



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

12 September 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Liz Kimmins MLA (Chairperson)

Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Alan Chambers MLA

Diane Dodds MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Nuala McAllister MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Linda Dillon MLA

Alan Robinson MLA

Apologies:

Colin McGrath MLA

In Attendance:

Keith McBride, Clerk

Roisin Donnelly, Assistant Clerk

Angela McParland, Assistant Clerk

Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor

Stephen McGlennon, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2.05pm in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Colin McGrath MLA.

Nuala McAllister joined the meeting at 2.06pm

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson thanked the families of the deceased patients of Michael Watt who met with Committee Members on Tuesday, 10 July 2024, sharing their experiences in seeking justice and truth for their relatives.

The Chairperson advised Members that she has written to the Minister to request that he meet with the Neurology Deceased Patients Review (DPR) Phase 2 families and also the families who have been through Phase 1 of the process, as a matter of urgency.

The Committee commended the families who are currently seeking answers and noted the importance of the Committee to hear from the families of their experience and their ongoing struggle in seeking answers.

The Committee noted that it has heard from a number of groups that there is consistently a lack of information from health care professionals and this is raising significant questions around patient confidence in the healthcare system.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to engage further with Regulation and Quality and Improvement (RQIA) to receive an update on RQIA's interaction with the families of the Neurology Deceased Patients Review and explore any gaps in the powers of RQIA in its effectiveness as an organisation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to continue to meet with similar groups, as requested, and hear their experiences within the healthcare system.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider bringing forward a motion to the House on 'Duty of Candour'.

The Chairperson advised Members that it is her understanding that the Department funded Carers Fund, which is administered through Community Foundation NI, is ending and that this will have a huge impact on organisations such as after school clubs for children with disabilities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking confirmation that the Carers Fund is ending and to provide information on any plans to replace funding for organisations affected by closure of the fund.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department regarding an announcement by the Department, prior to recess, on funding through Community Foundation NI. The Committee requested information on the current status of the funding and its distribution.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for confirmation that Sure Starts - Early Years in Newry will close on 30 September 2024, including confirmation that the reason for the closure for this critical service is due to a lack of premises and provide information on what work is being carried out to find new premises.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2024.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee considered a list of items that the Committee is awaiting a response on from the Department, from the previous session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting that the list of outstanding items be addressed.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson held a series of meetings with representative groups during summer recess, on 8 July 2024. The Chairperson advised Members that this had been an extremely useful exercise to hear from groups which the Committee had been unable to schedule oral briefings for due to a full Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson advised Members that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson met with Haemophilia NI on 22 August 2024 and received an update on the victims' compensation scheme.

The Chairperson advised Members that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson also attended the Northern Ireland Hospice and Children's' Hospice over the summer.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Pharmacists' Defence Association who were part of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Health Committee delegation which briefed the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson on 8 July 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the All-Party Group on Community Pharmacy.

5. Draft Programme for Government 2024/2027 – Oral Briefing from the Department of Health

The Committee considered the draft Programme for Government document and noted that the Consultation opened on 9 September 2024 and is to close on 4 November 2024.

The following officials from the Department of Health (DoH) joined the meeting at 2.21pm:

Dr Tomas Adell – Director of Elective Care and Cancer Policy, DoH; and

Eilís McDaniel – Director of Family and Children's Policy, DoH.

The officials briefed the Committee on the draft Programme for Government 2024 - 2027.

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 on the cancer diagnostics waiting lists requesting a breakdown of £76m spend last year and information on any areas currently being considered as possible targets for reducing spend through efficiencies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive, as a matter of urgency, the Transformation Reconfiguration blueprint or absolute clarity on the current timeline of when the Committee will receive this.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive detail on bids to the Reform and Transformation Unit.

