



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**Thursday, 14 January 2021
Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings**

Present:

Ms Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)*
Ms Paula Bradshaw MLA
Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA
Mr Gerry Carroll MLA*
Mr Alan Chambers MLA
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA*
Ms Cara Hunter MLA
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA*

Apologies: Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson)

In Attendance: Ms Éilis Haughey (Clerk)
Mr Jonathan Lamont (Clerical Supervisor)

**These Members attended the meeting via video-conference.*

The meeting commenced at 9.17 am in public session.

Mr Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 9.20 am

Ms Cara Hunter joined the meeting at 9.22 am

Mr Jonathan Buckley and Mr Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 9.23 am

The Clerk informed Members that neither the Chairperson nor Deputy Chairperson was unable to attend the meeting in person and a temporary Chairperson was required. The Clerk invited nominations for a temporary Chairperson.

It was proposed by Mr Jonathan Buckley and seconded by Ms Pam Cameron that Ms Paula Bradshaw be elected temporary Chairperson. No further nominations were proposed; therefore, Ms Bradshaw assumed the role of Chairperson for the duration of the meeting.

1. Apologies

As above.

2. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chair's business.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meetings held on 15, 17 and 22 December 2020 and the minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2021.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. COVID-19 Disease Response - Ministerial update

The Minister of Health, Mr Robin Swann MLA, and the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride, joined the meeting via video-conference at 9.22 am.

The Minister provided an update on the Department of Health's response and planning in relation to COVID-19.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Minister agreed to provide the Committee with an update on the status of plans to put in place a redress scheme in relation to the neurology inquiry, given the change of status to a public inquiry.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and Dr McBride for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding advice to clinically extremely vulnerable people.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

The Committee noted correspondence from the British Medical Association regarding the delay in the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccination for health care staff.

The meeting was suspended at 10.57 am and resumed at 11.10 am.

6. SR 2020/323 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 19) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The following Department of Health officials joined the meeting at 11.10 am via video-conference:

Ms Liz Redmond, Director of Population Health; and
Ms Marian McKeever, Health Protection Branch.

Ms Liz Redmond briefed the Committee on five Statutory Rules (agenda items 6 to 10) relating to Coronavirus regulations.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Ms Redmond 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 considered SR 2020/323 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 19) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which: introduces seating requirements for unlicensed premises and requires such premises to keep customer information and make changes to the information required; makes changes to restrictions on gatherings and introduce an upper limit of 500 persons; introduces a right of appeal to a court against a premises improvement notice or a prohibition notice; amends requirements in relation to sporting events and introduce an upper limit of 500 spectators; introduces requirements for those providing close contact services; removes restrictions on non-essential retail services; makes amendments to requirements on hospitality services; removes restrictions relating to places of worship, marriage and civil partnership, funerals and committals, and libraries; makes consequential amendments and minor amendments; and corrects errors.

Agreed: The Committee had considered SR 2020/323 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 19) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

7. SR 2020/335 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 20) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/335 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 20) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which amends the requirement for review of these Regulations; amends the period a person must wait before forming a new linked household; permits a supermarket to use any till or checkout aisle for intoxicating liquor sales; and makes technical amendments to permit the continued operation of business financial support schemes.

Agreed: The Committee had considered SR 2020/335 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 20) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

8. SR 2020/343 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 21) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/343 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 21) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which makes provisions in relation to entertainment venues.

Agreed: The Committee had considered SR 2020/343 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 21) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

9. SR 2020/346 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 22) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/346 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 22) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which provides for extended linked households at Christmas and the use of conference facilities by courts and tribunals; and corrects errors.

Agreed: The Committee had considered SR 2020/346 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 22) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

10. SR 2020/352 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 23) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/352 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No.2) (Amendment No. 23) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which limits a Christmas ‘bubble’ to one day and disallows overnight stays connected to a Christmas ‘bubble’.

Agreed: The Committee had considered SR 2020/352 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 23) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

11. SR 2020/325 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Advice for Persons Travelling to Northern Ireland) (No. 2) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Ms Elaine Colgan, Chief of Staff to the Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health, joined the meeting at 11.51 am via video-conference.

Ms Colgan briefed the Committee on three Statutory Rules (agenda items 11 to 13) relating to Coronavirus travel restrictions.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

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

The Chairperson thanked Ms Colgan for her attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee considered The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Advice for Persons Travelling to Northern Ireland) (No. 2) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which amends the information to be provided by operators to passengers to advise that the self-isolation period is reduced from 14 to 10 days. The Rule also adds a reasonable defence clause for operators relating to any amended information to be provided to passengers if it was not reasonably practicable to do so.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of the proposal for the Statutory Rule until it had received further information from the Department of Health.

12. SR 2020/326 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 25) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/326 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 25) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which: amends the post-travel self-isolation period from 14 days to 10 days; adds additional sectoral exemptions; allows for new signings to use the elite sportspersons exemption; provides new exemptions for certain workers engaged in television production and properly accredited journalists; gives effect to the enforcement of fixed penalty notices; adds Botswana and Saudi Arabia to the list of countries and territories in respect of which travellers are exempt from the requirement to self-isolate for 10 days after arrival in Northern Ireland; and removes the Canary Islands from that list.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of the proposal for the Statutory Rule until it had received further information from the Department of Health.

13. SR 2020/344 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 26) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/344 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 26) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which

removes Namibia, Uruguay and the US Virgin Islands from the list of countries and territories in respect of which travellers are exempt from the requirement to self-isolate for 10 days after arrival in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee had considered SR 2020/344 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 26) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, and had no objection to the Rule.

