



Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

18 February 2021

Meeting Location: meeting held by video-conference

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)

Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

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

Jean Barkley, Assistant Clerk

Roisin Donnelly, Assistant Clerk

Deirdre Farry, Assistant Clerk

Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor

Brendan Miskelly, Clerical Officer



The meeting commenced at 9.31 am in open session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson provided an update on the informal meeting that was held on 16 February with individuals affected by the operation of the mother and baby homes and Magdalene laundries and thanked the individuals and Committee Members who participated in the meeting.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 4 February 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 11 February 2021.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 9.35 am.



5. COVID-19 Disease Response – Department of Health briefing on Vulnerable Children Plan

The following officials joined the meeting by video-conference at 9.35 am:

Eilís McDaniel, Director of Childcare & Family Policy, Department of Health

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

Ricky Irwin, Director, Inclusion and Wellbeing, Department of Education

Maurice Leeson, Children's Services Planning Professional, Health and Social Care Board

Geraldine Teague, Lead Allied Health Professions Consultant, Public Health Agency

Eilís McDaniel provided an update on the Cross-Departmental COVID-19 Vulnerable Children and Young People's Plan.

Carál Ní Chuilín joined the meeting at 9.41 am.

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 further information on a number of issues.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a meeting with representatives of the Children’s Law Centre and Voice of Young People in Care to discuss the Vulnerable Children and Young People’s Plan and other issues.

The meeting was suspended at 11.15 am and resumed at 11.30 am.

6. SR 2021/18 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

Liz Redmond, Director of Population Health, Department of Health, joined the meeting by video-conference at 11.30 am and briefed the Committee on three Statutory Rules relating to Coronavirus restrictions (agenda items 6, 7 and 8).

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Director of Population Health for her attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department whether any analysis has been undertaken in relation to the impact on the mental and physical health of young people as a consequence of the current restrictions on sports and participation in outdoor activities.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee considered SR 2021/18 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, which amends the date that the Department of Health must review the restrictions and requirements imposed by the principal regulations to on or before 18 February 2021 and amends the expiry date of the principal regulations to midnight on 5 March 2021.



Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/18 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

7. SR 2021/27 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/27 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, which provides for exceptions to the restrictions on non-essential retail businesses.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had drawn attention to an issue arising from the drafting of this Rule regarding the collection of mobility vehicles, which the Department of Health has agreed to amend in future regulations.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/27 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

8. SR 2021/29 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/29 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, which allows for a person to provide driving instruction when that service is provided by, or on behalf of, the PSNI, NI Ambulance Service or Fire and Rescue Board for the purpose of testing of competence to drive a vehicle.



Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/29 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

9. SL1 The Addition of Vitamins, Minerals and Other Substances (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered a proposal by the Food Standards Agency to make a statutory rule to provide for the enforcement of EU Regulations on the addition of vitamins and minerals and of certain other substances to foods.

Sharon Gilmore, Head of Standards and Dietary Health, joined the meeting by video-conference at 11.30 am and answered Members' questions on the proposed statutory rule.

The Chairperson thanked the Head of Standards and Dietary Health for her attendance.

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

A Member advised that he had further questions in relation to this SL1 that he would provide to the Clerk for response by the Food Standards Agency.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health on the publication of the analysis of the consultation on continuing healthcare.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information on the timeframe and action plan for taking this work forward and to ask whether the Department of Health has a COVID-19 recovery plan in relation to this matter.

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding the launch of the Distance Awareness Scheme to promote adherence to social distancing and other COVID-19 protection requirements.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request update briefing on the Department's work to upscale the find, test, trace system and information on the current capacity of the system.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would continue to support all public health schemes and to outline to the Department the importance of clear public health messaging around such initiatives.

- iii. The Committee considered a request from the Eating Disorders Association Committee in Northern Ireland to meet the Committee to discuss future mental health policy and funding for the sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending further consideration of mental health policy.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People advising of the publication of the annual monitoring report on the implementation of the 'Still Waiting Action Plan' on mental health services and support.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending further consideration of mental health policy.

- v. The Committee considered two items of correspondence relating to the banding associated with advertised nursing posts in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek clarification from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust on this matter.

- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from Pat Catney MLA regarding his intention to introduce a Private Members Bill to ensure free access to sanitary products to those who need them, including in all schools, colleges and universities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending introduction of the Bill.

- vii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Stroke Association regarding the delay on the reform of stroke services and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request an update on progress on the reform of stroke services from the Department of Health.

- viii. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules' 23rd and 24th Reports of Session 2020-2021.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from Parent Action regarding the vaccination plans for staff in special education schools.
- x. The Committee noted correspondence from Southern Health and Social Care Trust PPI Panel regarding concerns about the communication of information on the vaccine programme.

The Chairperson declared an interest as having worked with this group from his constituency in his previous role as a social worker.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending the next briefing on the vaccination programme.



- xi. The Committee considered a request from the Royal College of Surgeons of England to brief the Committee on COVID-19 and issues relating to the transformation and rebuilding of services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this request as part of its forward work programme.

- xii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust responding to the Committee's request for information on the evidence and modelling used to inform the Trusts' surge plans.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask for further information on the regional planning and coordination of surge plans.

- xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the All Party Group on Early Years and Childcare, providing briefing on the work of the APG, and considered an invitation for Members to attend forthcoming meetings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would reply individually to the invitation to attend forthcoming meetings.

- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding self-isolation grants.

- xv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Centre for Public Health, Queen's University Belfast regarding the requirement for more financial support for those on low-incomes to encourage compliance with self-isolation rules.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to Department for Communities for a response on the issues raised.

- xvi. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the special recognition payment to be made to health and social care workers.



Agreed: The Committee agreed to advise the individual that it is awaiting a response from the Department of Health in relation to this matter and that advice relating to specific circumstances should be made directly to the Department.

- xvii. The Committee considered an invitation from Marie Curie and Queens University to attend a consultation event on end of life care and place of death in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would respond individually to the invitation.

- xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health advising of his intention to introduce the Health and Social Care Bill in the Assembly on 8 March 2021 and noted that officials will brief the Committee on the principles of the Bill on 4 March.

- xix. The Committee considered the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill that was introduced in the Assembly on 16 February.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would request a briefing from the Bill sponsor on the general principles of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek the views of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on whether the Bill is human rights compliant.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would seek further information on the process undertaken to assess legislative competence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it would discuss the scheduling of its consideration of matters relating to the Bill at the next meeting.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its forward work programme.



12. Any Other Business

A Member raised concerns regarding the Department of Health's decision not to undertake a full equality impact assessment in relation to the Vulnerable Children and Young People's Plan as well as concerns more widely around EQIA screening for Department policies during the pandemic.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information on equality screening and the decision making around assessing the requirement for completing full equality impact assessments.

A number of additional matters raised by Members have been recorded under the relevant agenda item.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 25 February 2021 at 9.30 am by video-conference.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.08 pm.

Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Health