



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday, 23 July 2020
Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings**

Present: Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson)
Ms Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson) *
Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA
Mr Gerry Carroll MLA
Mr Alan Chambers MLA
Mr Alex Easton MLA
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA*
Mr Colin McGrath MLA
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA*

In Attendance: Ms Éilis Haughey (Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Lamont (Clerical Supervisor)

**These Members attended the meeting via video-conferencing.*

The meeting commenced at 10.32 am in public session.

The meeting was suspended momentarily on a number of occasions as a result of technical difficulties with the video-conferencing facility.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised Members that he had given interviews to the media where he had been introduced as Chairperson of the Health Committee, even though he had advised that he was speaking in his capacity as a Sinn Féin representative.

The Chairperson advised that he had attended a meeting of the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network.

The Chairperson suggested that, given the number of stakeholder groups requesting to brief the Committee, consideration be given to holding a stakeholder event via video conferencing in the autumn.

The Chairperson referred to the Department's decision to hold a consultation on a soft opt-out system for organ donation in Northern Ireland, and acknowledged the work of the family of Dáithí MacGabhann on the issue.

The Chairperson advised Members of proposed arrangements for dealing with Freedom of Information requests during the summer recess period.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, during the recess period, to submit views on the releasing or withholding of information, in response to any non-routine or contentious Freedom of Information requests received.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2020.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee considered a draft letter to the Minister of Health regarding the Review of RQIA Resignations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed an amendment to the draft letter.

5. Briefing by the HSC Trusts on reinstatement of services and budget issues

Officials from the Health and Social Care Trusts joined the meeting via video-conference at 10.38 am.

Dr Anne Kilgallen, Chief Executive, Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Seamus McGoran, Interim Chief Executive, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Ms Jennifer Welsh, Chief Executive, Northern Health and Social Care Trust

The officials briefed the Committee on the Trusts' plans in relation to the reinstatement of services and budgetary pressures.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The officials agreed to provide the Committee with further information on a number of issues raised by Members during the question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The meeting was suspended at 12.15 pm and resumed at 12.23 pm.

6. COVID-19 Disease Response - Briefing from the Chief Nursing Officer

The Chief Nursing Officer, Ms Charlotte McArdle, joined the meeting via video-conference at 12.23 pm.

Ms McArdle briefed the Committee on the impact of COVID-19 on the provision of nursing and allied health services and the restoration of services.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson declared an interest as formerly being employed as a social worker and currently taking a career break, being a member of the trade union, NIPSA and having a relative who is a nurse.

Ms Pam Cameron declared an interest as having a relative who is a nurse.

Mr Alex Easton left the meeting at 12.54 pm.

Ms McArdle agreed to provide the Committee with further information on issues raised during the question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Ms McArdle for her attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted correspondence relevant to the briefing session from the Minister of Health regarding issues arising from its briefing by the Royal College of Nursing on 18 June.

The meeting was suspended at 1.26 pm and resumed at 2.18 pm.

Present: Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson)
 Ms Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson) *
 Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA
 Mr Alan Chambers MLA
 Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA*
 Mr Colin McGrath MLA
 Mr Pat Sheehan MLA*

**These Members attended the meeting via video-conferencing.*

The Committee agreed to move to agenda item 8.

7. SR 2020/90 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Ms Elaine Colgan, Chief of Staff to the Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health, joined the meeting via video conference at 2.18 pm.

Mr Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 2.27 pm.

Ms Colgan briefed the Committee on:

- SR 2020/90 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020,
- SR 2020/97 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Advice for Persons Travelling to Northern Ireland) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020,
- SR 2020/138 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and
- SR 2020/140 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session and Ms Colgan agreed to provide the Committee with further information on issues raised during the session.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Colgan for her attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted correspondence relevant to the briefing session from the Minister of Health regarding the operation and enforcement of SR 2020/90 and SR2020/97.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information from the Department on a number of issues raised by Members.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/90 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and had no objection to the Rule.

8. SR 2020/97 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Advice for Persons Travelling to Northern Ireland) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/97 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Advice for Persons Travelling to Northern Ireland) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and had no objection to the Rule.

9. SR 2020/138 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of SR 2020/138 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 until a future date.

10. SR 2020/140 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of SR 2020/140 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International

Travel) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 until a future date.

11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health regarding the requested meeting with neurology recall patients.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Department's response to the individual who raised the matter, to write to the Department to request a date by which the meeting will be arranged and to advise the individual of this further letter.

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding Data Strategy and Transformation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include this issue on the Forward Work Programme and to schedule an oral briefing from the Department.

- iii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding Digital Aspects of Transformation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include this issue on the Forward Work Programme and to schedule an oral briefing from the Department.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding an amendment to the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include this issue on the Forward Programme and to schedule an oral briefing from the Department.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Maurice Bradley MLA to the Minister of Health regarding dental services.

- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from the British Association of Private Dentists NI, the British Dental Association and eleven individual dentists, regarding the briefing from the Chief Dental Officer to the Committee for Health on 9 July 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for comment, and to consider a further briefing from the Chief Dental Officer and Director of General Healthcare Policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the Committee's letter to the Department to the British Dental Association, the British Association of Private Dentists NI and the individual dentists who wrote to the Committee.

vii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the British Dental Association to the Northern Ireland Executive.

viii. The Committee considered a response from the Belfast Trust to the Committee's correspondence regarding the resumption of services at the Regional Fertility Centre.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department and the Belfast Trust to ask for the reasons behind the delay in the reopening of the Regional Fertility Centre, and to request a date for the resumption of services; and to advise the individual who raised the matter with the Committee of this action.

ix. The Committee considered correspondence from Fairness in Fertility regarding the resumption of fertility treatment at the Regional Fertility Centre.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Fairness in Fertility to advise of Committee correspondence with the Department on the matter.

x. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding HSCNI employees and COVID-19.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Ministers of Health and Finance, to ask what alternatives are proposed to address the needs of carers and if Ministers will look into supporting those unable to work in the meantime.

xi. The Committee considered the copy of correspondence from an individual regarding Public Interest Disclosure Statement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the individual to ask that he keep the Committee updated on the matter.

xii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the Cumberlege Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the individual to advise of Committee correspondence with the Department on this matter.

xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding access to cannabis medication.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to enquire about its participation in the Refractory Epilepsy Specialist Clinical Advisory Service (RESCAS).

xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from NIPSA regarding the Strategic Framework for Rebuilding HSC services.

xv. The Committee noted the July Economic Statement from the Department of Finance.

- xvi. The Committee considered the report from Independent SAGE entitled, “A Better Way to Go: Towards Zero COVID.”
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the report to the Health Minister, to ask him to commit to a zero COVID objective, and to seek his views on each of the recommendations.
- xvii. The Committee considered a request from Community Pharmacy NI to brief the Committee.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to include this request in the Forward Work Programme.
- xviii. The Committee considered a request from Families Involved NI to brief the Committee.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to include this request in the Forward Work Programme.
- xix. The Committee considered a request from the Stroke Association to brief the Committee.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to include this request in the Forward Work Programme.
- xx. The Committee noted the sixteenth and seventeenth reports from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.
- xxi. The Committee considered the response from South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to the Committee’s enquiry regarding the timelines for addressing complaints.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the response, pending further consideration on receipt of responses from the other Health and Social Care Trusts on the matter.
- xxii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the summer recess.
- xxiii. The Committee considered correspondence from Chartered Society of Physiotherapy regarding COVID-19 feedback request.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed that Members would respond individually to the request.
- xxiv. The Committee considered correspondence from BirthWise regarding equal access to maternity services across Northern Ireland.
- Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification on the disparities in access to maternity services for birth partners between the Trusts, and the reasons for such disparities.
- xxv. The Committee considered a response from the Department to the Committee’s request for information on research into the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to enquire which official has responsibility for this area of work within the Department.

- xxvi. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the All-Party Group on Reducing Harm Related to Gambling to the Minister, asking what Departmental support is available for those with a gambling addiction, and if gambling disorders will be included in the Mental Health Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note, pending future scrutiny of the Mental Health Strategy.

- xxvii. The Committee noted a letter from the Speaker, regarding the Assembly Commission's decision to establish a Youth Assembly.

The Committee returned to agenda item 7.

12. COVID-19 Disease Response – briefing regarding Contact Tracing

The following officials joined the meeting via video-conference at 3.45 pm:

Mr Dan West, Chief Digital Information Officer, Department of Health

Dr Eddie O'Neill, Consultant Medical Adviser, Health and Social Care Board

Mr Colm Harte, Technical Director, Nearform.

The officials briefed the Committee on contact tracing and the development of the 'StopCOVID NI' smartphone app.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The officials agreed to provide the Committee with further information on issues raised during the question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The session was reported by Hansard.

Mr Colin McGrath left the meeting at 3.57 pm.

13. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its Forward Work Programme.

The Committee noted an informal record of its planning session on 16 July 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider adding UNITE to its Forward Work Programme, to discuss the matter of registered childminders during the pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a joint briefing from the Department of Health and the Department of Health in the

14. Any Other Business

Concern was expressed about funding for the pilot project introducing the anti-HIV medication, PrEP, through GUM clinics.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask if this pilot project will continue to be funded.

15. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next committee meeting was to be scheduled at the call of the Chairperson.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 4.43 pm.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Date: _____