



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR HEALTH**

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Thursday, 26 November 2020  
Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings**

**Present:** Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson)  
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  
Mr Colin McGrath MLA\*  
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA

**In Attendance:** Ms Éilis Haughey (Clerk)  
Mr Brendan Miskelly (Clerical Officer)

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

*The meeting commenced at 9.32 am in public session.*

**1. Apologies**

None.

**2. Chairperson's Business**

- i. The Chairperson referred to the Committee's motion debated in the Assembly on 23 November which he felt was a useful contribution to the COVID-19 response planning discussions.
- ii. The Chairperson reminded Members that the meeting would continue into the afternoon to continue its consideration of evidence relating to the inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on care homes.
- iii. The Chairperson welcomed confirmation from the Minister of Health that the Independent Neurology Inquiry would become a statutory public inquiry.

- iv. The Chairperson also welcomed the establishment of a public inquiry in response to clinical concerns within Urology at Southern Health and Social Care Trust and expressed his concern for the patients and families affected.
- v. The Chairperson advised that it was Carers' Rights Day and that issues affecting carers remained a priority for the Committee.
- vi. The Chairperson provided an update on a meeting he had held with the Coleraine Branch of Diabetes UK.
- vii. The Chairperson advised that he had received a number of letters from young people working with the mental health charity, Niamh Louise, and that he would arrange for these letters to be circulated to Members for consideration at the next meeting.
- viii. The Chairperson provided an update on a briefing on Common Frameworks that he and the Deputy Chairperson had attended.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2020.

### **4. Matters Arising**

The Committee considered the wording of a draft letter to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ask that the matter of a mutual recognition agreement between the UK and the EU, covering medicines, medical devices and other healthcare products, be raised in ongoing discussions with both parties.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to issue the letter, subject to minor amendment, to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

*Mr Colin McGrath joined the meeting at 9.40 am.*

### **5. Departmental Briefing: Budget**

The following Department of Health officials joined the meeting via video-conference at 9.40 am:

Ms Brigitte Worth, Director of Finance;

Mr David Keenan, Head of Financial Planning;

Mr Andrew Dawson, Director of Infrastructure Investment; and

Ms Ciara Dolan, Director of Transformation.

*Mr Gerry Carroll joined the meeting at 9.43 am.*

*Mr Jonathan Buckley joined the meeting at 9.47 am.*

Ms Worth and Mr Dawson briefed the Committee on Department of Health budget matters.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The officials agreed to provide the Committee with further information on a number of issues raised during the question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

*The Deputy Chairperson declared an interest as having a relative who works for the Contact Tracing Service.*

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health and the Public Health Agency for further detail on their bids and plans regarding the development and delivery of the Find Test Trace Isolate and Support system.

*The meeting was suspended at 11.06 am and resumed at 11.15 am.*

## **6. Briefing from the Chair of the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Mother and Baby Homes, Magdalene Laundries and Historical Clerical Child Abuse**

The following representatives from the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Mother and Baby Homes, Magdalene Laundries and Historical Clerical Child Abuse joined the meeting via video-conference at 11.15 am:

Ms Judith Gillespie, Independent Chair;

Ms Eilís McDaniels, Director of Childcare & Family Policy, Department of Health;  
and

Mr Gareth Johnston, Director, Victims and Survivors Division, The Executive Office.

Ms Gillespie, briefed the Committee on the work of the Inter-Departmental Working Group.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request further briefing from the Inter-Departmental Working Group when the commissioned research on the operation of the Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries has been published.

*The meeting was suspended at 12.16 pm and resumed at 12.21 pm.*

**7. SR 2020/250 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 13) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The following departmental officials joined the meeting, in person, at 12.21pm:

Ms Maura Campbell, Head of Policing Policy & Strategy, Department of Justice; and  
Mr Anthony Carleton, Director of Local Government and Housing Regulations, Department for Communities.

Mr David Hughes, Director, Department of Health joined the meeting via video-conference.

The officials briefed the Committee on four Statutory Rules relating to Coronavirus restrictions (agenda items 7 to 10).

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

*Mr Pat Sheehan left the meeting at 12.44 pm.*

*Ms Paula Bradshaw left the meeting at 1.04 pm.*

The officials agreed to provide the Committee with further information on a number of issues raised during the question and answer session.

The Committee considered SR 2020/250 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 13) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which imposes: additional requirements in relation to food and drink; new requirements in relation to social distancing; and new requirements in relation to large gatherings. The Rule also makes consequential amendments to the provisions on offences and penalties and fixed penalty notices.

*Agreed:* The Committee had considered SR 2020/250 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 13) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

**8. SR 2020/255 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 14) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/255 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 14) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which provides district councils with the power to designate persons to enforce the regulations and to issue a ‘premises improvement notice’ where those responsible for premises are in breach of the regulations.

*Agreed:* The Committee had considered SR 2020/255 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 14) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

**9. SR 2020/256 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 15) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/256 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 15) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which provides for restrictions in Schedule 2 to be extended to the end of Thursday, 26 November and introduces modifications of those restrictions from 20 November. The Rule also amends an error in earlier regulations and makes a number of technical amendments.

