of the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

- vi. The Committee considered a request from NIC-ICTU to brief the Committee.

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

- vii. The Committee considered a request from Marie Curie that death, dying and bereavement are included in the Committee's work plans and an invitation to visit Marie Curie Belfast Hospice.

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

- viii. The Committee noted the Investment Strategy NI February 2024 Investing Activity Report for the Department of Health.

- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from Relate NI requesting to meet the Committee to discuss its key policy priorities.

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

- x. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the protection and safeguarding of vulnerable adults and the role of the RQIA.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would consider how information on inquiries, reviews and investigations are communicated to the people affected and/ or their families when discussing the committee's work programme and strategic priorities.

- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from a community pharmacist regarding the funding of community pharmacy services.

The Committee noted that arrangements to receive briefing from Community Pharmacy NI were being progressed.

xii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the review of the cases of the deceased patients of Michael Watt.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask RQIA for an update on the deceased patient review since the publication of the 2022 report and for information on planned next steps.

13. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to rearrange its scheduled informal briefing from the Department of Health on the Encompass system.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

14. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

15. 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, 7 March 2024.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:57 pm.

Liz Kimmins MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

7 March 2024