



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

15 May 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

- Philip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)
- Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Alan Chambers MLA
- Diane Dodds MLA
- Órlaithí Flynn MLA
- Nuala McAllister MLA
- Alan Robinson MLA

Apologies: None

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Linda Dillon MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

In Attendance: Keith McBride, Clerk
Oliver Bellew, Assistant Clerk
Angela McParland, Assistant Clerk
Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor
Martina Mullin-O'Hare, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

The Chairperson thanked the staff of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service for facilitating an excellent and insightful tour of its world class learning and development facility in Cookstown.

GP Contracts

The Committee noted the results of the recent General Practitioner referendum where GPs voted overwhelmingly to reject the 2025/26 General Medical Services contract offered by the Department of Health. The Committee expressed its disappointment at the outcome of the vote and encouraged the Minister of Health to re-engage constructively with the stakeholders with a view to reaching a speedy resolution.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the British Medical Association to provide a briefing on the matter at its next meeting.

Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 2.05pm.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2025.

4. Matters Arising

None.

5. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services - Oral Briefing by Southern Area Hospice Services

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.05pm:

- Liz Cuddy, Chief Executive, Southern Area Hospice;
- Bridget Lynch, Director of Care, Southern Area Hospice; and,
- Bernie Torley, Nurse Manager, Southern Area Hospice.

The Chairperson welcomed the representatives and thanked them and their organisation for their contributions to the inquiry to date.

The representatives briefed the Committee on Access to Palliative Care.

Órlaithí Flynn joined the meeting at 2.10pm.

Diane Dodds joined the meeting at 2.29pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses and their organisation for the work it does in providing palliative care and for providing such a comprehensive briefing.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

6. SL1 The Health and Social Care Pension Scheme (Amendment No.2) Regulations NI 2025

The Committee considered SL1 The Health and Social Care Pension Scheme (Amendment No.2) Regulations NI 2025 which proposed to make technical and miscellaneous amendments to the Pension Scheme Regulations.

The Committee noted that similar regulations had been brought into force with equivalent NHS Pension Schemes in other jurisdictions and that the relevant impact assessments had concluded that no adverse impacts were anticipated. The Committee also noted that the Department would monitor the effect of the amendments on scheme members.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make the Statutory Rule.

7. Maternity Review Report Implementation – Departmental Written Briefing

The Committee noted that the Department had requested an extension to the deadline for providing a written update on the matter.

8. Hospital Car Parking Charges update – Departmental Written Briefing

The Committee noted a Departmental written update on the Hospital Car Parking Charges and in particular an eight-week update on the new traffic management system at hospital sites.

9. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services – Oral Briefing by Northern Health and Social Care Trust and Southern Health and Social Care Trusts

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.44pm:

- Alison Campbell Smyth, Assistant Director for Community Care, Northern Health and Social Care Trust;

- Dr Mary Ann McCann, Palliative Medical Consultant, Northern Health and Social Care Trust;
- Dr Louise McNutt, Palliative Medical Consultant, Northern Health and Social Care Trust;
- Dr Sarah Cousins, Palliative Medical Consultant, Southern Health and Social Care Trust; and,
- Dr Gemma Ryder, Palliative Medical Consultant, Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

The Chairperson welcomed the representatives and thanked them and their organisations for their contributions to the inquiry to date.

The representatives briefed the Committee on Access to Palliative Care.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarity on the parameters of its audit on palliative care and a timeframe for its anticipated completion.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

10. Six-monthly update on Workforce – Departmental Briefing

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.47pm:

- Phil Rodgers, Director of Workforce Policy, Department of Health;
- Peter Barbour, Head of Workforce Policy, Department of Health;
- Stephen Galway, Head of WPD Business Support Unit, Department of Health;
- Rodney Redmond, Head of Workforce Strategy, Department of Health; and,
- Katherine Ferguson, Head of Pay and Employment Unit, Department of Health.

The Chairperson welcomed the officials and invited them to brief the Committee.

