



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 10 June 2021

Meeting Location: virtual meeting

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Colm Gildernew MLA
Pam Cameron MLA
Paula Bradshaw MLA
Jonathan Buckley MLA
Gerry Carroll MLA
Alan Chambers MLA
Órlaithí Flynn MLA
Cara Hunter MLA
Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Keith McBride (Clerk)
Roisin Donnelly (Assistant Clerk)
Deirdre Farry (Assistant Clerk)
Jonathan Lamont (Clerical Supervisor)
Brendan Miskelly (Clerical Officer)



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The meeting commenced at 9:33 am in public session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

- i. The Chairperson advised that he had requested urgent briefing from the Department of Health on the increasing prevalence of the Delta variant in Northern Ireland but received a response to indicate it was no possible to provide this for today's meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Chairperson would table an Urgent Oral Question on this matter.

- ii. The Chairperson raised reports of attacks on NI Ambulance Service staff and recorded the Committee's condemnation of attacks on all health care staff.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request written briefings from The NI Ambulance Service and the NI Fire and Rescue Service on staff safety.

- iii. The Chairperson highlighted that it was Carers' Week and reminded Members that the Committee motion on support for carers would take place on Tuesday, 15 June.

- iv. The Chairperson advised that it was also Infant Mental Health Awareness Week and referred Members to correspondence from the Association for Infant Mental Health relating to this.



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- v. The Chairperson advised that this was likely to be Deputy Chairperson, Pam Cameron's and Jonathan Buckley's last meeting as members of the Health Committee. The Chairperson thanked both Members for their positive contribution to the work of the Committee during a very challenging period and wished them well in their new roles.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2021.

4. Matters Arising

The Chairperson advised that at last week's meeting the Committee considered SR 2021/141 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 (Amendment No. 5) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 and agreed that it was content with the rule, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules. The Chairperson advised that the Examiner has now reported and outlined a drafting issue that the Department will amend at the earliest opportunity.

The Committee noted the Department of Health's outlined approach to rectify the drafting error.

5. SL1 The Food and Feed Hygiene and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The following officials from Food Standards Agency NI joined the meeting by video-conference at 9.53 am:

Maria Jennings, Northern Ireland Director; and

Elvira Diez-Garcia, Head of Operational Policy and Delivery.



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The officials briefed the Committee on a proposal to make a statutory rule to provide for the execution and enforcement, in Northern Ireland, of the food and feed elements of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 on official controls and other official activities performed to ensure the application of food and feed law, rules on animal health and welfare, plant health and plant protection products; and other minor corrections.

A question and answer session followed.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for attending.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

6. Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill - Briefing from Royal College of Midwives and NI Abortion and Contraception Taskgroup

The following representatives joined the meeting by video-conference at 10.06 am:

Karen Murray, Director, Royal College of Midwives; and

Michele McGrath, Member, NI Abortion and Contraception Taskgroup.

The representatives briefed the Committee on their organisations' submissions on the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill.

A question and answer session followed.

The representatives agreed to provide the Committee with further information on a number of issues.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for attending.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted a supplementary briefing paper from the Royal College of Midwives on the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health, Department of Justice and the Health and Social Care Trusts regarding



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protests held outside premises providing abortion services and other healthcare services.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed to write to the Department of Health to ask: what public health guidance and messaging is provided about the availability of abortion related services; and for further details on abortion reversal, following the Minister's recent comments on the matter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Women's Policy Group NI to provide oral evidence on the Bill.

The meeting was suspended at 11.25 am and resumed at 11.36 am.

7. Briefing from Autism NI

The following representatives from Autism NI joined the meeting by video-conference at 11.37 am:

Kerry Boyd, Chief Executive Officer;

Dr Arlene Cassidy, Special Advisor; and

Kelly Maxwell, Director of Family Support.

The representatives briefed the Committee on issues relating to autism and the Department of Health Interim Autism Strategy.

A question and answer session followed.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives from Autism NI for attending.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.



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8. Health and Social Care Bill - Departmental briefing

The following officials from the Department of Health and the Health and Social Care Board joined the meeting by video-conference at 12:43 pm:

Martina Moore, Director of Organisational Change, Department of Health;

John Millar, Health and Social Care Bill Team Manager Department of Health; and

Paul Cavanagh, Director of Commissioning, Health and Social Care Board.