*Agreed:* The Committee had considered SR 2020/256 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (Amendment No. 15) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

**10. SR 2020/253 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered SR 2020/253 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which provides for a simplified fixed penalty regime in respect of face coverings regulations.

*Agreed:* The Committee had considered SR 2020/253 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and recommended that it be approved by the Assembly.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed that concerns raised by Members in relation to SR 2020/253 The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 would be reflected by the Chair during the debate in plenary on the Rule.

**11. SL1 The Food and Feed Hygiene and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020**

The Committee considered a proposal by the Food Standards Agency, to make a Statutory Rule to enforce Regulation (EU) 2020/354 on establishing a list of uses of feed intended for particular nutritional purposes and repealing Directive 2008/38/EC. The Rule will also correct an omission in The Official Feed and Food Controls Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009, and make other minor consequential amendments relating to Part 3 of the 2009 Regulations.

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

## 12. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health confirming the attendance of the Independent Chair and departmental officials to brief the Committee on the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Mother and Baby Homes, Magdalene Laundries and Historical Clerical Child Abuse.
- ii. The Committee considered a response from the Minister of Health to its request for further information on the consultation on the Substance Use Strategy.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the Minister's correspondence pending further engagement with the Department on the consultation.

- iii. The Committee considered a copy of correspondence from the Department of Health to the Royal College of Surgeons regarding proposals for the establishment of a podiatric surgery service in Northern Ireland.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending further consideration of rebuilding services.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding discharge to care homes policy.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to consider this correspondence as part of its Inquiry into the Impact of COVID-19 on Care Homes.

- v. The Committee considered correspondence from the Equality Coalition, raising issues about the use of the cross-community vote in Executive, in respect of the public health regulations.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Executive Office, noting the concerns raised about public health issues being decided in this way, and requesting that the issues be taken into consideration in future decision-making.

- vi. The Committee noted the Examiner of Statutory Rules' Twenty-ninth and Thirtieth Reports of Session 2019-2020.

- vii. The Committee considered correspondence from the British Society of Immunology providing its COVID-19 Taskforce report, 'The ageing immune system and COVID-19'.

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

- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding COVID-19 self-isolation grants.

- ix. The Committee considered the Children’s Law Centre’s response to the consultation on the cross-departmental actions for vulnerable children and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending consideration of the consultation responses.

- x. The Committee considered correspondence from the Education Committee to the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education regarding the consultation on the cross-departmental actions for vulnerable children and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending consideration of the consultation responses.

- xi. The Committee considered correspondence from the British Dental Association responding to the revised operational dental guidance.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending further consideration of the provision of dental services.

- xii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Association for Infant Mental Health in NI bringing a number of reports to the attention of the Committee relating to the impact of the pandemic on infant health.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to consider infant mental health as part of its forward work programme.

- xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the COVID-19 response regulations restricting access to churches.

- xiv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Food Standards Agency providing information requested during the briefing session on SL1 The Food (Miscellaneous Amendments etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to note the correspondence pending the next Brexit briefing session.

- xv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Children’s Law Centre drawing attention to a decision in the English Court of Appeal in relation to the extension of temporary Children’s Social Care Regulations.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the Children’s Law Centre’s correspondence to the Department of Health for a response to the issues raised.

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

The Committee noted its forward work programme.

The Chairperson advised that Professor Azeem Majeed, Imperial College, London; Professor Ralf Reintjes, Hamburg University of Applied Science; and Professor Devi Sridhar, University of Edinburgh; had accepted the invitation to brief the Committee on 3 December, on international experience of Find, Test, Trace, Isolate and Support Systems,.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to invite Health and Social Care Trust Chief Executives to provide an update briefing on the response of the Trusts to the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request briefing from the Department of Health on the planned regulations that will provide for the easing of Covid-19 restrictions over the Christmas period.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to request briefing from the Councils on their enforcement powers in respect of COVID-19 restriction regulations.

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

Committee Members discussed COVID-19 response measures including restrictions that will come into force after midnight on 27 November and measures to support the domiciliary care sector.

The Chairperson advised that there would be an opportunity to raise issues of concern at the scheduled briefing with the Minister on 3 December.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to provide notice to the Minister of the issues raised by Members in advance of the briefing session on 3 December.

#### **15. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next committee meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 3 December 2020, at 8.45 am, in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was suspended at 1.28 pm and resumed at 2.22 pm in Room 21 in closed session.*



**Present:** Mr Colm Gildernew (Chairperson)  
Ms Pam Cameron MLA (Deputy Chairperson)\*  
Mr Gerry Carroll MLA  
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA

*\*Ms Cameron attended the meeting via video-conference.*

**16. Committee Inquiry: Impact of COVID-19 on Care Homes: consideration of evidence**

The Committee continued its consideration of the evidence it had received in relation to the Inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on care homes and discussed possible findings and recommendations.

The Chairperson advised that a draft inquiry report would be prepared for consideration by the Committee.

*The meeting was adjourned at 3.32 pm.*

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Chairperson*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_