



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

13 June 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Liz Kimmins MLA (Chairperson)

Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Alan Chambers MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Diane Dodds MLA

Alan Robinson MLA

Apologies:

Linda Dillon MLA

Nuala McAllister MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

In Attendance:

Keith McBride, Clerk

Roisin Donnelly, Assistant Clerk

Angela McParland, Assistant Clerk

Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor

Antoinette Bowen, Clerical Officer

Noel Gallagher, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2.06pm in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Linda Dillon MLA, Nuala McAllister MLA and Colin McGrath MLA.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson referred Members to the informal information session with the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA), held before the Committee meeting, at which the Committee received information on workforce provision across children's social care services.

Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 2.08pm

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the information received in the session raised concerns that serious inadequacies around workforce in the social worker sector is putting both children and staff at immense risk, that this cannot continue, and must be addressed by the Department as a matter of urgency.

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to advise that the Committee held an informal information session with NIPSA and heard harrowing reports which mirrored Professor Jones' evidence that matters have worsened since publication of his Review Report.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Minister provide assurance to the Committee that the Department recognises there is a crisis within the sector and that, whilst a long-term sustainable plan for the sector is being put in place following findings from the Consultation, there is also an immediate short-term action plan being implemented to address the ongoing workforce crisis.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ascertain from the Minister a clear understanding of where the legal duty lies in the provision of children's social care services for the protection of children and young people.
- Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it would bring forward a Committee motion to the House regarding implementing recommendations from the Professor Ray Jones Report 'The Northern Ireland Review of Children's Social Care Services'.

3. Draft Minutes

- Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2024.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. General Dental Services – Briefing by the British Dental Association (BDA)

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.12pm:

Mr Tristen Kelso, Northern Ireland Director, BDA;

Ms Ciara Gallagher, Chairperson, Northern Ireland Dental Practice Committee (NI DPC); and

Ms Helen Brogan, Joint Vice-Chair, NI DPC, BDA.

The representatives briefed the Committee on dental services.

Órlaithí Flynn joined the meeting at 2.25pm

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule, as a matter of urgency, the briefing by the Chief Dental Officer and to receive an updated written briefing ahead of the rescheduled briefing. The Committee agreed to request information on: the Department's current position on issues raised by the BDA representatives; an update on contract reform negotiations; and address the Minister's recent comments around prioritising health inequalities in terms of oral health inequalities, including the impact on the 'working poor' in any health inequalities assessments by the Department.

6. Addiction Services – Written briefing from Department of Health

The Committee considered a Departmental written briefing on Addiction Services.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive detail on how the Department will take forward the 24 actions (42%) that are not progressing as planned and receive information on the funding available to implement the actions.

7. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence regarding a Consultation on policy proposals underpinning the Public Health Bill.

- ii. The Committee considered a Ministerial reply on Workforce Policy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive figures on actual vacancies when they become available.

- iii. The Committee considered a Ministerial reply on issues raised in a briefing by the Mental Health Champion.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive detail on what actions in the Mental Health Strategy have been prioritised by the Department.

- iv. The Committee noted a Ministerial reply on figures regarding homebirths across Maternity Services in the Causeway area.

- v. The Committee noted a Ministerial reply on Cervical Cancer Serious Adverse Incidents (SAIs).

- vi. The Committee considered a copy of a Ministerial reply to the Committee for the Economy on departmental co-operation on Support for Childminding.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to follow up with the Department in relation to its previous correspondence on its review of childminder-to-child ratios.

- vii. The Committee noted a copy of a Ministerial reply to the Committee for Justice on the Adult Protection Bill.

- viii. The Committee considered Ministerial correspondence on a Budget 2024-2025 Equality Impact Assessment.

Agreed: The Committee will await the Summary of Responses when it becomes available. In the interim, the Committee to receive detail of the Department's spending plans and priorities.

- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Education providing a copy of correspondence received from a cohort of MSc Physician Associate students from Ulster University Magee Campus on concerns about job opportunities.

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

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from Stronger from the Start Alliance on Infant Mental Health Awareness Week, 10 - 16 June 2024.
- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from Barnardo's Northern Ireland on its Young Carers Service and the establishment of a Young Carers Champions group.
- xii. The Committee considered correspondence from Eimear's Wish on Stem Cell Donor Awareness.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Public Health Agency and receive detail of the Agency's current work around stem cell donor awareness and its plans for future work.

- xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from Caleb's Cause Northern Ireland regarding a report by the former Committee for Employment and Learning.
- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual on the Northern Health and Social Care Trust Community Mental Health Teams.
- xv. The Committee noted a Ministerial response on a proposed single point of contact to support carers of people with learning disabilities.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to reschedule a briefing by the Chief Dental Health Officer on dental services, to be held before summer recess.

Agreed: The Committee had previously agreed to receive written briefings from the Department on Addiction Services as part of its priorities programme and agreed to now include oral briefings in its scrutiny of the issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

9. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Health is scheduled to take place at 2.00pm on 20 June 2024.

The meeting was adjourned at 3.37pm.

Liz Kimmins MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

20 June 2024