



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

18 April 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Liz Kimmins MLA (Chairperson)

Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Alan Chambers MLA

Linda Dillon MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Nuala McAllister MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Alan Robinson MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Diane Dodds MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance:

Keith McBride, Clerk

Roisin Donnelly, Assistant Clerk

Jonathan Lamont, Assistant Clerk

Katie Egan, Clerical Supervisor

Noel Gallagher, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2.06pm in public session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed the Committee of her meeting with Children's Health Coalition.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Minister for a written update of his meeting with the Children's Health Coalition in relation to financial support for families with sick children.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 11 April 2024.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. LCM Tobacco and Vapes Bill – Departmental Briefing

The following officials from the Department of Health and Health and Social Care Trusts joined the meeting at 2.10pm:

Bryan Dooley, Head of Health Improvement Policy Branch, Department of Health;
and

Karen Oldham, Health Improvement Policy Branch, Department of Health.

The officials briefed the Committee on LCM Tobacco and Vapes Bill.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to support the Minister in seeking the endorsement of the Northern Ireland Assembly of the Legislative Consent Motion.

Members were advised that the Committee's Report on the Tobacco and Vapes LCM would be circulated to Members on Monday for comment.

6. Waiting Lists – oral briefing from Royal College of Surgeons

The following officials from the Royal College of Surgeons joined the meeting at 2.40pm:

Niall McGonigle, Royal College of Surgeons (Eng) NI Director, Deputy Head of School of Surgery NIMDTA & Thoracic Surgeon

Ann Garrahy, Oral and maxillofacial (*OMFS*) surgeon;

Claire Jones, Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary (HPB) surgeon; and

Martin King, General Surgical Registrar and Immediate Past President Association of Surgeons in Training.

The officials briefed the Committee on waiting lists.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health to establish the level of engagement with Royal College of Surgeons on the blueprint for the reconfiguration of hospital services, who the Department engaged with on developing the blue print and when the Committee can expect to see the blueprint.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek the Minister's views of expansion of services into weekends and evenings and to comment on the figures of surgeons who are planning to retire in the coming years.

7. Workforce - Oral briefing from Royal College of Nursing

The following officials from the Royal College of Nursing joined the meeting at 3.52pm:

Briege Quinn, Royal College of Nursing Northern Ireland Board Chair;

Rita Devlin, Executive Director for Royal College of Nursing Northern Ireland;

Dolores McCormick, Associate Director, Employment Relations and Member Services; and

Ruth Thompson, Associate Director, Nursing Policy and Practice.

The officials briefed the Committee on workforce issues.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Danny Donnelly MLA declared an interest as a registered nurse.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for an update on the Retention Strategy recommendations, and to seek clarity on number of vacant posts and whether nurses currently in training will be offered any of those vacant posts.

Órlaithí Flynn left the meeting at 5.05pm

8. SR 2024/49 The Health and Social Care Pension Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered SR 2024/49 The Health and Social Care Pension Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) which introduces changes to the employer contribution rate.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2024/49 The Health and Social Care Pension Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) and had no objection to the Rule.

9. SR 2024/50 The Health and Social Care Pension Schemes (Partial Retirement etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered SR 2024/50 The Health and Social Care Pension Schemes (Partial Retirement etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 which aligns all members into one Scheme and introduces a new package of retirement flexibilities.

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2024/50 The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and had no objection to the Rule.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee considered the reply from the Minister of Health regarding Community Pharmacy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Minister's reply to Community Pharmacy.

- ii. The Committee considered the reply from the Minister of Health regarding waiting lists.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for more information on costs and on how waiting lists are prioritised. The Committee also agreed to ask about how waiting lists are reviewed to reassess the needs of patients and urgency.

- iii. The Committee considered the reply from the Minister of Health regarding the impact of the proposed EU Regulation on the use of mercury within Dentistry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to this issue at its Strategic Planning meeting.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding an update on the Regional Care and Justice Campus Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request further information following consideration of consultation responses.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Health regarding the All-Party Group on stroke services.

- vi. The Committee noted the request from Autism NI to brief the Committee on the implementation of the Autism Awareness Act (NI) 2022.

- vii. The Committee noted the briefing paper from British Association of Social Workers Northern Ireland.

- viii. The Committee noted the correspondence from Fuel Poverty Coalition regarding the Fuel Poverty Strategy.

- ix. The Committee noted the seventh report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.
- x. The Committee considered correspondence from Chris Hazzard MLA regarding ambulance handover times at local hospitals.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward this information to the Department of Health for comment.
- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding Sarcoidosis awareness.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

12. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Health will be an informal meeting scheduled to take place at 2.00pm on 25 April 2024 at NICVA offices, Belfast.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.25pm.

Liz Kimmins MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

02 May 2024