The officials briefed the Committee on the proposed new future planning model which will follow the closure of the Health and Care Board and responded to issues raised by stakeholders in relation to the Bill.

A question and answer session followed.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for attending.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules report on the delegated legislative powers contained in the Bill.

9. The Health Security (EU Exit) Regulations 2021

The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding a proposal for the UK Government to bring forward Regulations that relate to health security and health protection.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request departmental briefing on this proposal.



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10. SL1 The Food and Feed Hygiene and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee returned to its consideration of SL1 The Food and Feed Hygiene and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021.

The Chairperson advised that FSA officials had been contacted in relation to a question from a Member on the NI Protocol and the response confirmed that the statutory rule was not being proposed as a direct result of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland. These amendments relate to obligations on competent authorities and food businesses that are required to protect public health in Northern Ireland, and to mechanical corrections of drafting errors and removal of redundant provisions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposal for the Statutory Rule.

Jonathan Buckley left the meeting at 1.10 pm.

11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health advising that his Department had not made a submission in relation to the Climate Change Bill.
- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing information requested by the Committee in relation to the rebuilding of healthcare services.



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- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Professional Standards Authority providing its views on the UK Government's consultation on reforms to health professional regulation.
- iv. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the Association of Infant Mental Health to the Minister of Health regarding the inclusion of a commitment to promote infant mental health within the Mental Health Strategy.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department of Health for comment.
- v. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the delivery of speech and language therapy and occupational therapy services at Harberton Special School.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Public Health Agency in relation to this matter.
- vi. The Committee noted the Investment Strategy NI May 2021 Activity Report for the Department of Health.
- vii. The Committee considered a request from the Alzheimer's Society to support a petition by laying it in the Assembly.
Agreed: The Committee agreed that, as there was no provision for a petition to be laid in the name of a Committee or Committee Chair, the Chairperson would bring this matter forward in his capacity as an individual MLA.
- viii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Minister of Health regarding children's participation in sport.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly regarding a public petition that was laid in the Assembly



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on 1 June 2021 by Claire Sugden MLA on age appropriate care for teenagers and young adults with life-threatening illnesses.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing papers from the Department of Finance on the forecast outturn data for March 2021.
- xi. The Committee considered correspondence from a child contact centre seeking clarification on coronavirus guidance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department of Health for comment.

- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the long term physical and mental health implications for children and young adults following prolonged mandatory wearing of face masks.
- xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding cataract surgery waiting times.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department of Health for comment and to request further information in relation to waiting times for cataract surgery.

- xiv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Pharmaceutical Society NI providing information about its work and a briefing paper on reforming the regulation of healthcare professionals in the UK.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for its views on the issues raised by the Pharmaceutical Society.

- xv. The Committee noted correspondence from Carers NI regarding the launch of its 'Breaks or Breakdown' report to highlight the launch of Carers' Week.



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- xvi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities providing a copy of the RalSe paper on the Key Preliminary Considerations for a High Street Task Force in Northern Ireland.
- xvii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health on the provision of support for those with sight or hearing loss during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pam Cameron left the meeting at 1.35 pm.

- xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health on restrictions relating to visiting in care homes.
- xix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Assembly Women's Caucus providing a copy of the RalSe research paper 'Gender Budgeting and Gender Inequalities in Northern Irish Education Policy'.
- xx. The Committee noted a submission from the Women's Policy Group NI on the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill.
- xxi. The Committee noted a submission from Northern Ireland Humanists on the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson advised that arrangements were ongoing in relation to scheduling a briefing from CEDAW on the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill Bill.

The Committee noted that an informal meeting to discuss its forward work programme would take place on Tuesday, 15 June.



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13. Any Other Business

A Member referred to a media report concerning the November 2020 Department of Health report exploring whether there was a link between hospital discharges and COVID-19 outbreaks in Care Homes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for its comments on this matter.

14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Health was scheduled to take place on 17 June 2021 at 9.00 am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.53 pm.

Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Health