



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

13 February 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

- Philip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)
- Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
- Alan Chambers MLA
- Linda Dillon MLA
- Diane Dodds MLA
- Órlaithí Flynn MLA
- Nuala McAllister MLA
- Colin McGrath MLA
- Alan Robinson MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance: Keith McBride, Clerk

Angela McParland, Assistant Clerk

Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor

Stephen McGlennon, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2.04pm in public session.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson thanked the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) for the Committee's extremely informative visit, the previous afternoon, to the new Maternity Hospital and the Committee looks forward to the Hospital being opened and mothers and their new born babies, as well as the Hospital staff, being able to experience the excellent facilities.

3. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2025.

4. Matters Arising

There were no Matters Arising.

5. Independent Review Report ‘Enabling Safe Quality Midwifery Services and Care in Northern Ireland’ – Oral Briefing from Professor Renfrew, Professor Emerita at the University of Dundee

Professor Mary Renfrew, Professor Emerita at the University of Dundee, joined the meeting at 2.06pm, by videoconference.

Professor Renfrew briefed the Committee on the Independent Review Report ‘Enabling Safe Quality Midwifery Services and Care in Northern Ireland’.

Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 2.12pm

Nuala McAllister joined the meeting at 2.28pm

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Professor Renfrew for her attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive regular updates on the implementation of the review recommendations, with the first due in May 2025.

6. Budget 2025-26 – Oral Briefing from the Minister of Health

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.58pm:

- Minister of Health, Mike Nesbitt MLA; and
- Peter May, Permanent Secretary, Department of Health (DoH).

The Minister briefed the Committee on the Budget 2025-26 and DoH legislative programme.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and Permanent Secretary for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Agreed: The Committee to receive:

- I. In terms of violence and aggression towards staff (and RCN's increasing concerns), and the 2023 regional framework as yet not implemented, an update providing an assessment on the implementation of framework;
- II. Regarding the ISNI Investing Activity Report January 2025, clarification on the reason for the difference between the BHSCT's figure of £670m and ISNI figure of £1b for the Children's Hospital new build;
- III. On sub-teachers to teach RSE, clarification on whether this is the role of BHSCT rather than the role of the Department of Education, and detail regarding funding for schools to bring in sub-teachers to cover teacher training;
- IV. The Business Case for the £13m additional funding on respite and therapeutic care when available, the Committee to have confirmation on what was delivered and by which Trusts, and assurance that the issue is resolved regarding respite short break beds being used for residential and a whole facility (up to around 13 beds) sometimes being taken up by one individual;
- V. Information on domiciliary care packages, including the Department's estimation of savings through care packages that expedite patients leaving hospital; and detail of the variables involved/considered in planning and costing exercises being carried out by the Department for such packages;
- VI. Clarification from the Department on a reported 25% reduction of funding per vaccine for General Practitioners and pharmacists;
- VII. The number of General Practices currently in financial rescue programmes;

- VIII. On the Redwood Healthcare facility, confirmation on whether the Department can assign the estimated £50k needed to meet regulations from the £13m fund for short-term respite care;
- IX. On period products, clarification for the difference in funding figures between the highest level of £1.5m quoted to the Committee, in correspondence of 6 November 2024, and the Equality Impact Assessment January 2025 provided to the Committee which quotes a figure of £5.7m; and
- X. On 'Right Care, Right Person', detail of projected costs.

7. SR 2025/17 The Health and Social Care Pension Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025

The Committee considered SR The Health and Social Care Pension Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025.

The Regulations will amend the Health and Social Care Pension Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 to introduce an increase to member contributions to meet the scheme yield and correct a pre-existing error within the HSC Pension Scheme Regulations.

Agreed: The Committee has considered SR 2025/17 The Health and Social Care Pension Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, has no objection to the Rule.

8. SL1 The Draft Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) (Amendment) Regulations 2024

The following officials joined the meeting at 4.39pm:

- Professor Ian Young, Chief Scientific Officer (DoH); and

- Karen Simpson, Head of Medicines, DoH.

The officials briefed the Committee on the SL1 for the UK-wide Statutory Instrument on The Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) (Amendment) Regulations 2024.

The SI will progress UK-wide legislative amendments to the Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) Regulations 2004 aimed at improving and strengthening the current legislative provisions relating to UK clinical trials following the UK's exit from the European Union (EU), with the aim to:

- a. promote public health and ensure protection of participants remains at the heart of legislation;
- b. facilitate the evaluation and development of new or better medicines to benefit patients and society, and improve public health;
- c. remove obstacles to innovation, whilst maintaining robust oversight of the safety of trials;
- d. streamline the regulation of clinical trials and reduce unnecessary burden to those running trials by taking a risk-based approach; and
- e. ensure the legislation enables trial sponsors to work across countries so that the UK remains a preferred site to conduct multi-national trials.

