



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Health

## Minutes of Proceedings

**20 March 2025**

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

**Present:**

Philip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)

Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Alan Chambers MLA

Órlaithí Flynn MLA

Colin McGrath MLA

Alan Robinson MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Linda Dillon MLA

Diane Dodds MLA

Nuala McAllister MLA

**Apologies:**

None

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

The meeting commenced at 2.05pm in public session.

## **1. Apologies**

None.

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

### Acute Mental Health Inpatient Centre (AMHIC)

The Chairperson informed Members of an invitation which he had received from the Chief Executive of the Belfast Trust to visit the Acute Mental Health Inpatient Centre (AMHIC) to observe and discuss the extent of repairs required at the facility.

Members noted that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson would attend the visit on behalf of the Committee.

The Chairperson informed Members that correspondence had been received from the Department confirming the Minister's attendance at a future meeting of the Committee to discuss AMHIC and that an exact date would be provided for the briefing in due course.

### Cancer Coalition

The Chairperson informed Members that he had met with representatives of the Cancer Coalition to discuss issues relating to its work.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite Cancer Coalition to brief the Committee and particularly in relation to the Committee inquiry into Access to Palliative Care Services.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2025.

### **4. Matters Arising**

The Committee noted a draft Committee motion in respect of its disappointment at the number of unsuccessful applications for core grant funding whilst acknowledging the vital role that organisations play in supporting patients and alleviating pressure on local health services.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the draft motion for submission to the Business Office.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request a copy of the Impact Assessments in relation to decision to award Core Grant Scheme funding.

### **5. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services – Oral Briefing by RalSe**

The following official joined the meeting at 2.12pm:

- Dr Grainne Crealey, Researcher, Research and Information Services.

The official briefed the Committee on the current provision of palliative and end of life care services.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Danny Donnelly MLA declared an interest as a former nurse.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for clarity on the ability of palliative care patients to access 24-hour services, including telephone support, and

the necessity to ensure that such patients are not forced to attend Emergency Departments of local hospitals.

The Chairperson thanked the official for her attendance.

**6. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services – Oral Briefing by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Western Health and Social Care Trust, and the NI Ambulance Service**

The following officials joined the meeting at 2.57pm:

- Dr Joan Regan, Clinical Director for Palliative Care, BHSCT;
- Roisin McSwiggan, Divisional Nurse, Older Peoples Services, BHSCT;
- Prof. Max Watson, Consultant in Palliative Care Medicine, WHSCT;
- Bernie McCafferty, Assistant Director of Intermediate Care Services, WHSCT; and,
- Dr Nigel Ruddell, Medical Director, NI Ambulance Service.

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

Alan Robinson joined the meeting at 3.04pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request information on:

- The lack of joined up approach to “Do not attempt to resuscitate” documentation across the trusts and in community and hospital settings;
- The Department’s assessment of the reasons for the nine per cent increase in excess death rates since the Covid pandemic; and
- The consideration the Department has given to ensuring all pharmacies have qualified prescribers within their staffing compliment.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Nuala McAllister left the meeting at 3.58pm.

Colin McGrath left the meeting at 3.59pm.

## **7. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services – Oral Briefing by Carer’s NI and Rural Community Network**

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.59pm:

- Richard Meade, Devolved Nations Director, Carers NI;
- Áine Magee, Public Affairs and Media Manager, Carers NI;
- Kate Clifford, Director, Rural Community Network; and,
- Samantha Gallagher, Policy and Public Affairs Officer, Rural Community Network.

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

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Alan Chambers left the meeting at 4.20pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to ascertain the Department’s funding plans to improve community transport and what work has been taken forward with other Departments such as Infrastructure and Education to improve the transport infrastructure and make better use of transport resources such as Education Authority buses which are not in use during school holidays.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Communities to request whether the Minister has any plans in relation to continuing income support for a carer following the death of a person in their care;

Alan Chambers rejoined the meeting at 4.41pm.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

## **8. SI 2025/317 The Medicines (Products for Human Use) (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2025**

The Committee considered SI 2025/317 The Medicines (Products for Human Use) (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2025.

