



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

20 March 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Philip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)

Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Alan Chambers MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Alan Robinson MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Linda Dillon MLA

Diane Dodds MLA

Nuala McAllister MLA

Apologies:

None

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

The meeting commenced at 2.05pm in public session.

1. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services – Oral Briefing by RalSe

The following official joined the meeting at 2.12pm:

- Dr Grainne Crealey, Researcher, Research and Information Services.

The official briefed the Committee on the current provision of palliative and end of life care services.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Danny Donnelly MLA declared an interest as a former nurse.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for clarity on the ability of palliative care patients to access 24-hour services, including telephone support, and the necessity to ensure that such patients are not forced to attend Emergency Departments of local hospitals.

The Chairperson thanked the official for her attendance.

2. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services – Oral Briefing by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Western Health and Social Care Trust, and the NI Ambulance Service

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.57pm:

- Dr Joan Regan, Clinical Director for Palliative Care, BHSCT;

- Roisin McSwiggan, Divisional Nurse, Older Peoples Services, BHSCT;
- Prof. Max Watson, Consultant in Palliative Care Medicine, WHSCT;
- Bernie McCafferty, Assistant Director of Intermediate Care Services, WHSCT; and,
- Dr Nigel Ruddell, Medical Director, NI Ambulance Service.

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

Alan Robinson joined the meeting at 3.04pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request information on:

- The lack of joined up approach to “Do not attempt to resuscitate” documentation across the trusts and in community and hospital settings;
- The Department’s assessment of the reasons for the nine per cent increase in excess death rates since the Covid pandemic; and
- The consideration the Department has given to ensuring all pharmacies have qualified prescribers within their staffing compliment.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Nuala McAllister left the meeting at 3.58pm.

Colin McGrath left the meeting at 3.59pm.

3. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services – Oral Briefing by Carer’s NI and Rural Community Network

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.59pm:

- Richard Meade, Devolved Nations Director, Carers NI;
- Áine Magee, Public Affairs and Media Manager, Carers NI;
- Kate Clifford, Director, Rural Community Network; and,
- Samantha Gallagher, Policy and Public Affairs Officer, Rural Community Network.

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

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Alan Chambers left the meeting at 4.20pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ascertain the Department's funding plans to improve community transport and what work has been taken forward with other Departments such as Infrastructure and Education to improve the transport infrastructure and make better use of transport resources such as Education Authority buses which are not in use during school holidays.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Communities to request whether the Minister has any plans in relation to continuing income support for a carer following the death of a person in their care;

Alan Chambers rejoined the meeting at 4.41pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

[Extract]