



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Health

## Minutes of Proceedings

**19 June 2025**

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

**Present:**

Philip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)

Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Alan Chambers MLA

Linda Dillon MLA

Alan Robinson MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Diane Dodds MLA

Nuala McAllister MLA

**Apologies:**

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

**In Attendance:** Keith McBride, Clerk  
Angela McParland, Assistant Clerk  
Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor  
Martina Mullin-O'Hare, Clerical Officer

The meeting commenced at 2.01pm in public session.

## **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Órlaithí Flynn and Colin McGrath.

## **2. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson thanked the Northern Ireland Committee (NIC) of the Irish Congress of Trade Union (ICTU) for meeting with the Committee on Tuesday 17 June 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to state its support for re-establishing the Partnership Forum and to encourage the Department to engage with trade unions at the earliest possible stage in relation to re-configuration.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed it will engage with NIC-ICTU during the Committee's scrutiny of forthcoming legislation.

*Diane Dodds joined the meeting at 2.03pm*

The Chairperson acknowledged that the Southern Area Hospice Services has changed its name to Evora Hospice and that he had attended a 35 years celebration event by the Hospice on Wednesday 18 June 2025.

The Chairperson welcomed a statement to the Assembly by the Minister of the Economy on issues raised by Caleb's Cause in campaigning for Post-19 Special Educational Needs legislation to be implemented for young people who have disabilities in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive information on the following regarding the issues raised by Caleb's Cause:

- the work the Department is currently carrying out on this issue;
- the Department's current engagement with Executive colleagues in Education, Economy, and Communities to make progress, as the Committee sees the issue as needing a multi Departmental approach;
- whether the Department will look to put in place individualised health plans from birth for those affected;
- information on how such individualised care plans can eventually involve other Executive Departments to ensure provision of the right support for individuals across all elements of their lives; and
- comment from the Department on the Children's Services Co-operation Act which stipulates Departments must work together for the benefit of children, and the relevance of the Act to the above information requested by the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to receive an oral briefing in the Autumn from the Department on the issues raised by Caleb's Cause.

The Chairperson advised that he and the Deputy Chair had met with a delegation of midwives from the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) in Parliament Buildings on Wednesday 18 June 2025. The delegation had provided an informal briefing and raised the issue of home births being videoed and put online on social media platforms. The Committee considered that RCN sees this as very problematic for midwives and that there has been reports of similar concerns across different areas of the Health Service.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive detail of:

- protections the Department gives to midwives in these circumstances;
- the rules and regulations relevant to protecting the midwifery workforce in this regard;

- the processes that the Department has in place to urgently remove such online content to protect its workforce; and
- the guidance and support to protect the healthcare workforce in general on the issue of videos of healthcare workers being published online onto social media platforms.

The Chairperson raised the recent statement by the Minister to the Assembly on 17 June 2025 that the opening of the Maternity Hospital will be delayed by a further 28 months.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive:

- a detailed written briefing to fully update the Committee on the situation, including reasons for further delay, timelines, and potential costs, the areas of the new build affected and not affected, full detail of risks assessments;
- a copy of the recommendations by the Trust which the Minister is considering; and
- as committed to by the Minister, detail of the public money that could be recuperated, and detail as to the likelihood of other areas of the building being opened in the near future.

The Committee noted that the Minister advised the Assembly that a fire safety audit was carried out at the Royal Victoria Hospital on 4 June 2025 by personnel from the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. The audit found a substantial risk at two wards, with a score rating that falls within the enforcement notice category. A follow-up meeting took place on 11 June 2025 to assist the BHSCT in making the necessary improvements.

The Committee noted that BHSCT had been asked at the briefing on 12 June 2025 whether there were any other issues currently ongoing in the Trust that the Committee should be made aware of.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the audit findings were concerning and agreed to write to the BHSCT to receive: an explanation from the Trust as to why officials did not inform the Committee at the briefing on 12 June 2025 of the issue; and an update on whether the issue has been resolved.

The Committee discussed recent statements by individuals who are concerned about the whistleblowing process within the BHSCT.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarity on whether it is normal practice for a whistleblower manager to report to HR or whether there is a separate legal process, with anonymity built in to the process, that should be being followed.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive the full whistleblowing policy for Trusts.

*Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 2.12pm*

### **3. Draft Minutes**

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2025.

