



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Health

## Minutes of Proceedings

**24 October 2024**

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

**Present:**

Liz Kimmins MLA (Chairperson)

Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Alan Chambers MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Nuala McAllister MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Alan Robinson MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Linda Dillon MLA

Diane Dodds MLA

**Apologies:** None

**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 2.01pm in public session.

**1. Apologies**

No apologies were received.

*Colin McGrath joined the meeting at 2.01pm*

**2. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson noted the Written Ministerial Statement (WMS), published on Wednesday 23 October 2024, on Children with Disabilities – Short Breaks.

The Chairperson noted the WMS, published at the time of the Committee's meeting, on Addressing Health Inequalities – Announcement of Live Better Areas.

The Chairperson noted the Minister's announcement, on Tuesday 22 October 2024, in regards to the publication of an independent review of midwifery services by Professor Mary Renfrew 'Enabling Safe Quality Midwifery Services and Care in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for further information regarding the WMS on Children with Disabilities – Short Breaks, including: on the £13m in additional multi-year funding, clarity on the exact amount of funding that will be available; how funding will be

distributed in terms of residential and respite places; detail of the plans of how the Department will engage with the Trusts, especially in terms of ensuring equitable services across Trusts; detail of the Department's plans to engage with those with lived experience with a view to co-designing how best the funding is spent; detail of how the Department has addressed the immediate needs of the families who participated in the recent BBCNI programme which brought a major focus to the issues; and, confirmation as to whether it is still the case that there is an intention for the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) to amend rules and guidance around short breaks and long-term placements, which may release beds.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a Departmental briefing for March 2025 that will provide an update on the issues addressed in the WMS on Children with Disabilities – Short Breaks, and will include respite services in terms of adults with learning disabilities.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request a briefing from Professor Renfrew on the independent review of midwifery services.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2024.

### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **5. Inquiries Implementation Programme – Oral Briefing from the Department of Health**

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.12pm:

Michael O'Neill, Interim Director of Quality, Safety and Improvement Directorate, Department of Health (DoH);

Robbie Davis, Director of General Healthcare Policy Directorate, DoH;

Anne-Marie Bovill, Healthcare Inquiries Oversight Directorate, DoH; and

Dr Patricia Donnelly OBE, Inquiries Implementation Programme Management Board (IIPMB) Independent Member, and Chair of the Assurance Sub-group.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Inquiries Implementation Programme.

*Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 2.17pm*

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee acknowledged the twenty-eighth anniversary of the death of Claire Roberts. The Committee paid tribute to the families of the five children, Adam Strain, Claire Roberts, Lucy Crawford, Raychel Ferguson, and Conor Mitchell, involved in the Hyponatraemia-Related Deaths Inquiry (IHRD).

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

## **6. Being Open Framework – Oral Briefing from the Department of Health**

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.31pm:

Michael O'Neill, Interim Director of Quality, Safety and Improvement Directorate, DoH;

Ian Plunkett, Duty of Candour/Being Open Policy Lead and Inquiry into Hyponatraemia Related Deaths (IHRD) Programme Manager, DoH; and

Professor Peter McBride, Independent Consultant, HSC Leadership Centre.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Being Open Framework.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The Committee agreed actions in regards to Agenda Items 5 and 6:

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to follow up on the officials' agreement to the Committee's request to provide a table that gives appropriate detail against each individual recommendation, for each Inquiry the Board deals with, on how a recommendation has been implemented, or the reasons for non-acceptance, or how it is dependent on another issue etc., that will allow the public to be able to see this information with ease. The Department to update the Committee with these tables going forward, as is appropriate.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive confirmation regarding which Serious Adverse Incident (SAI) recommendations within the Hyponatraemia-Related Deaths Inquiry (IHRD) have been addressed by the Department to date, within the work of the review of the SAI framework.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive detail of how Adverse Incidents are recorded, and detail of the mechanisms that are in place for accountability and for learning lessons, to help mitigate against SAIs.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive detail of any discussions the Department has had with the UK Government on primary legislation regarding recommendation 68 of the INI Inquiry, or detail of any intentions the Department has on discussions with the UK Government on the recommendation.

