Access to Palliative Care in Northern Ireland

1. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this inquiry is to examine the provision of palliative care services, including in primary, secondary and specialist care areas. The inquiry aims to assess the adequacy and accessibility, identify gaps and areas for improvement, and make recommendations to ensure sustainable funding and high-quality care for patients with life-limiting illnesses.

2. Objectives

- **Evaluate Current Provision**: Assess the current state of palliative care services, including the range of services available, their geographical distribution, and the quality of care provided. (Evidence based)
- **Funding Mechanisms**: Examine the funding structures for hospices, including government contributions, charitable donations, and other sources of funding. (Research based)
- **Accessibility and Equity**: Investigate the accessibility of palliative care services across different regions and demographic groups in Northern Ireland. (Research based)
- **Coordination and Integration**: Explore the level of coordination between different healthcare providers and the integration of palliative care with other health services. (Evidence based)
- **Challenges and Barriers**: Identify the main challenges and barriers faced by hospices and palliative care providers, including financial, operational and regulatory issues. (Evidence based)
- **Future Needs**: Assess future needs and demands for palliative care services in light of demographic changes and emerging healthcare trends. (Research based)
- **Support for patients and families**: Assess what level of support is currently provided, looking at the journey of a patient and family through end-of-life care. (Evidence based)

3. Methodology

- **Evidence Collection**: Collect written and oral evidence from a wide range of stakeholders, including:
    - Healthcare professionals
    - Hospice administrators
    - Patients and their families
    - Charitable organisations
    - Health and social care bodies
    - Department of Health
- **Visits**: Conduct site visits to hospices and other palliative care facilities to observe practices and gather first-hand information.
- **Public Consultation**: Engage with the public through surveys and consultations to gather a broad range of views and experiences.
- **Research**

    - **Comparative Analysis**: Review palliative care and hospice funding models in other regions and countries to identify best practices and potential improvements.
    - **Accessibility**: What services are available across Northern Ireland.
    - **Future needs**: Assessment of future requirements for palliative care considering an ageing population.

4. Key Questions

- **Current Provision and Quality**:
    - What is the current state of palliative care services in Northern Ireland?
    - How do these services compare to national and international standards?
    - What are the experiences and outcomes for patients and families?
- **Funding**:
    - How are hospices currently funded, and what are the main sources of funding?
    - What is the role of the Department of Health in commissioning services from hospices?
    - Is the current funding model sustainable and sufficient to meet demand?
    - How do funding levels in Northern Ireland compare to other regions?
- **Accessibility and Equity**:
    - Are palliative care services equally accessible to all who need them, regardless of location, socioeconomic status, or other factors?
    - What barriers exist that prevent equitable access to palliative care?
- **Coordination and Integration**:
    - How well are palliative care services integrated with other health and social care services?
    - What are the benefits and challenges of current coordination efforts?
- **Future Planning**:
    - Is there a need for a new Palliative Care Strategy for Northern Ireland?
    - What are the projected future needs for palliative care in Northern Ireland?
    - How should services and funding models adapt to meet these needs?
- **Support for patients and families**:
    - When does palliative care start and end?
    - What support is available to families during end-of-life care?
    - Who should provide support to families?

5. Engagement

The Committee will publish the final draft of this document and request evidence on the questions above. The main focus of this call for evidence is to hear from this working in the sector.

Separately a questionnaire will be produced for those accessing services and focussing on how easy it was to access and the support that they received. This will be put on the Committee website and be provided to hospices to share with families.

The Committee will visit each of the 5 hospices in Northern Ireland – Marie Curie Hospice, NI Hospice, Children's Hospice, Foyle Hospice and Southern Area Hospice. During visits we will meet with families to discuss access and support.

6. Reporting and Recommendations

The inquiry will culminate in a comprehensive report detailing findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Recommendations will aim to improve the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of palliative care and hospice services in Northern Ireland.

7. Other

- **Volunteering at hospices – opportunity for Members to take part – campaign to promote volunteering**

- **Need to consider support for Members/staff and those engaging with the Committee when visiting sites, meeting people and hearing real life experience**

8. Timeline

Date	
Early October	Launch of Inquiry and call for evidence
October – December	Evidence gathering Research briefings Site visits
December	Consideration of Evidence
January – February	Oral evidence sessions
March - April	Consideration of recommendations
May	Publication of Report