



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Health

Minutes of Proceedings

05 June 2025

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present: Philip McGuigan MLA (Chairperson)
Danny Donnelly MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Diane Dodds MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Alan Chambers MLA
Linda Dillon MLA
Nuala McAllister MLA
Colin McGrath MLA
Alan Robinson MLA

Apologies: Órlaithí Flynn MLA

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

The meeting commenced at 2.03pm in public session.

1. Apologies

Órlaithí Flynn MLA.

2. Committee Inquiry: Access to Palliative Care Services - Oral evidence by Compassionate Communities Northern Ireland, Northern Health and Social Care Trust, and Cruse Bereavement Support Northern Ireland

The following representatives joined the meeting at 2.03pm:

- Sharon Williams, Project Manager, Compassionate Communities Northern Ireland,
- Fiona Gilmour, Macmillan Service Improvement Lead Palliative Care, Northern Health and Social Care Trust, and
- Thelma Abernethy, Head of Cruse Bereavement Support Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson welcomed the representatives and thanked them and their organisations for their contributions to the Inquiry to date.

The representatives briefed the Committee on Access to Palliative Care.

Nuala McAllister joined the meeting at 2.13pm

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Members agreed that providing death, dying, and bereavement support services in the community and in schools is an important part of the public health messaging for palliative care services in Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority (EA) regarding a National Lottery funded Programme carried out by Cruse Bereavement Support in schools working alongside Education Authority Critical Incident Teams, to receive information on work to mainstream the Programme and ensure it is equally accessible to all schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to also write to the Minister for Education to advise that the Committee had written to the EA and to seek his view on the matter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister on the importance of public health messaging for palliative care services in Northern Ireland and public health messaging commitments in the Department's Advance Care Planning policy, and to ask that he work closely with the Minister for Education to improve equitable access for important bereavement services in schools across Northern Ireland.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson thanked the families who attended an informal meeting on 3 June 2025 with the Committee regarding the complaints process and reporting of adverse incidents and serious adverse incidents in Health and Social Care Trusts.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to continue to liaise with the families over the coming months on the Committee's consideration of the Serious Adverse Incident (SAI) Framework, Adult Protection Bill, and implementation of a duty of candour.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note correspondence from one of the family members providing further information following the informal meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister to convey its concerns and to ask that the Minister meet with the families, as a matter of urgency. The Committee believes such a meeting would greatly assist the Minister in his oversight of the Review of the SAI Framework.

The Chairperson thanked the British Medical Association (BMA) for hosting an event at which issues regarding financial strains for medical students and the effects of this on the medical workforce in Northern Ireland were considered.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ascertain the extent of the Department's cross cutting work with the Department for the Economy, and assurance of cross cutting work in the future, that will ensure medical graduates can remain in Northern Ireland and that prospective students are not prevented from studying specialist medical degrees solely due to the financial strain of the university course.

The response from the Department to address: how debt accrued by medical students during their studies can affect their decision to work outside of Northern Ireland when they graduate; post graduate medical students having difficulty in accessing student loans; and a disparity between Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast medical students accessing loans.

The Chairperson acknowledged a Written Ministerial Statement on the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) cardiac unit review which was published after the Committee meeting had commenced. The Committee discussed the commitments given to the Committee by the Minister at the meeting on 29 May 2025 regarding the review..

Agreed: The Committee agreed it was disappointed that the Minister chose to not provide an Oral Statement to the Assembly and to release the Written Statement after the Committee meeting had commenced.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive an oral briefing from Department of Health (DoH) officials on the Written Ministerial Statement at its next meeting.

4. Draft Minutes

The Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2025.

5. Matters Arising

None.

6. Paediatrics Waiting Times – Oral Briefing from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3.01pm:

- Dr Thomas Bourke, Officer for Ireland, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH);
- Dr Rory Sweeney, Deputy Officer for Ireland, RCPCH;
- Dr Julie Ann Maney, Joint Northern Ireland Representative on the RCPCH Mental Health Advisory Group; and
- Anna McDaid, Head of Policy and Public Affairs (Devolved Nations), RCPCH.

The representatives briefed the Committee on the Report 'Worried and Waiting: A review of paediatric waiting times in Northern Ireland', published in April 2024.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Danny Donnelly declared an interest as a registered nurse

Alan Chambers joined the meeting at 3.40pm

Diane Dodds left the meeting at 3.40pm

Colin McGrath left the meeting at 3.47pm

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

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

- a breakdown on funding to address paediatric waiting lists;

- the work of the Department to make training carried out by medical staff in cross border coordinated initiatives officially recognised in Northern Ireland;
- confirmation on whether the coordinated training has been considered at North South Ministerial Council meetings and, if so, detail on progress made, if not, detail on why it has not been considered and when it is expected to be;
- information on the 'Healthier Together' Programme; and
- information on the roll out of the BHSCT 'Symptom Checker'.

7. SR 2025/100 The Health and Social Care Pension Schemes (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025

The Committee considered SR 2025/100 The Health and Social Care Pension Schemes (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025.

Agreed: The Committee has considered SR 2025/100 The Health and Social Care Pension Schemes (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules Report, has no objection to the Rule.

8. Progress of Children's Social Care Services Independent Review Report Recommendations – Oral Briefing by the Department of Health

The following officials joined the meeting at 4.20pm:

- Eilís McDaniel, Director of Social Care Reform, DoH;
- Deirdre Mahon, Retired Director of Women & Children's Services and co-chair of Family Support Workstream;
- Kerrylee Weatherall, Interim Director of Children's Community Services and co-chair of the Residential Placement Capacity Workstreams (DoH);
- Jacinta Linden, Chief Executive Officer of Bolster Community, and co-chair of the Family Support Workstream.

The officials briefed the Committee on the progress of Children's Social Care Services Independent Review Report Recommendations.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

Alan Chambers left the meeting at 4.40pm

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The officials agreed during the questions and answer session that the upcoming written briefing on respite, for the meeting on 26 June 2025, will include detail of spend for the £13m and that the Committee will be briefed by the Department, at a later stage, on the reported delays of day time services being transferred to out of hours services.

The Committee lost quorum at 5.02pm

Philip McGuigan MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Health

12 June 2025