6. SL1 The Human Medicines (Amendments Relating to Naloxone and Transfers of Functions) Regulations 2024

The Committee considered a proposal from the Department of Health to make a statutory rule that will increase the number of services, professionals or organisations that can supply naloxone without a prescription or written instruction. The Rule will also remove remaining references in the Human Medicines Regulations to the now dissolved Public Health England and the Health and Social Care Board Northern Ireland.

The following officials from the Department of Health (DoH) joined the meeting at 3.41pm:

Canice Ward – Head of Medicines Regulatory Group, DoH;

Karen Simpson, Head of Medicines Legislation Unit; and

Gary Maxwell – Head of Health Development Policy Branch, DoH.

The officials briefed the Committee on SL1 The Human Medicines (Amendments Relating to Naloxone and Transfers of Functions) Regulations 2024.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

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

Alan Robinson joined the meeting at 3.56pm

7. SL1 The Period Products (Department of Health Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered a proposal from the Department of Health to make a statutory rule that will specify the public service bodies that must ensure period products are obtainable free of charge, as per section 2(3) of the Period products (Free Provision) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

The following officials from the Department of Health (DoH) joined the meeting at 3.56pm:

Chris Matthews - Deputy Secretary, Resources and Corporate Management Group;
and

Irene Culleton – Head of People, Organisational Development and Equality Branch,
DoH.

The officials briefed the Committee on SL1 The Period Products (Department of Health Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer its decision on whether it was content with the proposal for the Statutory Rule until it received further information from the Department on the financial implications of Statutory Rule has been received.

8. SL1 The Recovery of Health Services Charges (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered a proposal from the Department of Health to make a statutory rule that will apply an inflationary uplift to current tariff levels, from 1 October, for the collection from persons or organisations making compensation payments to road traffic accident casualties of the costs incurred by hospitals in treating the casualties. The recovery scheme includes all cases where an injured person receives personal injury compensation and costs of ambulance services. The charges are mainly paid by the insurance industry and are collected on behalf of HSC Trusts by the Compensation Recovery Unit, a branch of the Department for Communities.

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

Agreed: The Clerk to follow up with Members with further information on what other sources charges are received from aside from insurance agencies.

9. Implementation of the Hospital Car Parking Charges Act – Written Briefing from the Department of Health

The Committee considered an update from the Department on progress of the new traffic management system for hospitals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive an update on parking charges currently being implemented by each Trust and, where there has been significant increase in charges, to provide information on the reasons for the increase.

10. Correspondence

i. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Department to the Minister of Justice on version 2 of a draft Executive paper on Consultation on policy proposals underpinning a draft Public Health Bill.

ii. The Committee considered a Departmental response on what actions in the Mental Health Strategy have been prioritised.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to further address the issue at the upcoming Minister and Budget oral briefings.

iii. The Committee noted a Departmental response on St Luke's drive through blood centre in Armagh.

iv. The Committee considered a Departmental response on jobs for Physician Associate graduates in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to take forward the issue at the upcoming oral briefing by the Department on workforce.

- v. The Committee considered a Departmental response on funding for the Children's Hospice.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the response further as part of its Inquiry on Palliative Care funding.

- vi. The Committee considered a Consultation document on the Public Health Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive a summary of responses following the Consultation.

- vii. The Committee noted a Departmental response regarding development of a Non-NHS pathway for patients requiring MESH treatment.

- viii. The Committee noted a Departmental response regarding issues raised in the briefing by Allied Health Professions Federation Northern Ireland.

- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department on the Annual Report of the Mental Health Champion.

- x. The Committee noted a Southern Health and Social Care Trust Urology Lookback Review.

- xi. The Committee considered the Strategic Priorities Framework 2024/2025 from the Department.

- xii. The Committee considered a Departmental response on New Script for Mental Health.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive quarterly updates on progress against the indicators.

