



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

14 November 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Liz Kimmins MLA (Chairperson)

Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Alan Chambers MLA

Diane Dodds MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Nuala McAllister MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Alan Robinson MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Linda Dillon MLA

In Attendance:

Keith McBride, Clerk

Roisin Donnelly, Assistant Clerk

Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor

Stephen McGlennon, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2.05 pm in public session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson referred to the 'Statutory Duty of Candour' plenary debate that took place on 11 November 2024 and the informal meeting with representatives of the General Medical Council that took place on 12 November 2024 to discuss issues around the potential introduction of a statutory duty.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Health to request clarity on his intentions to bring forward legislation on the duty of candour during this mandate.

The Chairperson updated Members on the engagement event that took place on 28 October with young people with experience of children's social care services that was facilitated by VOYPIC to discuss the recommendations from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services Report.

The Chairperson reminded Members about the Heart Failure Warriors event being held on 18 November in Parliament Buildings.

The Chairperson referred to her attendance at the British Heart Foundation event on 13 November in Parliament Buildings that highlighted gender-based inequality in cardiovascular health.

The Chairperson advised Members that Safer Aging Week was taking place between 11 and 17 December and that arrangements were being taken forward to meet with Hourglass, the organisers of Safer Ageing Week.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2024.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Patient Safety - Oral Briefing from the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

The following officials from the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman's Office joined the meeting at 2:10 pm:

Margaret Kelly, Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman;

Sean Martin, Deputy Ombudsman and Director of Investigations; and

Corrine Nelson, Director of Investigations.

Nuala McAllister joined the meeting at 2.13 pm.

Diane Dodds joined the meeting at 2.17 pm.

The Ombudsman and officials briefed the Committee on the work of NIPSO in relation to health and social care related complaints, its recent work on patient safety and its views on a statutory duty of candour.

Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 2.23 pm.

Nuala McAllister left the meeting at 3.16 pm.

Diane Dodds left the meeting at 3.39 pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the Ombudsman and officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

Alan Chambers left the meeting at 3:43 pm.

Alan Robinson left the meeting at 3:43 pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for an update on the progress of its work relating to the redesign of the Serious Adverse Incidents procedure including the timescale for the planned consultation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request a briefing paper from RalSe on accountability arrangements within the health and social care sector.

6. Addiction Services – Oral Briefing from the Department of Health

The following officials joined the meeting at 3:45 pm:

Gary Maxwell, Head of Health Development Policy Branch, Department of Health;

Kevin Bailey, Health and Social Wellbeing Improvement Manager, Public Health Agency; and

Julie Haslett, Social Care Lead for Mental Health, Community Care Directorate, Department of Health.

Alan Chambers re-joined the meeting at 3:46 pm.

Diane Dodds re-joined the meeting at 3:46 pm.

Nuala McAllister re-joined the meeting at 3:47 pm.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Department's work on addiction services and the Substance Use Strategy.

Alan Robinson re-joined the meeting at 4:01 pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

7. Westminster Tobacco and Vapes Bill – Oral Briefing from the Department of Health

The following officials from the Department of Health joined the meeting at 4.36 pm:

Professor Sir Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer;

Siobhan Broderick, Director of Population Health; and

Lesley Heaney, Population Health Directorate.

The officials briefed the Committee on the UK Government's Tobacco and Vapes Bill and plans for the provisions in the Bill to be applied in Northern Ireland.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The officials agreed to provide further information on a number of issues raised.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from JTI UK to the First Minister regarding the compatibility of the provisions of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill with the EU Tobacco Products Directive.

The Committee noted a Cancer Research UK briefing paper supporting legislation to raise the age of sale for tobacco products.

Órlaithí Flynn left the meeting at 4:58 pm.

8. SL1 The Bread and Flour (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee considered a proposal by the Department of Health to make a statutory rule which provides for the mandatory addition of folic acid to non-wholemeal flour to reduce the number of Neural Tube Defects affected pregnancies.

Agreed: The Committee agreed it was content with the proposal for the statutory rule.

9. Implementation of the Hospital Car Parking Charges Act – Written Briefing from the Department of Health

The Committee considered an update from the Department of Health on progress of the new traffic management system for hospitals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to raise Members' concerns about recent increases in hospital parking charges with the Trusts at the scheduled briefing session on 21 November.

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

The Committee noted an update on the Committee's call for written evidence relating to its inquiry on access to palliative care services and considered the list of organisations that had been contacted to request their views.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request the views of the Autism Reviewer and organisations that provide care for people within residential settings.

11. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted the publication of the Department of Health's Breastfeeding Strategy Review and an update from the Department on the development of a planned Breastfeeding Action Plan.
- ii. The Committee considered the Department of Health EQIA Outcome Report on the 2024-2025 Resource Budget.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss the report with officials at the planned budget briefing scheduled for 21 November.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health advising of the Minister's agreement to extend temporary provisions restricting the use of gonadotrophin-releasing hormone analogues and their use in treating gender incongruence or gender dysphoria in children.
- iv. The Committee noted the publication of the Department of Health, 'Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals NI 2023'.
- v. The Committee noted SR 2024/186 The Adoption and Children (2022 Act) (Commencement No.3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024 was made on 29 October 2024.

- vi. The Committee considered a Department of Health response to information requested on General Dental Service reform.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department to provide regular 8-weekly updates on the progress of dental reform.

- vii. The Committee considered a Department of Health response to information requested on health reform including: surgical hubs capacity, performance management accountability mechanisms for HSC organisations and post-19 SEN provision.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider this further at the waiting list briefing scheduled for 5 December.

- viii. The Committee noted a Department of Health response to information requested regarding HSC Trusts accountability arrangements.

- ix. The Committee noted a Department of Health response to information requested on progress relating to the introduction of a Baby Loss Certificate Scheme.

- x. The Committee noted a Department of Health response to information requested on the progression of Duty of Candour legislation and short breaks and support for adults with learning disabilities.

- xi. The Committee considered correspondence from Advice NI regarding the 'Tell Us Once' bereavement services in operation in GB.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward Advice NI's correspondence to the Department of Health for comment.

- xii. The Committee considered a policy brief on antenatal screening from Ark.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to meet with the authors of the brief to discuss the findings.

- xiii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure regarding commitments under the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 and electric/zero emissions vehicles within departmental vehicle fleets.
- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding the Budget 2025-26 Future Years Information Gathering Exercise.
- xv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding the 2024-25 Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn information for September.
- xvi. The Committee noted correspondence from the House of Lords Food, Diet and Obesity Committee advising of the publication of its report, 'Recipe for health: a plan to fix our broken food system.'
- xvii. The Committee considered correspondence from NICCY requesting that a joint committee session with the Education Committee is held to consider issues affecting children's rights in the context of SEND.
- xviii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health regarding the recent meeting between the Committees' Members on 18 October 2024 in Leinster House.
- xix. The Committee considered correspondence from Peter Martin MLA regarding the Rainbow Project and sign-posting previously on its website to GenderGP.

The Committee discussed a proposal to write to the Rainbow Project on the rationale for the sign-posting. Some Members expressed concerns as this matter had been referred to the PSNI.

Diane Dodds MLA wished to record her concerns that the Committee responsible for safeguarding children would not write to the Rainbow Project on a safeguarding issue concerning GenderGP.

- xx. The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) advising of the transfer of responsibility for Health and Social Care Quality Improvement from PHA to the RQIA on 1 November 2024.
- xxi. The Committee noted an invitation from the Department of Health and the Public Health Agency to the launch of the Substance Use Strategic Commission and Implementation Plan on 26 November in Belfast.
- xxii. The Committee noted a reply from RQIA to a request for information relating to the extent of non-domiciled companies attending hospitality events in Northern Ireland to offer dental consultations and promote dental practice to be carried out overseas.
- xxiii. The Committee noted the Strategic Investment Board Activity Report for the Department of Health for October 2024.
- xxiv. The Committee considered an invitation from Heart Failure Warriors to attend an event to promote heart failure care on 18 November in Parliament Buildings.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that Members would respond directly to the invitation from Heart Failure Warriors.

- xxv. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the British Dental Association to the Minister of Health regarding the importance of progressing dental service reform.
- xxvi. The Committee noted the Minister of Finance Oral Statement of 11 November on Public Expenditure 2024-25 October Monitoring.

- xxvii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding antenatal screening.
- xxviii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the impact of the Autumn Budget announcements on the Care Home Sector.
- xxix. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Health providing an update on its bid to the Transformation Fund to support the further roll out of the Primary Care MDT Programme.

The Committee further noted that an informal meeting with the Director of Primary Care Services has been scheduled for 26 November relating to this matter.

12. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Foundations for the Future Conference, which will provide an opportunity to reflect on the progress of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services, was being held on 27 November 2024 in Belfast.

The Committee considered its draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

13. Any Other Business

The Chairperson advised Members that an online meeting had been arranged with Unite the Union Registered Childminding Branch to take place on 21 November 2024.

A Member referred to the impact of the increase in employer's national insurance contribution rates on dental and primary care practices.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for its assessment of the increased financial burden that the national insurance uplift in contribution will have on dental and primary care practices.

A Member referred to the 2024-2025 pay negotiations for health and social care staff.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask the Department of Health for further information relating to the pay offer for 2024-2025.

14. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place at 2.00 pm on 21 November 2024.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.18 pm.

Liz Kimmins MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

21 November 2024