



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

10 April 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

- Philip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)
- Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Alan Chambers MLA
- Diane Dodds MLA
- Órlaithí Flynn MLA
- Alan Robinson MLA

Apologies: None

Present by Video or Teleconference:

- Linda Dillon MLA
- Nuala McAllister MLA
- Colin McGrath MLA

In Attendance: Keith McBride, Clerk
Oliver Bellew, Assistant Clerk
Angela McParland, Assistant Clerk
Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor

The meeting commenced at 2.01pm in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

Informal Meeting with RQIA

The Chairperson informed members of an informal meeting he had attended with the Chair and Chief Executive of RQIA to discuss the organisation's work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request information on whether it intends to bring forward legislation or regulations to update the role and remit of RQIA and whether it intends to include a cost recovery model.

Meeting with the new Interim Permanent Secretary

Members noted that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson would be meeting with the new Interim Permanent Secretary of the Department during the Easter recess.

The Chairperson informed Members that he would seek clarity on when the Interim Permanent Secretary would be attending the Committee to provide a briefing on work plans.

National Insurance Contributions

The Chairperson informed the Committee of calls he had received regarding the potential impact of increased national insurance contributions on local health service

providers including GPs, hospices, dentists and pharmacists who indicated that they may have to reduce working hours in order to absorb the cost increase.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for clarity on how the £3.5m allocated to alleviating this pressure will be spent. The Committee also agreed to request information on any assessment of impact the Department may have carried out on service disruption and patient outcomes as a result of the cost increase.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 3 April 2025.

4. Matters Arising

None.

5. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services - Oral Briefing by Foyle Hospice

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.04pm:

- Donal Henderson, Chief Executive, Foyle Hospice;
- Angela McIntyre, Chairperson, Foyle Hospice;
- Annmarie Casey, Director of Nursing and Clinical Care, Foyle Hospice; and
- Dr Paul McIvor, Medical Director, Foyle Hospice.

The Chairperson welcomed the representatives and expressed thanks to the staff of Foyle Hospice for the work they do and for hosting the Committee during a very informative visit to its premises in February.

The representatives briefed the Committee on Access to Palliative Care.

Órlaithí Flynn joined the meeting at 2.12pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Nuala McAllister joined the meeting at 2.18pm.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

6. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services – Oral Briefing by the Royal College of Nurses and the Regional Specialist Palliative Care Nursing Group

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.54pm:

- Karen Bowes, Senior Nurse, RCN;
- Ruth Thompson, Associated Director, RCN;
- Bernie Torley, Advanced Nurse Practitioner Trainee and Nurse Manager, Southern Area Hospice; and
- Denise Cranston, Specialist Palliative Care Lead Nurse, South East Trust.

The representatives briefed the Committee on Access to Palliative Care Services.

Danny Donnelly MLA declared an interest as a nurse who had previously provided palliative care.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for clarity on what work it is undertaking to improve Do Not Attempt to Resuscitate policies for service providers and families; and, for further information on the ReSPECT policy document.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

7. Governance arrangements for the new build of the Children's Hospital – Oral Briefing by the Department

The Committee noted Departmental written briefings on the contract award timeline and governance arrangements for the new build of the Children's Hospital in Belfast.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.48pm:

- Philip McClay, Director of Health Estates, Department of Health; and,
- David Porter, Director of Strategic Development, Belfast Trust.

The officials briefed the Committee on the contract award timeline and governance arrangements for the new build of the Children's Hospital.

Nuala McAllister left the meeting at 4.03pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Officials agreed to furnish the Committee with:

- a copy of the timeline for the opening of the new Maternity Hospital when available;
- clarity on what the issues are that gave the Department concern as referred to in the Department's written submission; and
- regular updates on the progress of the development of the Children's hospital including whether it is on time and budget.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

8. Correspondence

- i. Members noted Departmental correspondence which sought the Committee's view on how proposed amendments to the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Order should be progressed.

Agreed: The Committee was content for the Department to consider bringing forward a legislative consent motion and to request further information on which key stakeholders have been consulted.

- ii. The Committee noted a Departmental update on issues relating to the Autism Strategy 2023 – 2028, which had been discussed at the meeting on 27 February 2025.

- iii. Members noted a Departmental response to the Committee's request for a timeline for the accreditation of HPV testing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek clarity on:

- the requisite additional information to enable the Trust to receive its accreditation for HPV testing;
- the process for awarding Belfast Trust the HPV testing contract and why Belfast Trust was chosen; and,
- twelve week waiting times for cervical screening test results for patients.

Agreed: The Committee also asked to be informed when the accreditation has been received,

- iv. The Committee noted a copy of the assessment of impact for the Core Grant Scheme.
- v. The Committee noted a Departmental update on the situation with the new maternity hospital which specifically addressed the issues relating to the water system.
- vi. The Committee noted a response from RQIA which outlined its immediate priorities.
- vii. The Committee noted a copy of the latest Investing Activity Report by Invest Strategy NI.
- viii. The Committee noted an invitation from NI Kidney Research Fund to its open night on 16 April 2025.

Agreed: It was agreed that Members would respond to the invitation directly.

- ix. Members noted a request from Pharmaceutical Society NI to brief the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include Pharmaceutical Society NI to its list of informal meetings.

- x. The Committee noted correspondence from Protective Mothers NI in respect of its concerns of systematic issues within one of the Trusts.

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

- xi. The Committee noted correspondence from Saltroad in respect of reforming speech and language therapy in Northern Ireland.
- xii. The Committee noted a copy of the Gaps in Delivering Together Report from Action Mental Health.
- xiii. Members noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office in relation to the Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the correspondence to the Department for information.

- xiv. The Committee noted a copy of the Analysis of the 2024-25 Outturn and Forecast Outturn from the Committee for Finance.
- xv. The Committee noted an invitation from Common Youth to visit its premises and discuss its work.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the visit to its list of informal engagements.

- xvi. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual in respect of a potential breach of the Windsor Framework.
- xvii. The Committee noted a response from an individual in respect of a complaint.

- xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual with concerns around data retention.

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

9. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson informed Members that there was a deadline of noon on Friday 11 April 2025 to advise of London trip attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

10. Any Other Business

None.

11. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place at 2.00pm on Thursday 1 May 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.58pm.

Philip McGuigan MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

1 May 2025