- xiii. The Committee noted a Written Ministerial Statement on department initiatives, previously emailed to Members

- xiv. The Committee noted an update from the Department on the Neurology Deceased Patients Review.
- xv. The Committee noted a Departmental response on queries following the briefing from the Royal College of Nursing.
- xvi. The Committee noted a Departmental response on Ward 15 Downe Hospital, previously emailed to Members.
- xvii. The Committee noted a Consultation document on the commencement of provisions relating to 'acts of restraint' within the Mental Capacity Act.
- xviii. The Committee noted a Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy 2026: Second Action Plan Progress Report to 31 March 2024.
- xix. The Committee noted a Written Ministerial Statement on Appointment of Independent Autism reviewer.
- xx. The Committee noted an SI to Restrict Prescription of Gender Dysphoria Medicines, previously emailed to Members.
- xxi. The Committee noted Departmental correspondence on amendments to the Northern Ireland Firefighters' Pension and Compensation Scheme
- xxii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy on SIBNI reports.
- xxiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on Outturn and Forecast Outturn.
- xxiv. The Committee noted the twentieth report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

xxv. The Committee considered correspondence from Chest Heart and Stroke on introducing a register of vaping retailers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider further alongside the Legislation Consent Memorandum on smoking and vaping.

xxvi. The Committee considered correspondence from the British Dental Association the Department's briefing on Dental Services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider at the Chief Dental Officer briefing.

xxvii. The Committee noted the SIB investing activity reports for June, July, August 2024.

xxviii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Oireachtas Health Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a visit with the Oireachtas Committee in October.

xxix. The Committee considered correspondence from RQIA regarding an informal visit to RQIA.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a visit.

xxx. The Committee considered correspondence from the Ulster University.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to the Department for comment.

xxxi. The Committee noted correspondence from the Nursing and Midwifery Council on an Independent Review into the NMC.

- xxxii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Alzheimer's Society on a request for information for future information sharing including links to recent reports.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to Assembly Research.

- xxxiii. The Committee considered a response from the Public Health Agency on stem cell donor awareness.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward to NIBTS for comment and to Eimear's Wish for information.

- xxxiv. The Committee noted correspondence from Pivotal on a report on the first seven months of the restored Northern Ireland Executive.

- xxxv. The Committee considered correspondence from Queen's University Belfast inviting Members to a cancer Symposium Dinner.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would response individually.

- xxxvi. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual requesting to meet the Committee regarding the NHSCT and RQIA.

- xxxvii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual representing families in regards to DPR that resulted in the meeting held on 10 September 2024.

- xxxviii. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual on SAI redesign project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider as part of the upcoming SAI briefing.

- xxxix. The Committee noted a copy of an email to the Minister regarding BAME representation in Trusts.
- xl. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual on the impact of length of waiting list for orthopaedic surgery Musgrave Park Hospital and request for reimbursement under SPPG.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to highlight the cross-border directive at the Minister's briefing and Budget briefings

The Committee noted annual reports and accounts 2023/2024 for:

Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT)
Southern Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT)
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT)
Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCT)
NHSCT Charitable Trust Fund
BHSCT Charitable Trust Fund
SEHSCT Charitable Trust Fund
WHSCT Charitable Trust fund
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS)
NIAS Charitable Trust
Business Services Organisation (BSO)
Public Health Agency (PHA)
Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA)
Professional Standards Authority (and Business Plan)
Patient and Client Council
Regulation and Quality Improvement (RQIA)
Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service (NIBTS)

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider as part of its Forward Work Programme, quarterly updates from the Department on the Urology Review and an update on autism policy from the Department.

The meeting moved into closed session at 4.24pm.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the wording of a Committee motion in relation to Children's Social Care Services. The Committee agreed to table the motion in the Business Office.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme and identified some further briefings that were to be scheduled.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to visit Dublin on Thursday 10 October to meet with the Oireachtas Committee and to visit the Children's Hospital in Dublin. Members are to let the Clerk know if they are available to attend the visit.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the draft Terms of Reference to the Committee's proposed Inquiry into Access to Palliative Care Services and that it would be scheduled for consideration at next week's meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.09pm.

Liz Kimmins MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

19 September 2024