



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday, 9 July 2020
Room 30, 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 Éilís Haughey (Clerk)
Mr Brendan Miskelly (Clerical Officer)

**These Members attended the meeting via video conference.*

The meeting commenced at 10.38 am in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised Members that he had taken part in an online round-table discussion, the Chair of the House of Commons Health Committee, Mr Jeremy Hunt, the former Chief Scientific Adviser to the UK Government, Sir David King, and others, to discuss a report produced by Independent SAGE. The Chairperson advised that the report had been tabled and would be discussed later in the meeting.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2020.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson advised Members that he had sought procedural advice on a suggestion to invite the Junior Ministers to brief the Committee on the Executive's decision-making in relation to easing lock-down restrictions, and confirmed that there was no barrier to the Committee issuing any invitation which had a focus on health related matters.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to await the Minister of Health's response to the Committee's request for detail of the scientific evidence on which recent decisions have been made, before giving further consideration to inviting the Junior Ministers to brief the Committee.

5. COVID-19 Disease Response - Briefing from the Chief Dental Officer

Department of Health officials joined the meeting via video conference at 10.45 am.

Mr Michael Donaldson, Acting Chief Dental Officer, Department of Health

Mr Paul Montgomery, Acting Director of General Health Policy, Department of Health

Mr Donaldson briefed the Committee on the impact of COVID-19 on the provision of dental services and plans for the restoration of services.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Donaldson and Mr Montgomery for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted the following correspondence relevant to the briefing session:

- Correspondence from the British Association of Private Dentists NI regarding provision of PPE required for aerosol generating dental procedures.
- Correspondence from an individual dentist highlighting concerns regarding the impact of the pandemic on dentists and dental practices.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to follow up on matters of concern in writing and to request further information from the Department of Health on a number of issues raised by Members.

The meeting was suspended at 12.15 pm.

The meeting resumed at 12.25 pm.

6. 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 12.28 pm.

Ms Colgan briefed the Committee on SR 2020/90 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and SR 2020/97 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Advice for Persons Travelling to Northern Ireland) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which introduce measures to mitigate the risk of the spread of COVID-19 from people arriving in Northern Ireland.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Colgan for her attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of SR 2020/90 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 until its meeting on 23 July.

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

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of SR 2020/97 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Advice for Persons Travelling to Northern Ireland) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 until its meeting on 23 July.

The meeting was suspended at 1.01 pm.

The meeting resumed at 1.03 pm.

8. SR 2020/121 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 9) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Mr Nigel McMahon, Chief Environmental Health Officer, Department of Health, joined the meeting via video conference at 1.03 pm.

Mr McMahon briefed the Committee on SR 2020/121 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 9) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and SR 2020/128 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 10) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which provide for easements of the restrictions introduced in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Mr McMahon for his attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Members discussed the attendance at the funeral of Mr Bobby Storey.

The question was put that this Committee disassociate itself from the actions of any Members of the Committee for Health who attended the funeral of Mr Bobby Storey.

The Committee divided: Ayes 3; Noes 4; Abstentions 2.

AYES

Ms Pam Cameron
Mr Alan Chambers
Mr Alex Easton

NOES

Mr Gerry Carroll
Ms Órlaithí Flynn
Mr Colm Gildernew
Mr Pat Sheehan

ABSTAIN

Ms Paula Bradshaw
Mr Colin McGrath

The proposal fell.

The question was put that the Committee would write to the Commissioner for Standards to ask him to investigate the conduct of two Members of the Health Committee and whether there were breaches of the code of conduct in relation to the funeral of Mr Bobby Storey.

AYES

Ms Paula Bradshaw
Ms Pam Cameron
Mr Alan Chambers
Mr Alex Easton
Mr Colin McGrath

NOES

Mr Gerry Carroll
Ms Órlaithí Flynn
Mr Colm Gildernew
Mr Pat Sheehan

Agreed: That the Committee would write to the Commissioner for Standards to ask him to investigate the conduct of two Members of the Health Committee and whether there were breaches of the code of conduct in relation to the funeral of Mr Bobby Storey.

The Committee moved to agenda item 10.

9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health to issues the Committee had raised in relation to aerosol-generating procedures and PPE for paramedics and providing an update on a meeting between the Chief Allied Health Professions Officer and the College of Paramedics, to discuss these issues.
- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health in relation to comments made by a committee Member at the briefing session with the Minister and Chief Medical Officer on 30 June and noted that the Member concerned had addressed this matter directly with the Minister and the CMO. The Committee further noted an apology from Ms Bradshaw in relation to remarks made during that session.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health confirming that the organisations affected by the temporary modifications provided for in the Mental Capacity (Deprivation of Liberty) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2020, had been advised of the cessation of the temporary modifications with effect from 10 July.
- iv. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health to the Committee's request for an update on the Department's analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on people with diabetes and the implications for shielding.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask for clarification from the Department of Health on when the publication of coded death statistics would be published and to request a copy of this information as soon as it is available.

- v. The Committee noted a copy of an open letter from Diabetes UK to the Minister of Health and the Minister of the Economy, calling on the NI Executive to provide better protection for clinically vulnerable people returning to work, including those with diabetes.
- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health providing a copy of the terms of reference for the independent review into the RQIA Board resignations; and considered a related statement by former members of the Board of the RQIA on the independent review and its terms of reference.

The meeting moved into closed session at 1.54 pm

Ms Paula Bradshaw left the meeting at 1:58 pm.

The meeting moved into public session at 2.16 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Clerk to draft a letter outlining the concerns raised by Members in relation to the independent review and its terms of reference.

- vii. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health to the Committee's request for information on the governance and procedures for complaints to the Health and Social Care sector and corresponding Serious Adverse Incident investigations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to all of the Health and Social Care Trusts to enquire about timelines for addressing complaints, particularly long-standing complaints or those suspended due to COVID-19.