14. SL1 The Healthy Start Scheme and Day Care Food Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Health, to make a Statutory Rule to provide for an increase in the Healthy Start voucher value to maintain parity with England and Wales.

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

15. January Monitoring – written briefing

The Committee considered a written briefing on the January monitoring round.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further information; Members to forward questions to the Clerk.

16. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding the launch of the public consultation on the draft Mental Health Strategy.
- ii. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health to its request for a response on concerns raised in relation to Community Dental Services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Minister's response to the individual who had raised this issue.

- iii. The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health to its request for information on the Department's engagement in relation to the Dying with Dignity Bill currently progressing through Dáil Éireann.

- iv. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health to concerns raised regarding on the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on the children's activities sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Minister's response to the individual who had raised this issue.

- v. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health to its request for an update on HPV primary screening in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Minister's response to the individual who had raised this issue.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding a Public Interest Disclosure statement made in 2019 in relation to social work and HR practices in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing the Terms of Reference for the Intermediate Care Project.

- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing information requested during a Brexit briefing regarding custom made medical devices.

- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding amendments to mental health legislation and guidance in response to Coronavirus pressures, pending future scrutiny of the legislation.

- x. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules' Seventeenth Report of Session 2020-2021.

- xi. The Committee considered a response from the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health accepting its invitation to hold a joint meeting to consider the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including North-South co-operation on pandemic management.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to proceed with arrangements for the joint meeting.

- xii. The Committee noted two items of correspondence from separate individuals concerned about arrangements for post-primary transfer tests.

- xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Food Standards Agency providing information on the Common Frameworks for which it has lead responsibility.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending briefing on the Common Frameworks.

- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Education regarding its agreement to submit a motion for debate in the Assembly on the adverse impact of the pandemic on access to special educational needs support for vulnerable children.

- xv. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Education to the Interim Mental Health Champion inviting her to brief the Committee on student and pupil wellbeing during the pandemic.
- xvi. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Committee for Finance to the Ministers of Finance and Health regarding VAT payable on PPE imported from the EU to Northern Ireland.
- xvii. The Committee noted a copy of the Department of Health's response to the Committee for Finance, advising that as it is not the policy lead on VAT issues it would be inappropriate to comment on this matter.
- xviii. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the Committee for the Economy to the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding the potential economic impact of the end of financial support schemes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending future consideration of poverty and health inequalities.

- xix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust providing confirmation of its compliance with RQIA standards of hygiene, cleanliness and infection prevention and control.
- xx. The Committee considered a response from the Department for Communities to its request for an update on the progress of the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending future consideration of poverty and health inequalities.

- xxi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Health and Sport Committee of the Scottish Parliament regarding the provisional UK Common Framework on Nutrition Labelling, Composition and Standards.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Health and Sport Committee to thank it for its correspondence, and to note pending future scrutiny of the UK Common Frameworks.

- xxii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding regulations relating to outdoor exercise.
- xxiii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the recent treatment of a relative in hospital and hospital-acquired COVID-19.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the individual, advising of its related work.

- xxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to enquire if consideration will be given to utilising experience of Event Management organisers, and to raise wider issues around maximising workforce appeal recruitment.

xxv. The Committee noted the Department of Health’s November Monitoring Report regarding the application of the Children’s Social Care (Coronavirus) (Temporary Modification of Children’s Social Care) Regulations 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further information; Members to forward questions to the Clerk.

xxvi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Office of the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People regarding its recently published second ‘Statement on Children’s Rights in Northern Ireland’.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the NICCY report pending future consideration of children’s health/ mental health.

xxvii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the COVID-19 regulations pertaining to the Christmas 2020 period.

xxviii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding COVID-19 restrictions.

xxix. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

xxx. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the Chair of the Independent Neurology Inquiry to the Minister of Health regarding the scheduling of witness sessions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending further engagement with Independent Neurology Inquiry.

xxxi. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the availability of goods post-Brexit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to advise the individual of the Committee’s Brexit scrutiny.

xxxii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Children’s Law Centre regarding the NGO Stakeholder Report to inform the List of Issues that will be sent to the UK Government by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the pending future consideration of children’s health /mental health.

xxxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Finance providing an update on the Executive’s 2021-2022 Budget process.

xxxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Blood Cancer Alliance & Leukaemia and Lymphoma NI regarding the Blood Cancer roundtable meeting report and the All Party Group on Cancer subgroup meeting on treatment engagement.

xxxv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Royal College of Nursing NI regarding community mental health services within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

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

17. Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted its forward work programme.

18. Any Other Business

A Member raised the matter of the Department of Health’s decision to hold a public inquiry into the work of a urologist in the Southern HSC Trust.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department ask for the rationale behind the decision to hold a public inquiry on the matter.

A Member raised the matter of ‘long COVID’.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an update on provision of services for those suffering from ‘long COVID’.

A Member raised the matter of organ transplantation during the pandemic.

Agreed: Members agreed to write to the Department to ask how many organs from deceased donors have not been used and have had to be disposed of, since the beginning of the pandemic.

19. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 21 January 2021, at 9.30 am, in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting moved into closed session at 12.43 pm.

20. Committee Inquiry: COVID-19 and its impact on Care Homes – Consideration of Report

The Committee noted the Executive Summary for inclusion in its inquiry report.

The Clerk advised the Committee that the complete report would be provided for formal agreement at the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.50 pm.

Signed: _____
Chairperson

Date: _____