



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 24 June 2021

Meeting Location: virtual meeting

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)
Gordon Lyons 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 9.32 am in public session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

- i. The Chairperson welcomed the new Deputy Chairperson, Gordon Lyons MLA to his first meeting of the Health Committee.
- ii. The Chairperson provided an update on a meeting he held with the Royal College of Surgeons on its 10 Steps not 10 Years Action Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further information in relation to the Our Hearts, Our Minds programme which was referred to during that meeting.

- iii. The Chairperson advised that it was Biomedical Science Day which promotes how biomedical science is vital to healthcare and this year has a particular focus on highlighting the integral work the profession has undertaken during the pandemic.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2021.



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4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill - Briefing from Alliance for Choice and Alliance for Choice Derry

The following representatives joined the meeting by video-conference at 9.37 am:

Emma Campbell, Co-convener, Alliance for Choice; and

Dr Maeve O'Brien, Member, Alliance for Choice Derry.

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

A question and answer session followed.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for attending.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

6. Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill - Briefing from Doctors for Choice, Abortion Rights Campaign & Women's Policy Group NI

The following representatives joined the meeting by video-conference at 10.58 am:

Dr Alyson Hunter, Consultant Obstetrician, Doctors for Choice;

Helen Stonehouse, Co-convener, Abortion Rights Campaign; and

Danielle Roberts, Policy Officer, Women's Policy Group.



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

A question and answer session followed.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for attending.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The meeting was suspended at 12.06 pm and resumed at 12.15 pm.

7. SR 2021/160 The Public Health Notifiable Diseases Order (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/160 The Public Health Notifiable Diseases Order (Northern Ireland) 2021 which will make Hepatitis C a notifiable disease so that medical practitioners will be required to share patient information with the Public Health Agency if they become aware, or have reasonable grounds for suspecting, that a person they are attending has Hepatitis C.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2021/160 The Public Health Notifiable Diseases Order (Northern Ireland) 2021 and agreed it had no objection to the Rule.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask for assurances from the Department of Health about the confidentiality and human rights aspects of making hepatitis C a notifiable disease.

8. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding the development of the Being Open Framework which is being taken forward in response to the inquiry into hyponatraemia-related deaths report recommendations.



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- ii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health responding to the Committee's request for an update on the progress of the urology public inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek clarity on the Department of Health's plans to engage with the Committee in relation to the terms of reference for the inquiry.
- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health on the main estimates for the Department of Health.
- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding protests at health care premises providing abortion services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask for further detail on the Department's work to develop a service specification for the commissioning of abortion services.
- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health responding to the issues raised by Members on coronavirus restriction regulations at a briefing on 18 March 2021.
- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding the validation process for private sector suppliers for COVID-19 detection tests.
- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding waiting times budget allocations.
- viii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Health regarding the planned revocation of the Establishment and Agencies (Fitness of Workers) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 which were made in April 2020 to give effect to a temporary Covid-19 pre-employment vetting policy that permitted employers to recruit staff quickly to health and social care posts



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on the basis of more limited pre-employment checks, in anticipation of Covid-19 staffing pressures.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health to bring forward the plans for the revocation of the Establishment and Agencies (Fitness of Workers) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 using the normal process for statutory rules.

- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from the Western Health and Social Care Trust regarding the workforce vacancies within its reproductive healthcare services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Western Trust to provide detail on how it intends to address these vacancies.

- x. The Committee considered a request from the Allied Health Federation NI to meet the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an informal meeting with Allied Health Professions NI.

- xi. The Committee noted a Church of Ireland press release providing a statement from its Standing Committee on Northern Ireland Abortion Law and Support for Women in Pregnancy.

- xii. The Committee considered correspondence from the devolved nations lead for Coeliac UK on the challenges for people with coeliac disease.

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

- xiii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Southern Health and Social Care Trust and correspondence from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust regarding protests at premises providing abortion services.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to note this correspondence and return to this matter when responses have been received from all the Health and Social Care Trusts.

- xiv. The Committee noted the correspondence from the RQIA regarding the appointment of Briege Donaghy as Chief Executive of the RQIA, on secondment from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing with the new RQIA Chief Executive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for the report on the review of the mass resignation of RQIA Board Members in June 2020.

- xv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Northern Ireland Abortion and Contraception Taskgroup requesting to brief the Committee on its report on Reproductive Health in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an informal briefing from the Northern Ireland Abortion and Contraception Taskgroup.

- xvi. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the availability of treatment for PKU.

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

- xvii. The Committee considered an invitation from Women's Policy Group NI to the re-launch of the WPG COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan on 28 July 2021.

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



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- xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health responding to the Committee's request for information relating to ongoing legal processes associated with the Inquiry into Hyponatraemia-Related Deaths.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek further clarity on how line management functions under secondment arrangements.

- xix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing further information requested by the Committee relating to the Independent Neurology Inquiry Terms of Reference, the Neurology Cohort 3 Recall and the Neurology Services Review.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer consideration of this correspondence until its next meeting.

- xx. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding waiting times for cataract surgery.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this correspondence to the individual who had raised this matter with the Committee.

- xxi. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules Forty-third report of session 2020-2021.

- xxii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the restriction on visiting in hospitals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Health for a response to the issues raised.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its Forward Work Programme.



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10. Any Other Business

- i. The delay in the introduction of the Adoption and Children Bill and the Organ Donation Bill was discussed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health and the Executive Office for information relating to the progress of these Bills and Executive consideration of their introduction.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for an update on its wider legislative and policy programme and related consideration by the Executive Office.

- ii. Executive decisions relating to travel restrictions and travel within the common travel area was raised.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for the advice it provided to the Executive Office in relation to travel within the common travel area.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Executive Office for the rationale for its decisions relating to travel within the common travel area and whether it had adhered to advice from the Department of Health in relation to this matter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for information relating to its consideration of COVID-19 vaccine passports/certification.

- iii. Carál Ní Chuilín provided an update on a meeting that she had held with families of patients of Muckamore Abbey Hospital.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange to meet informally with the families.



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11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Health was scheduled to take place on 1 July 2021 at 9.30 am.

The Committee agreed to move into closed session at 12.52 pm.

12. Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses in Northern Ireland: briefing from the Truth Recovery Panel

The following representatives from the Truth Recovery Panel joined the meeting at 12.52 pm:

Deirdre Mahon, Chairperson;

Professor Phil Scraton, Panel Member; and

Dr Maeve O'Rourke, Panel Member.

The Chairperson of the Truth Recovery Panel briefed the Committee on the progress of the Panel on its report on Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses in Northern Ireland.

A question and answer session followed.

Paula Bradshaw, Órlaithí Flynn and Carál Ní Chuilín left the meeting at 1.46 pm.

Jonathan Buckley and Gerry Carroll left the meeting at 1.48 pm.

Cara Hunter left the meeting at 2.02 pm.



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The Chairperson thanked the Truth Recovery Panel Chairperson and panel members for attending.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health responding to issues raised by representatives of Birth Mothers and their Children for Justice in Northern Ireland campaign group during an informal meeting with Committee Members on 5 May 2021.

The Committee agreed to defer its informal deliberations on the Health and Social Care Bill until its next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 2.09 pm.

Colm Gildernew MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Health