The officials provided an update on workforce issues within the Department of Health.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Nuala McAllister left the meeting at 4.35pm.

Danny Donnelly MLA declared an interest as a Band 5 and Band 6 nurse who works for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

Colin McGrath left the meeting at 4.40pm.

Órlaithí Flynn left the meeting at 4.47pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted correspondence between the Department and Parents4Pegs in respect of additional support for children with autism and/or a learning disability who require surgery at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department in respect of a progress report on the work achieved on the Improving Health within Criminal Justice Strategy.
- iii. The Committee noted a Departmental response to Members' queries arising from its inquiry into Palliative Care.
- iv. The Committee noted a submission by the Patient and Client Council in respect of its inquiry into Palliative Care.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the submission further at its Compassionate Communities evidence session which had been scheduled for

22 May and in line with the Department's responses on Advanced Care Planning policy implementation.

- v. The Committee noted a request from Alliance for Choice to brief the Committee on Stanton Healthcare.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the request in its list of informal meetings.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to forward a copy of the correspondence to the Department and RQIA for comment.

- vi. The Committee noted a copy of the Analysis of 2024-25 Outturn and Forecast Outturn from the Committee for Finance.
- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual in respect of Wilson's Disease.
- viii. The Committee noted a Ministerial Statement in respect of tackling waiting lists which had also been emailed to Members on 6 May 2025.
- ix. Members noted a Departmental response to Committee queries on HPV testing at the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.
- x. The Committee noted a Departmental response to its query on the role and remit of RQIA.
- xi. The Committee noted a Departmental response to Assembly Research and Information Services in respect of Key Information Summaries and their interface with some acute settings systems.
- xii. The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of a proposed Tobacco and Vapes Bill.

- xiii. The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of a Legislative Consent Motion on the Westminster Rare Cancers Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a Departmental briefing on the LCM.

- xiv. The Committee noted a Departmental response to its queries on the governance arrangements for the new build of the Children's Hospital. The Committee expressed its disappointment at the response and was content to await a further response before discussing the issue further with Departmental officials.

- xv. Members noted a further Departmental response in respect of Community Pharmacy.

- xvi. Members noted correspondence from Ladies with Letters in respect of the Committee's ongoing discussions with the Department in respect of the Cytology Review.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the letter to the Minister for comment.

- xvii. The Committee noted correspondence between the Committee for Justice and the Department of Health in respect of Child Contact Centres.

- xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure in respect of Final Budget Allocations 2025-26 – Disaggregation of Programme for Government priorities.

- xix. Members noted a request from Eimer's Wish to meet with the Committee.

- xx. The Committee noted an invitation from Cancer Research UK to attend its upcoming webinar on Investing for Impact.

Agreed: It was agreed that Members would respond to the invitation directly.

- xxi. Members noted a request from Parkinson's UK to meet with the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the request in its list of informal meetings.

- xxii. The Committee noted a Departmental response to queries raised at the meeting on 20 March 2025 in respect of its consultation engagement with persons of lived experience of serious adverse incidents.

- xxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the British Medical Association in respect of the General Medical Services contract offer which had been rejected by General Practitioners in a recent referendum. The Chairperson reminded members that the issue had been addressed in Chairperson's Business.

- xxiv. The Committee noted a copy of the Pathway to Progression report from the Royal College of Nursing.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson reminded Members of the Committee's planned visit Common Youth in Waring Street, Belfast at 11am on Thursday 22 May.

The Chairperson informed Members that an informal meeting with the Pharmaceutical Society had been arranged for Tuesday 27 May at 1pm in Room 21.

The Chairperson reminded Members of a stakeholder event with people with lived experiences of palliative care which had been scheduled for 12 June and that all Members were encouraged to attend as the event will form a significant part of the Committee's inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

13. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Reimagine Childcare Collective to an informal meeting.

14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place at 2pm on Thursday 22 May 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.06pm.

Philip McGuigan MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

22 May 2025