The Statutory Instrument seeks to update the fees paid to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency from their last amendment in April 2023.

**Agreed:** The Committee considered SI 2025/317 The Medicines (Products for Human Use) (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 2025 and had no objection to the statutory instrument.

## **9. SR 2025/46 – The Optical Charges and Payments (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025**

The Committee considered SR 2025/46 – The Optical Charges and Payments (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025.

The proposed rule seeks to increase the value of optical vouchers issued to certain patients to help with the cost of glasses or contact lenses.

Members noted that the Committee had agreed the SL1 pertaining to the rule at its meeting on 27 February 2025.

The Chairperson informed Members that the rule had not yet been considered by the Examiner of Statutory Rules and that any agreement by the Committee to proceed with the proposal would be subject to concerns not being raised in her report.

**Agreed:** The Committee considered draft SR 2025/46 The Optical Charges and Payments (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025, and had no objection to the rule, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

## **10. Correspondence**

- i. The Committee considered a written update from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in respect of works associated with water safety at the new Maternity Hospital. Members welcomed the update which indicated that work

was progressing in line with the programme which had been provided to the Committee on 5 December 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Trust:

- for its assessment of the likely timescale and cost of completing the remedial work; and,
  - for clarity on whether the newly formed Project Water Safety Group replaces any similarly appointed body and, if so, the reason for the establishment of a new body and the changes in membership.
- ii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence between the Committee for Justice and the Department of Health in relation to Child Contact Centres.
- iii. The Committee noted correspondence from Positive Life NI in respect of the impact of non-receipt of core grant funding.
- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance to all statutory committees in respect of final budget proposals for 2025-2026. The correspondence advises that the Department of Finance has sought further information from all departments to help inform a final budget proposal for the period.
- v. The Committee noted correspondence from the Pharmaceutical Society in respect of the Professional Standards Authority Review Report for 2023-24 which highlights a number of failings and areas for improvement. The Pharmaceutical Society has highlighted its response to these shortcomings.
- vi. The Committee noted a letter of thanks from Marie Curie to the Minister for his commitment in the Programme for Government to improve support for those coping with death, dying and bereavement.
- vii. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual in respect of products which tackle black mould and pseudomonas.

- viii. The Committee discussed correspondence from a member of the public highlighting a consultation in relation to the Serious Adverse Incident Redesign Programme Framework.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for clarity on how it is proactively engaging with persons of lived experience in its consultation.

- ix. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence between an individual and the RQIA in relation to a personal matter.

- x. The Committee discussed a tabled response from the Department in respect of concerns about violence and aggression towards staff and the implementation of the violence and aggression framework.

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

- clarity on disparity in cases between Belfast and all other trusts;
- to request regular updates on the situation; and,
- the Department's assessment of the reasons for the escalating number of verbal and physical attacks.

- xi. The Committee noted a tabled response from the Department in respect of finances required for an upgrade to the Redwood Healthcare Facility. Members noted that the additional cost of £50,000 required to upgrade the facility will be arranged by the South Eastern Trust.

- xii. The Committee discussed a tabled response from the Department to the Committee's request for greater detail on the additional costs associated with increased National Insurance contributions.

- xiii. The Committee noted a tabled response from the Department in respect of a timeline for the implementation of guidelines and framework which support the draft Placement and Fostering Agencies Regulations.



- xiv. The Committee noted correspondence from the British Heart Foundation in respect of its policy report on women and heart disease – “Closing the Heart Attack Gender Gap”.

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

## **11. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson reminded Members of the visit to St Francis Hospice in Dublin which had been confirmed for Wednesday 2 April 2025.

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

## **12. Any Other Business**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to request his views on the impact of potential welfare benefit cuts on the mental health and social care sectors.

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

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place at 2.00pm on Thursday 27 March 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.06pm.

**Philip McGuigan MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Health**

**27 March 2025**