The Committee considered the SL1 and a briefing paper by the Department.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Department provide further information to the Committee regarding a distinction having been drawn between the EU Commission Directive 2003/94, in respect of GB, and Commission Delegated Regulation 2017/1569, in respect of Northern Ireland. The Committee agreed to receive information on why GB is committing only to the former, i.e. 2003/94, and not to the latter, at which Northern Ireland is subjected to, and provide clarification of any potential impact this may have on clinical trials in Northern Ireland.

9. Committee Inquiry on Access to Palliative Care Services – Committee Call for Evidence Update

The Committee noted a Clerk's Memo providing an update on the Committee's Consultation exercises on Citizen Space which invited responses from health

organisations and professionals, and from those with lived experience relevant to the Inquiry.

10. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted a response from the Department on elective care and theatre time for surgeons.
- ii. The Committee considered a response from the Department on the inclusion of musculoskeletal (MSK) core skills in General Practitioner training.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to Versus Arthritis for comment and to ask if they have any points to raise regarding the Department's response.

- iii. The Committee considered a response from the Department to an ARK briefing paper recommending first trimester antenatal screening should be offered to all pregnant women in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response to ARK for comment and keep a watching brief on work by the Public Health Agency (PHA) and Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) on the matter.

- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on 2024-25 Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn information.
- v. The Committee considered correspondence from Kate Nicholl MLA on issues with the reporting and enforcement structures for those who have been deemed medically unfit to drive in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson will meet with Kate Nicholl MLA to consider how the Committee can assist on the matter.

- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from RQIA offering to meet the Committee and provide an overview briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a meeting with RQIA.

- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from Cancer Research UK (CRUK) on the CRUK Northern Ireland Cancer Screening Awareness Campaign February-March 2025.
- viii. The Committee noted a response from the British Dental Association (BDA) to a response from the Department to the Committee concerning General Dental Services Reform.
- ix. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual concerning employment protocol of Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts.
- x. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from an individual to the Minister and the Department concerning the SAI Redesign Programme.
- xi. The Committee noted a response from the Department concerning the Budget 25-26 12-week consultation on the Equality Impact Assessment and a breakdown of how £8.4billion will be spent across the HSC Services.
- xii. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the SAI framework redesign following the Committee's informal meeting with the PCC and PCC SAI Engagement Platform.
- xiii. The Committee considered a response from the Department concerning PHA needs assessment on short breaks for children and the legal requirement on commissioning palliative care services in Northern Ireland, following the Department's briefing palliative care services on 16 January 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider the response further in the forthcoming work on its Inquiry on Access to Palliative Care Services.

- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister detailing strategic priorities 2024-25, incorporating strategic outcomes framework and system oversight measures - following the closure of the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) in 2022 and its migration to SPPG within DoH, and the statutory requirement to produce a Commissioning Plan, and consequently a Commissioning Plan Direction (CPD) ended.
- xv. The Committee considered a copy of a response from the Department to the Committee for Education regarding the removal of on-site nurses from special education needs schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive confirmation on the Minister's support for professional medical supervision being on site in special needs schools, the complex medical needs of children in these schools not being put on classroom assistants and commitment to funding for this.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive detail of the current guidance within schools for managing medical matters for pupils. The Committee understands the cross Departmental nature of the matter with the Department of Education, but would like the response to be clear on the Department of Health's role and approach on the matter.

- xvi. The Committee noted a copy of a response from the Department to the Committee for Justice relating to the Creswell - Simpson Case Review.
- xvii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Pharmaceutical Society Northern Ireland on the recent appointment of Mr Canice Ward as Chief Executive.

- xviii. The Committee considered correspondence from Minister/Caoimhe Archibald MLA regarding a constituent's experience at the Emergency Department of Altnagelvin Hospital.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department for the Department to comment on the current state of the Emergency Department of Altnagelvin Hospital.

- xix. The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the Committee's request for detail of what conversations have taken place within the Department on the matter to begin to ascertain any failings by the HSC Service, and whether the Department has had any communication, or intends to have, with the Department of Justice or the Executive as a whole on the matter.

Órlaithí Flynn left the meeting at 5.09pm

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

The Committee discussed the visit to St Francis Hospice in Dublin, scheduled for Wednesday 2 April 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to travel as a group to Dublin.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

12. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed accreditation of BHSCT for HPV screening.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive confirmation on whether BHSCT has been accredited for HPV screening following the recent visit by the UK Accreditation Service.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place at 2.00pm on 19 February 2025 as a concurrent meeting with the Committee for Education at Middletown Parish Hall, Armagh.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.20pm.

Philip McGuigan MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

27 February 2025