



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday, 25 June 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 Éilís Haughey (Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Lamont (Clerical Supervisor)

**Ms Flynn attended the meeting via telephone conferencing.*

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised Members that he had taken part in a number of media interviews in relation to the resignation of the RQIA Board.

The Chairperson also advised that he had met representatives of Derry Chamber of Commerce to discuss local production of PPE and that he had attended a meeting of the All-Party Group on Learning Disability.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

The meeting was suspended at 10.33 am.

The meeting resumed at 10.35 am.

5. SR 2020/103 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 6) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Mr Nigel McMahon, Chief Environmental Health Officer, Department of Health joined the meeting via telephone conferencing at 10.35 am.

Mr McMahon briefed the Committee on SR 2020/103 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 6) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which provide for further easements of restrictions.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

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

The Chairperson thanked Mr McMahon for his attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health what consideration it is giving to facilitate visits to care homes; visits to maternity units and allowing women to be accompanied at antenatal scans and appointments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to request further detail on the scientific evidence that is being used to inform the regulations which provide for easements of restrictions.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/103 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Amendment No. 6) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

The Chairperson advised that he and the Clerk would seek further advice in relation to a proposal to invite Executive Office Junior Ministers to brief the Committee on the Executive's decisions in relation to the easing of restrictions introduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr Colin McGrath left the meeting at 11.23 am.

6. SR 2020/104 The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/104 The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which will allow for fewer restrictions on the prescribing and supply of the cannabis-based medicine, Epidyolex.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/104 The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, had no objection to the Rule.

7. SR 2020/106 The Mental Capacity (Deprivation of Liberty) (Amendment) (Revocation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/106 The Mental Capacity (Deprivation of Liberty) (Amendment) (Revocation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which will revoke the Mental Capacity (Deprivation of Liberty) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, as the modifications provided by the original temporary regulations are no longer required.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2020/106 The Mental Capacity (Deprivation of Liberty) (Amendment) (Revocation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, had no objection to the Rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health to advise stakeholders affected by the temporary modifications, that these have now been removed.

8. Departmental Briefing: Update from the Chief Social Worker

Department of Health officials joined the meeting at 11.26 am.

Mr Sean Holland, Chief Social Worker, Department of Health

Mr Mark Lee, Director, Mental Health, Disability and Older People, Department of Health

Mr Colin McGrath re-joined the meeting at 11.27 am.

The officials briefed the Committee on issues relating to the provision of adult social care.

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.

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 briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted correspondence relevant to the briefing session from the NIHRC responding to the Committee's request for information relating to the consent issue of COVID-19 testing of residents of care homes.

Mr Alex Easton left the meeting at 12.46 pm.

Mr Colin McGrath left the meeting at 12.46 pm.

The meeting was suspended at 12.46 pm.

The meeting resumed at 1.01 pm.

9. Dentistry and the impact of COVID-19

Representatives from the British Dental Association NI (BDA) and the British Association of Private Dentists NI (BAPD) joined the meeting via telephone conferencing at 1.01 pm.

Ms Caroline Lappin, Chairperson, BDA

Mr Richard Graham, Chairperson, NI Dental Practice Committee, BDA

Mr Tristen Kelso, Director, BDA

Ms Paula McHenry, Committee Member, BAPD

The representatives briefed the Committee on the impact of COVID-19 on the provision of dental services and the restoration of services.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Gerry Carroll declared an interest as having a relative who is a dentist.

Mr Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 1.35 pm.

The Chairperson thanked the BDA and BAPD representatives for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted an open letter from the British Association of Private Dentists NI to the Health Minister on the current restrictions on dental care in NI.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Chief Dental Officer to brief the Committee on the issues impacting the provision of dental services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 1.58 pm.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted, pending discussion at the next scheduled briefing with the Minister, correspondence from the Minister of Health responding to the Committee's request for information on NERVTAG recommendations regarding PPE.

- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health responding to the Committee's request for information on the impact of COVID-19 on services and treatments for Multiple Sclerosis patients.
- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing information further to his briefing session with the Committee on 20 May 2020.
- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding recent media coverage of concerns raised by the Chief Medical Officer with QUB.
- v. The Committee noted, pending discussion at the next scheduled briefing with the Minister, a response from the Minister of Health to the Committee's enquiries relating to AHP representation on the new HSC Management Board.
- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Communities regarding the need for cross-departmental consideration of the difficulties people with visual impairments encounter when seeking to adhere to social distancing measures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Health for its consideration.

- vii. The Committee noted advice from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to the Department of Justice on the Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill.
- viii. The Committee noted, pending receipt of a reply from the Department to its letter on diabetes and COVID-19, correspondence from an individual concerned that there is insufficient guidance for employers of staff with diabetes, to protect this group during and after the coronavirus pandemic.
- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual requesting information on the reopening of AA meetings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to AA to request information on its current approach to service provision as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and plans for restarting services.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from Irish Advocacy Network providing information on its mental health advocacy role and work.
- xi. The Committee noted the BMA conference report 'Better Culture, Better Care, creating trust, learning and accountability within health and social care.'
- xii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment (NIUSE) regarding the future funding of disability employment services and requesting an opportunity to brief the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite NIUSE and other relevant stakeholders to brief the Committee.

- xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding dental costs for students due to leave full-time education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek clarity from the Department of Health in relation to dental costs for school leavers.

- xiv. The Committee noted, pending future scrutiny of the health aspects of Brexit, correspondence from the Committee for the Economy advising of the House of Lords International Agreements sub-committee's Inquiry into UK-US Trade Negotiations, which will include in its initial focus, healthcare and drug pricing.

- xv. The Committee considered correspondence from the British Acupuncture Council regarding the classification of acupuncture practitioners in NI Executive coronavirus guidelines.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek clarification from the Department of Health in relation to this matter.

- xvi. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding current visiting restrictions in maternity units and noted that the Committee had agreed to seek clarification in relation to this matter, as part of its ongoing consideration of the easement regulations.

- xvii. The Committee noted, pending further scrutiny, a NISRA report on the impact of COVID-19 on hospital waiting times.

- xviii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for the Economy to the Minister for the Economy, on briefing it received from the NI Union for Supported Employment.

- xix. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Education Committee to the Minister of Health regarding the Mental Health Action Plan.

- xx. The Committee noted the 2019 Annual Report and Accounts for the General Dental Council.

- xxi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Health Minister regarding the appointment of an interim Mental Health Champion.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Professor O'Neill to congratulate her on her appointment.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its Forward Work Programme.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.09 pm.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Chairperson's Liaison Group on arrangements relating to plenary sittings of the Assembly.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to provide its views on arrangements relating to plenary sittings of the Assembly, to the Chairperson's Liaison Group.

The meeting moved into public session at 2.19 pm.

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 30 June 2020 at 1.00 pm in Room 29.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 2.20 pm.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Date: _____