**Agreed:** The Department to provide a written briefing to the Committee ahead of the oral briefing by the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, scheduled for 21 November, to include: detail on the individual or office and/or the body that has official oversight of, and responsibility of holding to account, the work of the Health and Social Care Trusts; detail of the role of the Trust Boards; detail of the role of a Chief

Executive Officer of a HSC Trust; clarity on the role of the Trust Chief Executive Officers as non-Executive members of Trust Boards; and the process that is followed should the Minister wish to hold a Trust to account on a work area.

## **7. Respite Services – Written Briefing from the Department of Health**

The Committee considered a written briefing from the Department on respite services.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for confirmation on whether the Department has considered, or intends to consider, including an element of Duty of Candour in the Adult Protection Bill or any other forthcoming legislation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive detail of work by the Department on respite services for adults with special needs and their carers, considering carers of adults with learning disabilities can often be elderly and may need support themselves.

## **8. Committee Inquiry – Access to Palliative Care**

The Committee noted the Clerk's written brief on the Committee's forthcoming Inquiry on Access to Palliative Care.

## **9. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee considered a Departmental response on the timeline for the general dental services contract and an update on general dental issues.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive adequate detail on the timeline. For example, further detail on project milestones and key decisions, and estimated dates for the milestones and key decisions.

- ii. The Committee noted a Departmental response on Ministerial engagement with the Youth Assembly Health Committee.
- iii. The Committee noted a Departmental response concerning a Domiciliary Care Landscape Report.
- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on an analysis of 2024-25 Outturn and Forecast Outturn.
- v. The Committee considered an invitation from the Reimagine Children's Collective to a Review Conference on 27 November 2024, being held as a recommendation from the Children's Social Care Review.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to attend the conference.

- vi. The Committee noted correspondence from Cancer Research UK on its PROCESS study report on smoking cessation services inequalities.
- vii. The Committee noted a 'hold the date' invite from the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) to join an event in Parliament Buildings, on 18 June 2025, for midwives, who are also RCM workplace representatives, to gain insight into political influencing.
- viii. The Committee noted correspondence from ARK providing a policy brief on the Healthy Start Scheme in Northern Ireland.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from My Death, My Decision (Northern Ireland) on the Choice at End of Life Bill introduced in Westminster.
- x. The Committee noted correspondence from Ofcom Northern Ireland on its Implementing Online Safety Act: Progress Update publication.

- xi. The Committee considered three items of correspondence from three individuals on the Public Health Bill

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Clerk respond to each item of correspondence, as the Committee awaits a summary of responses from the Department on the Consultation recently held by the Department on the Bill.

- xii. The Committee noted a Departmental paper providing an update on progress relating to the new Framework for Learning and Improvement from Patient Safety Incidents.

- xiii. The Committee noted a copy of the WMS on Children with Disabilities – Short Breaks, as mentioned by the Chairperson in Chairperson’s Business and which had also been emailed to Members on 24 October 2024.

- xiv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Chair of Medical Staff South Eastern Trust, and Regional Representative of the British Association of Dermatologists (BAD), concerning recent Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) guidelines for Isotretinoin prescribing on dermatology services across Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to respond that the Committee is supportive of a meeting being arranged, by MHRA, between BAD and the Commission of Human Medicines.

- xv. The Committee considered correspondence from Advice NI concerning Bereavement Service in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider as part of the Committee’s Inquiry on Access to Palliative Care.

- xvi. The Committee considered correspondence from Carers NI to a Carer Poverty Commission Conference on 7 November 2024.



**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that Members would respond on an individual basis regarding their attendance at the conference.

xvii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual sharing a response from RQIA concerning a Judicial Review.

xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual conveying their concerns with the Renfrew Report on Maternity Services.

## **10. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

## **11. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme.

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

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

The Committee will next meet at a concurrent meeting with the Committee for Justice, scheduled to take place at 2.00pm on 7 November 2024.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.39pm.

**Liz Kimmins MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Health**

**14 November 2024**