- viii. The Committee noted the publication by the Department of Health of the regional principles for visiting in health and social care settings and care home settings in Northern Ireland, for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ix. The Committee noted the Executive Office social media advertisement providing information on accessing support for people affected by domestic violence.

- x. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Finance to the Minister of Health and Minister of Finance, congratulating them on the successful delivery of PPE to key workers.
- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance, advising that the Executive had agreed to carry out a review of Arm's Length Bodies in accordance with the New Decade New Approach document and providing detail on the scope and timeline of the review.
- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Education providing a briefing paper from the National Deaf Children's Society on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the education of deaf children and young people.
- xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Justice requesting a copy of the information the Health Committee requested from the Department of Health on funding for the seven-year domestic and sexual violence and abuse strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the information to the Committee for Justice when received.

- xiv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Justice advising that the NI Policing Board has responsibility for the scrutiny of operational policing matters including the enforcement of the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations by the PSNI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the joint CAJ /Amnesty International briefing paper raising concerns about the enforcement of the regulations, to the NI Policing Board for consideration.

- xv. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Minister of Health, providing a copy of a written submission it had received from Solace NI, on Covid-19 and its financial impact on local government.

- xvi. The Committee considered a request from the Faculty of Homeopathy to meet the Committee to discuss the increased usage of homeopathic medicines during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the request as part of its Forward Work Programme.

- xvii. The Committee noted a NISRA report on the impact of Covid-19 on hospital waiting times as of 31 May 2020.

- xviii. The Committee noted the NISRA/ Department of Health report on Quarterly Carer's Statistics for Northern Ireland for January to March 2020.

- xix. The Committee noted, pending future scrutiny of Brexit-related matters, correspondence from the NIA EU Affairs Manager providing an update on the development of common frameworks.
- xx. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from BirthWise to the Minister of Health on the outcome of its survey on women's experiences of aspects of maternity care during the pandemic.
- xxi. The Committee noted the June 2020 ISNI Investing Activity Report for the Department of Health.
- xxii. The Committee considered a request from Unite to brief a joint meeting of the Education and Health Committees on the issues affecting registered childminders as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that in light of the Health Minister's recent announcement on the widening of access to childcare, it would enquire whether the requested briefing was still necessary.

- xxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from Alcoholics Anonymous responding to the Committee's request for information on the delivery of services as a result of the pandemic and planned resumption of services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the information provided by AA to the individual who had raised this issue with the Committee.

- xxiv. The Committee noted, pending further scrutiny of addiction and mental health services, the NI Audit Office report on addiction services in Northern Ireland.

- xxv. The Committee considered an invitation to the Chairperson to participate in a virtual round-table event with breastfeeding families hosted by Breastival, on 6 August, as part of world breastfeeding week.

Agreed: The Committee agreed it was content for the Chairperson to chair the event.

- xxvi. The Committee noted a report from Pivotal on the impact of COVID-19 on the NI economy.

- xxvii. The Committee considered a request from the Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation Partnership to brief the committee on the challenges of respiratory care and the need for a new respiratory health strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this request as part of its Forward Work Programme.

Mr Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 2.19 pm.

xxviii. The Committee considered a briefing paper from Londonderry Chamber on PPE procurement in NI and a related item of correspondence from a Professor of engineering who also supports the local production of PPE.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward both items of correspondence to the Department of Health for its consideration and copy to the Department of Finance and Department of Economy for information.

xxix. The Committee noted, pending scrutiny of mental health policy, correspondence from the Minister of Health providing his views on securing sustainable funding for the community crisis intervention service and providing an update on the planned review of mental health crisis services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Minister's response to Derry City and Strabane District Council.

xxx. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the closure of spinal surgeries as a result of the pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to advise the individual of the Committee's scrutiny role and to direct the individual to their local MLAs for support.

xxxi. The Committee considered the Examiner of Statutory Rules' fifteenth report of session 2019-2020 and noted: that the Examiner had no issues to raise in relation to SR 2020/109 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 7) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020; drew to the attention of the Assembly SR 2020/118 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 8) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 on the ground that they call for elucidation in one respect; and highlighted a breach of the 21-day rule in respect of SR 2020/104 The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

xxxii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence issued to the Family and Friends of Haemophilia NI on its behalf further to concerns raised by the group regarding individuals affected by the contaminated blood scandal.

xxxiii. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health to the Committee's query regarding cross-departmental co-operation on support for people with visual impairments applying social distancing measures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed forward a copy of the Minister's response to the Committee for the Communities.

xxxiv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health providing a copy of a response sent to an individual who had raised concerns with the Committee in relation to the re-opening of childcare facilities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the Minister's response to the Committee for Education.

xxxv. The Committee considered correspondence from Mr Chris Hazzard MP in relation to the future of emergency care in the Downe Hospital.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a written update on the review of urgent and emergency care and to ask when the report on this will be published.

xxxvi. The Committee considered a report from Independent SAGE, ‘A Better Way to Go: Towards a Zero Covid UK.’

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the report further at its next formal meeting as part of the Committee’s consideration of its position on next steps in dealing with the pandemic.

The Committee returned to its consideration of agenda item 8.

10. SR 2020/121 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 9) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 (continued)

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/121 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 9) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules’ report, recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

11. SR 2020/128 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 10) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/128 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 10) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules’ report, recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its Forward Work Programme.

13. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed the publication of the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review Report on 8 July and the Minister of Health’s response to the report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to ask for further detail on the Minister’s response to the report recommendations including actions and associated timescales.

14. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next committee meeting to be scheduled was a planning meeting to take place on Thursday, 16 July 2020 at 10.30 am via MS Teams.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 2.36 pm.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Date: _____