



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

1 May 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

- Philip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)
- Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Alan Chambers MLA
- Linda Dillon MLA
- Diane Dodds MLA

Apologies: None

Present by Video or Teleconference:

- Órlaithí Flynn MLA
- Nuala McAllister MLA
- Colin McGrath MLA
- Alan Robinson MLA

In Attendance: Keith McBride, Clerk
Oliver Bellew, Assistant Clerk
Angela McParland, Assistant Clerk
Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor

The meeting commenced at 2.02pm in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

Home Care Services

The Chairperson informed Members that the six-monthly update on the Department's handling of issues within domiciliary and home care, which had been scheduled for this meeting, would not be proceed as scheduled.

Members noted that the Committee Office had reiterated to officials the importance of the briefing and requested that it be re-scheduled for the meeting on 22 May 2025.

Meeting with Permanent Secretary

Members noted that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson had met with the Interim Permanent Secretary of the Department. The Chairperson informed Members that the Interim Permanent Secretary would be attending the Committee meeting scheduled for 29 May 2025 to provide a joint briefing with the Minister.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

The Chairperson commended the work of the NI Fire and Rescue Service under dangerous and challenging conditions during the recent wildfires. The Committee expressed its gratitude to the Service for this work.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 10 April 2025.

4. Matters Arising

None.

5. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services - Oral Briefing by Association of Palliative Medicine of Great Britain and Ireland; Regional Palliative Medicine Group; Paediatric Palliative Care Network; and, NI Hospice

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.04pm:

- Dr Matthew Doré, Consultant in Palliative Medicine, Honorary Secretary of the Association for Palliative Medicine of Great Britain and Ireland (APM);
- Dr Alan McPherson, Consultant in Palliative Medicine, Chair of the Regional Palliative Medicine Group Northern Ireland (RPMG);
- Dr David Graham, Consultant Paediatrician, cochair of the Northern Ireland Paediatric Palliative Care Network; and
- Dr Clare White, Consultant in Palliative Medicine, Northern Ireland Hospice.

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

The representatives briefed the Committee on Access to Palliative Care.

Órliaithí Flynn joined the meeting at 2.11pm.

Linda Dillon joined the meeting at 2.21pm.

Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 2.56pm.

Danny Donnelly declared an interest as a nurse who has previously worked with patients receiving palliative care.

The Chairperson updated the Committee on correspondence which had been received in relation to cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information from the Department on individualised end of life care documentation.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to seek legal advice on the Department's statutory duty to provide palliative care.

6. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services – Oral Briefing by Research and Information Services

The following official joined the meeting at 3.58pm:

- Sinead McMurray – Researcher – Research and Information Service.

The official briefed the Committee on her research paper on Access to Palliative Care Services: Global Perspectives – How Other Countries Fund and Deliver Palliative Care.

Colin McGrath left the meeting at 4.27pm.

Alan Robinson left the meeting at 4.30pm.

Nuala McAllister left the meeting at 4.33pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the official for her attendance.

7. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a Departmental response to its request for further information in respect of the Department's 2025/26 Resource and Capital Budget briefing on 27 March 2025.

- ii. The Committee considered a Departmental response to correspondence it had shared from Community Pharmacy NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response to CPNI for comment.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to seek further clarification on the response and specifically on the number of businesses in breach of contract including the late payment of bills and missed Direct Debits.

- iii. The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of Respite Services and Short Breaks.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response to the Children's Law Centre.

- iv. The Committee noted an update on the Department's ongoing review of Adolescent and Young Adult cancer services.

- v. The Committee noted a Departmental update on provisions within the Mental Capacity Act for capability assessments for young people with learning disabilities.

- vi. The Committee noted a general update on work related to the Mental Capacity Act (NI) 2016.

- vii. The Committee noted a progress report on the HSC Workforce Strategy 2026.

- viii. Members noted a response to the Committee's questions following the Departmental briefing on the Review of Emergency General Surgery at the South West Acute Hospital on 13 March 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request the specific number of patients who entered the escalation process as a result of extended stays in an ambulance.

- ix. The Committee noted a Departmental update on instances of violence and aggression against HSC staff.
- x. The Committee considered a further Departmental response in respect of the Cytology Screening Review.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response to the Ladies with Letters group for comment and to schedule a Departmental oral briefing in the Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to request an explanation of how the Committee can be informed of individual's performance in one Trust, but not in other Trusts.

Agreed: The Committee also agreed to seek further information on who was on the Review Panel that carried out a review of how the cytology screening contract was awarded.

- xi. The Committee noted a Departmental response in respect of concerns raised by an individual regarding the Children with Disability Service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response to the individual for information.

- xii. Members noted Departmental correspondence acknowledging receipt of the Committee's views on the proposed amendments to the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2017.

- xiii. The Committee noted a copy of a Departmental response to individuals in respect of their concerns about mental health provision for adults with learning disabilities in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the response to the individuals for information.

- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the British Medical Association to the Minister of Health which expressed concern about delays in pay recommendations for Doctors' and Dentists and patient safety concerns for doctors. The Committee noted its concerns in relation to the issues raised in the correspondence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request sight of the Departmental responses and an assurance that the necessary actions would be taken to resolve the issues.

- xv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Justice Committee regarding police attendance at children's homes.

- xvi. Members noted a request from Cubbie to brief the Committee on its work.

Agreed: Members agreed to add the organisation to its list of attendees for the Committee Clinic.

- xvii. Members noted a request from NIC-ICTU to brief the Committee on its work.

Agreed: Members agreed to add the organisation to its list of attendees for the Committee Clinic.

- xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Professional Standards Authority in respect of the regulatory performance of the Health and Care Professions Council.

- xix. The Committee noted an invitation from the Open University to attend the Why Riot report launch.

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

- xx. The Committee noted a request from the Royal College of Psychiatrists for an online meeting with the Chairperson to discuss a workforce crisis in their sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson would hold an online meeting with the organisation to discuss the matters and that the Chair would report back to the Committee following the meeting.

- xxi. The Committee noted correspondence between the Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Department of Health and Social Care in respect of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill and awaits a copy of the response from the Under-Secretary of State.

Diane Dodds declared an interest as her husband is of a member of the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee.

- xxii. The Committee noted a copy of the Investing Activity Report for April 2025 from ISNI.
- xxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual in respect of community mental health services.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson reminded Members of the Committee's planned visit to the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service's Learning and Development Centre in Cookstown on Thursday 8 May.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

9. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an informal meeting with the Reimagine Children's Collective.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an informal meeting with nurses working in prisons.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place at 2.30pm on Thursday 8 May 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.52pm.

Philip McGuigan MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

8 May 2025