### **4. Matters Arising**

None.

### **5. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services – Northern Ireland Hospice and Northern Ireland Children’s Hospice**

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.18pm:

- Trevor McCartney, Chief Executive Officer, Northern Ireland Hospice;
- Brian Henderson, Chief Finance Officer, Northern Ireland Hospice;
- Gemma Aspinall, Director of Care and Quality Governance, Northern Ireland Hospice; and
- Dr Emma Lundy, Consultant in Palliative Medicine, Northern Ireland Hospice.

The representatives provided oral evidence to the Committee on access to palliative care services.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

*The Chairperson declared an interest as having had a family member as a patient in the Northern Ireland Hospice.*

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their evidence to the Inquiry.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was concerned to hear that the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice was informed that the scoping exercise to be carried out by the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) will not include the Hospice. The Committee agreed to follow this up at the evidence session with the Department scheduled for 3 July 2025.

## **6. SL1 The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (General) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2025 – Briefing from Pharmaceutical Society Northern Ireland**

The following representative joined the meeting at 3.29pm:

- Canice Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland.

The representative briefed the Committee on the SL1.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Ward for attending.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the merits of the policy and that the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland make the Statutory Rule.

## **7. Adult Protection Bill – Oral Evidence from Department of Health**

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.38pm:

- Mark McGuicken, Director of Disability and Older People, Department of Health (DoH); and
- Kerry Loveland-Morrison, Head of Adult Safeguarding Unit, DoH.

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department on a Delegated Powers Memorandum.

The officials provided oral evidence to the Committee on the Adult Protection Bill.

The evidence included a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

## **8. Legislative Consent Motion on UK Mental Health Bill**

The following officials joined the meeting at 4.10pm:

- Heather Stevens, Director of Mental Health, DoH;
- Debbie Sharpe, Head of Mental Health Strategy Delivery Unit, DoH; and
- Brian Cassidy, from the Mental Health Strategy Delivery Unit (DoH).

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department providing Amendment Text to the Bill.

The officials gave oral evidence on the Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) on the UK Mental Health Bill.

The evidence included a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the LCM as laid and that the Committee will consider its Report on the LCM at its next meeting.

*Nuala McAllister left the meeting at 4.19pm*

## **9. Legislative Consent Motion on Rare Cancers Bill**

The Committee considered its Report on the LCM on the Rare Cancers Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Report in full and agreed that the Report be published along with the Appendices on the Assembly web pages.

## **10. Departmental Written Briefing – Maternity Services**

The Committee noted a written briefing from the Department on maternity services.

## **11. Departmental Written Briefing – Mental Health Strategy**

The Committee noted a written briefing from the Department on the Review of Deliverability of the Mental Health Strategy.

## **12. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department regarding the policy guidance on Change and Withdrawal of Services.
- ii. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Health regarding the breakdown of funding for paediatric waiting lists.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to receive a more detailed response. The Committee to receive, as to the £215m set aside for reduced waiting list, a comprehensive breakdown of which specialities this will be allocated to.

- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from the DoH following a briefing on 22 May 2025 on Home Care Services providing clarity on the definition of “unmet need” not being used correctly in regard to data collated in regard to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

- iv. The Committee considered correspondence from the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) regarding the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) Performance Review of Nursing and Midwifery Council.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to be kept updated on the matter.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Justice regarding a LCM on the Crime and Policing Bill.
- vi. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department correcting a statistic provided by officials at the briefing on 6 March 2025 on the Community Pharmacy Strategic Plan.

*The Deputy Chairperson declared an interest as Chairperson of the All Party Group on Community Pharmacy*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing by the Department for the Autumn.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to Community Pharmacy NI for comment.

- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department on respite services.
- viii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Patient Client Council regarding the BHSCT cardiac unit.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider again at its next meeting.

- ix. The Committee considered correspondence from an individual regarding the BHSCT.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider again at its next meeting.

- x. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding the BHSCT cardiac unit.
- xi. **Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider again at its next meeting.
- xii. The Committee considered correspondence from the Department regarding terms of reference on Level 5 Intervention of BHSCT.
- xiii. **Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider again at its next meeting.

### **13. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

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

### **14. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

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

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place at 2pm on Thursday 26 June 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.36pm.

**Philip McGuigan MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Health**

**26 June 2025**