



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Health

## Minutes of Proceedings

**5 December 2024**

**Meeting Location:** Room 29, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Linda Dillon MLA (Temporary Chairperson)

Alan Chambers MLA

Diane Dodds MLA

Nuala McAllister MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Alan Robinson 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 2.33pm in public session.

## **1. Nomination of a Temporary Chairperson**

The Clerk took the Chair and the Committee considered nomination of a Temporary Chairperson.

Nuala McAllister moved that Linda Dillon MLA take the Chair of the Committee.

Diane Dodds MLA seconded the motion. There were no other nominations.

The Clerk put the question:

*“That Linda Dillon MLA takes the Chair.”*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that Linda Dillon MLA take the Chair.

*Linda Dillon took the Chair as Temporary Chairperson*

The meeting was suspended at 2.34pm.

The meeting recommenced at 2.39pm.

## **2. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Liz Kimmins MLA (Chairperson), Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson), and Órlaithí Flynn MLA.

## **3. Chairperson's Business**

There was no Chairperson's Business.

## **4. Draft Minutes**

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting on 28 November 2024.

## **5. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **6. New Maternity Hospital – Oral Briefing from the Department of Health and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust**

The following officials joined the meeting at 2:42pm:

- Chris Matthews, Deputy Secretary, Resources and Corporate Management Group, Department of Health (DoH);
- Phillip McClay, Director of Health Estates, DoH;
- Ciaran Mulgrew, Chair of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT);
- Maureen Edwards, interim Chief Executive Officer, BHSCT; and
- David Porter, Director of Estates, BHSCT.

The officials briefed the Committee on the new Maternity Hospital.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Temporary Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

*Nuala McAllister left the meeting at 4.27pm*

The Committee moved into closed session to consider a draft press release at 4.28pm.

*Nuala McAllister returned to the meeting at 4.30pm*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Clerk forward a copy, to all Members, of the agreed draft press release on the Committee's concerns over the delays of the new Maternity Hospital for Members' approval.

The Committee returned to public session at 4.41pm.

The Committee discussed that the new Maternity Hospital will provide state-of-the-art facilities that will transform the care that is provided to mothers and babies but expressed its concerns over how the Hospital project has been managed overall.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Temporary Chairperson write to the Minister of Health to advise that the Committee is extremely disappointed about the ongoing delays in the opening of the Maternity

Hospital and concerned about the significant estimated additional public money that will be required to address the problems that have been identified.

To ask the Health Minister to consider what additional measures can be put in place to ensure the delivery of the Maternity Hospital in a timely manner.

To emphasise the need that lessons from the Maternity Hospital project are learned by both DoH and BHSCT and are applied to the management of other major capital projects across the health estate going forward, including the new flagship Children's Hospital, seeking assurance that this will be the case.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Temporary Chairperson write to the Minister and Chair of BHSCT, for the Committee to receive the following:

On medical gas pipes, the Committee to receive further detail on the plans for the medical gas pipe replacement including, the extent of the replacement, timescale and cost, and detail of when this work will commence.

On the water system, the Committee to receive updates on the results of the ongoing water sample testing as soon as is available, and be kept informed of the trend of the sampling results and whether there is a demonstration of a reduction or an increase in the presence of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*.

The Committee to receive a timeline for the receipt of the final report from the independent experts and the estimated timescale for the implementation of recommendations.

The Committee to receive further information on the movement of £20m of revenue funding to capital funding.

The Committee to receive information on the financial costs of keeping the existing Maternity Hospital safe for use during the period of time that the new Maternity Hospital cannot be used.

On the lessons learned from the new Maternity Hospital project and applying these to future capital building projects including the Children's Hospital, the Committee to receive a list of lessons learned to date.

The Committee to receive further detail on what measures have been put in place for both the Maternity Hospital and the Children's Hospital projects as a result of lessons learned.

The Committee to receive a comprehensive list of the remaining defects that need to be addressed within the Maternity Hospital before it can be safely opened.

The Committee to receive further information on the accountability arrangements and mechanisms that are in place in both organisations with respect to the oversight of the management major capital projects.

