



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Health

## Minutes of Proceedings

25 February 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**

None.

### **2. Chairperson's Business**

There was no Chairperson's business.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 18 February 2021.

### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **5. COVID-19 Disease Response – Update on vaccination programme**

Patricia Donnelly, Head of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, Department of Health, joined the meeting by video-conference at 9.33 am and provided an update on the vaccination programme.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.



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The Chairperson thanked Patricia Donnelly for attending the meeting.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for further information relating to: access to vaccines by asthma sufferers and staff in special schools; advice and information for those shielding; and the role of the health and safety executive.

A Member referred to the legal advice the Committee had received on the process undertaken by the Assembly to assess the legislative competence of Bills, which was requested to support the Committee's consideration of issues relating to the introduction of the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill (agenda item 11).

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of the Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill until the next meeting to allow Members further time to consider the legal advice.

*The meeting was adjourned at 10.36 am and resumed at 10.48 am.*

*Jonathan Buckley joined the meeting at 10.48 am.*

### **6. Workforce - Briefing from the Chief Nursing Officer**

The following officials from the Department of Health joined the meeting by video-conference at 10.49 am:

Professor Charlotte McArdle, Chief Nursing Officer; and  
Heather Finlay, Deputy Chief Nursing Officer.



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The Chief Nursing Officer briefed the Committee on workforce issues.

*The Chairperson declared an interest as formerly being employed as a social worker and currently taking a career break and having a relative who is a nurse.*

*The Deputy Chairperson declared an interest as having a relative who is a nurse.*

*Cara Hunter declared an interest as having a relative who is a nurse.*

The officials agreed to provide further information on a number of issues.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for attending the meeting.

*The meeting was adjourned at 12.37 pm and resumed at 12.55 pm.*

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Colm Gildernew MLA (Chairperson)

Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Paula Bradshaw MLA

Gerry Carroll MLA

Alan Chambers MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Cara Hunter MLA

Carál Ní Chuilín MLA



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**7. SR 2021/17 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel, Operator Liability and Public Health Advice) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021**

The following officials from the Department of Health joined the meeting by video-conference at 1.00 pm:

Elaine Colgan, Chief of Staff to the Chief Medical Officer; and  
Gillian Hynes, Health Development Policy Branch.

The officials briefed the Committee on two travel restriction statutory rules (agenda items 7 and 8).

*Jonathan Buckley joined the meeting at 1.23 pm.*

The officials agreed to provide further information on a number of issues.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for attending the meeting.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee considered SR 2021/17 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel, Operator Liability and Public Health Advice) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, which places obligations on operators of commercial transport regarding the requirement for a negative coronavirus test; increases penalty notices for non-completion of passenger locator forms; and adds to the list of countries subject to additional measures.

**Agreed:** The Committee considered SR 2021/17 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel, Operator Liability and Public Health Advice) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, and had no objection to the rule.



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**8. SR 2021/32 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 6) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021**

The Committee considered SR 2021/32 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 6) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, which makes changes to the list of those exempt from self-isolation requirements.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek further relating to the travel restriction regulations.

**Agreed:** The Committee considered SR 2021/32 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, International Travel) (Amendment No. 6) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021, and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

**9. SR 2021/26 The Healthy Start Scheme and Day Care Food Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021**

The Committee agreed to defer its consideration of SR 2021/26 The Healthy Start Scheme and Day Care Food Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021 until the next meeting.

**10.SL1 The Recovery of Health Services Charges (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021**

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Health to make a statutory rule to provide for an inflationary uplift on the tariff levels for the scheme that provides for the collection of costs incurred by hospitals in treating road traffic accident casualties.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposal for the statutory rule.



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## 11. Severe Fetal Impairment Abortion (Amendment) Bill

The Chairperson confirmed that the Committee had agreed earlier in the meeting to defer its consideration of this agenda item until the next meeting.

## 12. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health regarding its consideration of the benefits of midwifery led units and support for the establishment of an All-Ireland Midwifery Unit network.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the Minister's correspondence pending future scrutiny of the maternity and neonatal services regional review.

- ii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing further detail on the criteria to be used in respect of the special recognition payment to be made to healthcare staff and students.
- iii. The Committee considered two items of correspondence from the Department of Health responding to issues raised by the Committee in relation to SR 2021/8 The Mental Health (1986 Order) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2021.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to advise the Department that it was not content with its response indicating that it would only consult with the NI Human Rights Commission when timescales allow.

*The meeting was suspended at 1.33 pm and resumed at 1.35 pm in closed session as it was unable to continue the live stream broadcast.*



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- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health providing information requested by the Committee relating to coronavirus international travel restrictions.
- v. The Committee noted the correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee regarding its primacy over current and forthcoming NI Audit Office reports and its planned programme of work.
- vi. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules' 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Reports of Session 2020-2021.
- vii. The Committee considered correspondence from Jim Shannon MP regarding the availability of the drug treatment for phenylketonuria (PKU).

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

- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Scottish Parliament Health and Sport Committee regarding its consideration of the provisional UK Common Framework on Food and Feed Safety Hygiene.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from Public Health Agency regarding the COVID-19 vaccination booking scheme.
- x. The Committee considered correspondence from AddictionNI providing a copy of its Drink Wise, Age Well legacy event presentation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an informal virtual meeting with AddictionNI.

- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health advising of the UK wide consultation by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency on the availability of two progestogen-only contraceptive pills.





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- xii. The Committee considered correspondence from a representative of the shielding community on advice and support for those shielding.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health for a response to the issues raised.
- xiii. The Committee considered the Hansard report of the NI Youth Forum presentation to the Committee for the Executive Office on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the hansard report pending further engagement on mental health issues.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an informal virtual meeting with the NI Youth Forum.
- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Justice Committee inviting views on the Protection from Stalking Bill.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek further clarity in relation to this Bill.
- xv. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding General Practice services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending receipt of a response from the Department of Health regarding the GP telephone triage system.
- xvi. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the requirement for legislation relating to the protection of care home residents.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note this correspondence pending its consideration of the outcome of the Department of Health's



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consultation on an Adult Protection Bill and to advise the individual of the ongoing consultation.

- xvii. The Committee considered correspondence from Royal College Paediatrics and Child Health regarding its project on the future of Paediatrics in the UK and an invitation to a launch event.

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

- xviii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Education Committee to the Minister of Health regarding levels of children's physical activity in schools in Northern Ireland.
- xix. The Committee noted a response from the Minister of Health to concerns about the impact of ongoing restrictions on sport on physical and mental health.
- xx. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the eligibility of carers to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

### **13. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee noted its forward work programme.

### **14. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.



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**15. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 4 March 2021 at 9.30 am by video-conference.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.45 pm.

**Colm Gildernew MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Health**