



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

3 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
 - Nuala McAllister MLA
 - Colin McGrath MLA
 - Alan Robinson MLA
- Apologies:**
- Linda Dillon MLA

- In Attendance:**
- Keith McBride, Clerk
 - Oliver Bellew, Assistant Clerk

Angela McParland. Assistant Clerk

Jonathan Lamont, Clerical Supervisor

The meeting commenced at 2.00pm in public session.

1. Apologies

None.

2. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services - Oral Briefing by Marie Curie

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.01pm:

- Paula Heneghan, Associate Director Strategic Partnerships and Services, Marie Curie;
- Dr Jennifer Doherty, Medical Director, Marie Curie;
- Joan McEwan, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Marie Curie.

The Chairperson welcomed the representatives and expressed thanks to the staff of Marie Curie for the work they do and for their contribution to the inquiry to date including a response to the Committee's consultation and facilitation of a Committee visit to their premises.

Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 2.16pm.

The representatives briefed the Committee on Access to Palliative Care.

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.

3. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services – Oral Briefing by Hospice UK

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.46pm:

- Prof Max Watson, Director of Project ECHO, Hospice UK; and,
- Aileen Morton, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Hospice UK.

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

Nuala McAllister joined the meeting at 3.16pm.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

The briefing session was reported by Hansard.

4. Acute Mental Health Inpatient Centre – Oral Briefing by the Minister of Health

The Committee noted a Departmental written briefing on the Acute Mental Health Inpatient Centre in Belfast.

The following officials joined the meeting at 3.24pm:

- Mike Nesbitt MLA, Minister of Health, Department of Health;
- Philip McClay, Director of Health Estates, Department of Health;
- David Porter, Director of Strategic Development, Belfast Trust; and,
- Orla Tierney, Interim Co-Director Mental Health Services, Belfast Trust.

The officials briefed the Committee on the issues at the Acute Mental Health Inpatient Centre (AMHIC).

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: It was agreed that the officials would provide clarity on:

- When the Minister first became aware of the need for repairs at the AMHIC;
- Whether intensive care psychiatric beds will be impacted by the remedial work;

- Timescale for the report on the issues at AMHIC;
- Whether defective materials come under the terms of redress from the constructor; and,
- A timeline of the procurement process up to appointment of construction contractor and signing of the contract for the children's hospital project.

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and officials for their attendance.

Alan Chambers left the meeting at 4.39pm.

Nuala McAllister left the meeting at 4.39pm.

5. Chairperson's Business

Visit to St Francis Hospice, Dublin

The Chairperson gave an overview of the visit to St Francis Hospice, Dublin which he had attended the previous day with the Deputy Chairperson and members of the Committee team.

The Chairperson thanked Fintan Fagan, Professor Karen Ryan and Paula Pinto of the Hospice and All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care for facilitating the visit and providing a great insight into the development of the facility and the work which is done there.

Members noted that much of the conversation with the representatives centred around policy process for developing and delivering palliative care in the both the hospice and community.

Neurology Deceased Patients' Review

The Chairperson reminded Members of an informal Committee meeting in September 2024 with the families of deceased patients of former neurologist Michael Watt and the Committee's subsequent letter to request a meeting between the Minister and those families.

The Committee noted the Minister's commitment to meet with the families in a statement to the House in July 2024.

The Chairperson informed Members of correspondence from the families to request a progress update.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the first Departmental written update and all subsequent updates to the families. The Committee also agreed to write to the Minister to ascertain whether he has met with the families.

Informal meeting with RQIA

The Chairperson informed Members that he and the Deputy Chairperson would be meeting with RQIA in an introductory capacity as the new Chair of the Committee.

6. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2025.

7. Matters Arising

None.

8. SL1 The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) (Independent Guardian) (Amendment) Regulations NI 2024

The Committee considered SL1 The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) (Independent Guardian) (Amendment) Regulations NI 2024.

The SL1 seeks to address the mandatory recruitment requirements for a person seeking to become an Independent Guardian.

The following officials joined the meeting at 4.42pm:

- Lynsey Armstrong, Head of Child Protection, Domestic and Sexual Abuse Unit, Department of Health;
- Paul McConville, Social Services Officer, Department of Health; and,
- Sinead McGrath, Deputy Principal, Child Protection, Domestic and Sexual Abuse Unit, Department of Health.

Nuala McAllister rejoined the meeting at 4.45pm.

Colin McGrath left the meeting at 4.54pm.

The officials briefed the Committee on the policy proposals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content for the Department to make the Statutory Rule.

9. Correspondence

- i. The Committee noted an update from the Department on the Mental Capacity Act (NI) 2016.

Agreed: to seek clarification on whether the capability assessment is included in this work.

- ii. The Committee noted a copy of correspondence between the Minister and the Justice Committee in respect of Child Contact Centres.
- iii. The Committee noted the Department's response to a complaint from an individual in respect of an ongoing Serious Adverse Incident investigation.
- iv. The Committee noted correspondence from the All Party Group on Autism in respect of the Committee's engagement with the Independent Autism Reviewer.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to advise the APG that it had requested clarity on the role and responsibilities of the Independent Autism Reviewer before a meeting can be scheduled.

- v. The Committee noted correspondence from an individual in respect of mental health provision.

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

- vi. The Committee noted a response from the Department in respect of the Cytology Screening Review. Members discussed the lack of requisite detail in the response.

Agreed: The Committee expressed its disappointment at the lack of detail in the response and agreed to respond to the Department to express its disappointment and to request that the information be provided. The Committee also agreed to seek clarity on the timeline for completion of Part Two of the review and to request that that the Committee be briefed by Departmental officials, including officials from the Trusts and PHA, following completion of the Review.

- vii. The Committee noted correspondence between the Department and the Committee for Education in respect of the healthcare requirements of children with special educational needs.
- viii. The Committee noted a copy of the Health and Social Care Imaging Services report from the NI Audit Office.
- ix. The Committee discussed correspondence from an individual in respect of respite and residential care for disabled children in the Southern Trust.

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

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed a draft itinerary for a series of engagements in London subject to the agreed quorum of five Members attending.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

11. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed correspondence received by Órlaithí Flynn MLA from Papyrus, a prevention of young suicide group that provides a 24-7 helpline, which stated the organisations growing concern that it would have to cease operations as a result of underfunding and difficulties in receiving charitable donations in the current economic climate. Members noted that the organisation was scheduled to meet with the Minister on 10 April.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to raise its concern for the future of the organisation with the Minister in advance of the planned meeting on 10 April.

12. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place at 2.00pm on Thursday 10 April 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 5.19pm.

Philip McGuigan MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

10 April 2025