The Committee to receive further information on the role and responsibilities of the DoH Deputy Secretary with responsibility for Resources and Corporate Management Group in relation to the Maternity Hospital project.

The Committee to receive a briefing on the progress of the Maternity Hospital when the final report from the independent experts is complete.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a visit to the Royal Hospitals site.

## **7. Draft SI 2024 The Human Medicines (Amendment) (Modular Manufacture and Point of care) Regulations 2024**

The Committee considered draft SI The Human Medicines (Amendment) (Modular Manufacture and Point of care) Regulations 2024.

The Committee received an oral briefing from Department of Health officials on 21 November 2024. On the UK-wide joint Statutory Instrument (SI) which is to provide a new regulatory framework for medicines manufactured at the point of care and via modular manufacturing. This adapts the current regulatory approach which is designed for centralised factory-based manufacture.

The Committee considered that the Statutory Instrument was notified to the European Union, as required under Directive 2015/1535, in so far as the SI applies in relation to Northern Ireland and that no comments were received.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to receive a further oral briefing from the Department regarding the SI being notified to the EU, to hear from officials on the potential for the new framework to operate differently in Northern Ireland to the UK because of the EU Directive.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider the draft SI again following the further briefing from the Department.

#### **8. SL1 NI Firefighters' Pension Schemes – The Firefighters' Pension Schemes and Compensation Schemes (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024**

The Committee considered SL1 The Firefighters' Pension Schemes and Compensation Scheme (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024. A Consultation was launched on 4 September and closed 1 November 2024. The Department received responses from the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and the Fire Brigades Union who agreed with the proposed amendments but highlighted a few areas of consideration. The Department advised the Committee that these areas have been resolved.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it is content with the merits of the policy and that the Department make the Statutory Rule.

## 9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted further information from the Department on the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, following the briefing on 14 November 2024.
- ii. The Committee noted a response from the Department to its request for comment on correspondence received from Advice NI concerning the Bereavement Service in Northern Ireland.
- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance in regards to the interim Public Sector Transformation Board.
- iv. The Committee considered an invitation to a joint event by the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) and the Patient Client Council (PCC) on Improving Safety, to be held on 24 January 2025 in the MAC.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that Members would respond individually.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from Cancer Research UK forecasting an increase in cancers caused by smoking.
- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from Ladies with Letters.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Temporary Chairperson write to the Minister to encourage that he meet with the group regarding the letters they received from the Southern Health and Social Care Trust that their smear test results will be reviewed and that the Minister provide, to the Committee, an update on the Cervical Screening review.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule an informal meeting with the Ladies with Letters, to be hybrid or in person, as suits the Ladies with Letters.

- vii. The Committee considered correspondence from Parents 4 PEGs NI. The Committee discussed that the parents had attended Parliament Buildings on Monday and met with Members. The Temporary Chairperson advised the Committee that she had been disappointed that she had been unable to attend on Monday due to a prior diary commitment with the Policing Board.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Autism Reviewer for comment.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Temporary Chairperson write to the Minister regarding its concerns on the issues raised by the parents.

- viii. The Committee considered an invitation from the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland to a conference on Embedding a Trauma Informed Approach to be held on 23 January 2025 in the Stormont Hotel.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that Members would respond individually.

- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from the Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee regarding the Tobacco and Vapes Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the correspondence be included in the Committee report on the forthcoming Legislative Consent Memorandum.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from the Youth Assembly providing a November update.

- xi. The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding correspondence from Advice NI on concerns of cessation of the Royal Victoria Hospital walk-in dentistry service.



- xii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding funding of training requirements of Community First Responders to assist ambulance handover times.
- xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department concerning the rise in employer National Insurance contributions, as announced in the October Budget.

## **10. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to reschedule its visit to the NI Children's Hospice, the Committee having visited the NI Hospice earlier in the day but having had to defer its visit to the Children's Hospice.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

## **11. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

## **12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place at 2.00pm on 12 December 2024.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.52pm.

**Linda Dillon MLA**

**Temporary Chairperson, Committee for Health**

**12 December 2024**