



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 20 May 2021

Meeting Location: virtual meeting

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)

Roisin Donnelly (Assistant Clerk)

Deirdre Farry (Assistant Clerk)

Jonathan Lamont (Clerical Supervisor)

Brendan Miskelly (Clerical Officer)



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The meeting commenced at 9.31 am in open session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

- i. The Chairperson provided an update on a meeting he and the Deputy Chairperson held with consultant cardiologists from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust on organ donation.
- ii. The Chairperson referred to the Committee's motion on Mental Health Awareness which took place on 18 May and thanked Members for their contributions.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2021.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.



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5. Access to GP services – Briefing from British Medical Association NI

Dr Alan Stout, Chairperson, BMA NI GP Committee joined the meeting at 9.37 am and briefed the Committee on access to GP services.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Dr Stout for attending the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health to: review the involvement of GPs in the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out; provide an update on the progress of the development of an electronic prescription system; and provide an update on the workforce appeal and how this can be used to alleviate pressures in primary care.

The meeting was suspended at 11.00 am and resumed at 11.10 am.

6. Health and Social Care Bill: Briefing from the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Nursing and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy NI

The following representatives joined the meeting at 11.11 am:

Dr Laurence Dorman, Chairperson, Royal College of General Practitioners NI;

Rita Devlin, Associate Director of Nursing Policy and Practice, Royal College of Nursing; and

Tom Sullivan, Public Affairs and Policy Manager, Chartered Society of Physiotherapy NI.

The representatives briefed the Committee on the views of their organisations on the Health and Social Care Bill.

The Chairperson declared an interest as formerly being employed as a social worker and currently taking a career break.

A question and answer session followed.



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The Chairperson thanked the representatives for attending.

The briefing session was report by Hansard.

7. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding waiting lists for access to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for further information relating to the waiting times for autism assessments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department for a monthly update on progress to address the CAMHS waiting lists.

- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding the provision of speech and language therapy and occupational therapy for SEN pupils at Harberton Special School.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Minister's letter to the individuals who raised this matter with the Committee.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing the further information requested by Members following the Department's Brexit briefing on 15 April 2021.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from Breinar Training requesting to brief the Committee on its mental health programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an informal meeting with Breinar Training.



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- v. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding a Public Interest Disclosure in the Western Trust.
- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the UK government's plans to introduce legislation to provide for mandatory calorie labelling for large businesses.
- vii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the RQIA Review of Records of Deceased Patients of Dr Watt.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to request an update from RQIA on the review and any other reviews being undertaken in relation to neurology cases.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for an update on progress and further information on the terms of reference for the public inquiry.
- viii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure regarding an outstanding response from the Department of Health to a matter it had raised in relation to funding for community transport.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Health.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual calling for a public inquiry into the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Northern Ireland.
- x. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Department of Finance to the Committee for Finance providing a detailed breakdown of Departments' accruing resources for the year 2020-21.



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- xi. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Communities to the Department of Health requesting its position on the issue of Full Cost Recovery.
- xii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding job opportunities for creative art therapies practitioners within the health and social care system.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the Department of Health for comment.
- xiii. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules' Thirty-eighth Report of Session 2020 – 2021.
- xiv. The Committee considered correspondence from the NI Human Rights Commission regarding access to reproductive healthcare services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite NIHRC to brief the Committee on its report on access to reproductive healthcare services.
- xv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Speaker's Office regarding the submission of the NIHRC on the Severe Fetal Abortion (Amendment) Bill.
- xvi. The Committee noted correspondence from Fairness (IN) Fertility regarding the awaited resumption of IUI fertility treatment in the Southern Trust.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to ask for an update on the resumption of fertility services in each Trust.
- xvii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health responding to concerns raised by the Committee on the difficulties and challenges faced by people with sensory impairments and communication



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difficulties during the pandemic and the support available at vaccine centres.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department for clarification in relation to the provision of information in Braille.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Assembly Commission regarding access to information on Assembly proceedings for people affected by hearing loss, sight loss and other sensory impairments.

xviii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health providing information on actions to address the findings in the Health Inequalities Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a further briefing on the Department of Health's actions in relation to addressing health inequalities.

xix. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the provision of speech and language therapy and occupational therapy services at Harberton School.

xx. The Committee noted correspondence from the Chairperson of the Regional Workforce Wellbeing Network providing a link to a webinar on 'Staff Recovery and Wellbeing – Transforming HSC for the future.'

xxi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Agriculture inviting its views on the Climate Change Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that the Department of Health provide it with a copy of any response it makes to the AERA Committee on this Bill.



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8. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson advised that the Justice Committee had requested use of the Senate Chamber for all-day meetings on 27 May, 10 June and 24 June and confirmed that this would have no impact on the Health Committee meetings as these would continue to be held virtually. The Committee agreed that it was content with this.

9. Any Other Business

The Committee registered its appreciation of the progress that has been made on the delivery of the vaccination programme as over a million people in Northern Ireland had now received their first COVID-19 vaccine dose.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information in relation to the safety of the vaccine for people with severe allergies including an allergy to latex.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Health was scheduled to take place on 27 May 2021 at 9.30 am.

The meeting moved to closed session at 12.31 pm.



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11. Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill - consideration of written submissions

The Committee noted that thirty-nine written submissions had been received on the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill from the following organisations:

- Abortion Rights Campaign
- Alliance for Choice Derry
- Amnesty International UK and Informing Choices NI
- Anscombe Bioethics Centre
- Belfast Feminist Network
- Both Lives Matter
- British Association of Perinatal Medicine
- British Medical Association
- British Pregnancy Advisory Service
- British Society of Abortion Care Providers
- Christian Action Research and Education NI
- CEDAW
- Doctors for Choice NI
- Doctors for Choice UK
- Don't Screen Us Out
- Down's Syndrome Research Foundation UK
- Dr E Dorman, Consultant Obstetrician, Fetal Medicine Specialist and Gynaecologist
- Evangelical Alliance NI
- Fetal Medicine Consultants, Regional Centre for Fetal Medicine



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- General Medical Council
- HERe NI
- Lisburn Reformed Presbyterian Church
- NI Abortion and Contraception Taskgroup
- NI Human Rights Commission
- NI Women's European Platform
- NIPSA
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland
- Pro Life Campaign
- Rape Crisis NI
- Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
- Royal College of Midwives
- Royal College of Nursing NI
- Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
- Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health – Ireland
- Royal College of Psychiatrists
- The Christian Institute NI
- TransgenderNI
- Ulster University Pro-choice Society
- Women's Support Network

The Committee noted that a further 9,082 written submissions from individuals had also been received on the Bill.

The Committee considered the written evidence received.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the Bill summary documents to the Bill Sponsor and to request a response to the issues raised.

Agreed: The Committee agreed which organisations it wished to invite to provide further oral evidence on the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request advice on the impact of the recent Westminster regulations on the commissioning of abortion services in Northern Ireland.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.46 pm.

Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Health